Global Migration and Diversity of Educational Experiences in the Global South and North

A Child-Centred Approach

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Chapter 6

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Introduction

According to UNESCO (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic since its beginning in January 2020, has impacted the life and education of an estimated 1.6 billion children in more than 190 countries, thereby making it one of the biggest interruptions to education systems in history. This disruption has particularly had its toll on vulnerable children, increasing the inequalities within education that have already existed prior to the global pandemic. Remote education requires access to technological equipment and a good internet connection (Morgan, 2020), which is not available to all children. Research has shown that in Europe, 6.9 per cent of students do not have access to the internet in their homes (Van Lancker and Parolin, 2020). Disadvantaged groups such as low-income families and migrants are more prone to such inequalities with the social, educational, and economic gap widening during COVID-19. In the UK, Blundell et al. (2021) published a report about the ways in which the pandemic is aggravating inequalities in education and skills as well as socio-economic status and health. Results from the report show that the rates of unemployment drastically increased during the pandemic, raising the number of poorer households. Socio-economic status has always played a role in children's educational achievement as children from low-income households have a lesser chance of achieving higher scores and accessing higher education (Hansen and Hawkes, 2009). This in turn hinders social mobility and widens the gap between poorer and richer individuals.

In times of crisis and during the global pandemic, the impact of the differences in socio-economic status on children's schooling was evident. Andrew et al. (2020) noticed that during the first lockdown in the spring of 2020, children from higher-income families were much more likely to report that their schools provide online classes and access to videoconferencing with teachers. These children also reported that they are more likely to have access

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to resources such as online classes, text chatting, and study spaces. In addition to resources like computers and tutors (Benzeval et al., 2020), which prompt them to spend way more time on home learning than children from lower-income households. Migrants and displaced populations, particularly, individuals who already faced pre-existing, socio-economic, health, and educational inequalities and vulnerabilities have been significantly affected by the global pandemic (Jourdain et al., 2021). In the UK, research has shown that migrant children and families face many challenges at schools (Manzoni and Rolfe, 2019), including a lack of familiarity with the UK education system such as expectations around the level of parental engagement, feelings of isolation because of cultural differences, and language barriers. With the outbreak of coronavirus and the school closures, the challenges become heightened. The safety restrictions and social distancing measures forced children to be separated from their peers who found themselves not only having to deal with the new threat of the virus but also having to adapt to different learning environments. Children, families, and teachers alike were put under the enormous pressure of having to switch to online platforms in a very short time and without any prior planning. In the following section, light will be shed on some of the key challenges that teachers and students faced upon the transition to online learning.

Online learning during COVID-19

By the end of March 2020 and as a response to the pandemic face-to-face classrooms were replaced by online platforms. Online learning was the government's attempt to avoid learning loss, that is the loss of knowledge and skills due to a discontinuity in students' education (Atteberry and McEachin, 2021), and to ensure continued effective learning. In an era of rapid technological developments and digitalisation, considerable research into the challenges and opportunities offered by the online in educational contexts was conducted (McFarlane, 2019). As Redmond (2015) and Reid (2012) noticed, online learning has been transforming traditional face-to-face learning, shifting students' and teachers' roles (teachers becoming learning facilitators and students taking more control over the learning process), and enhancing teachers' digital competence. On the other hand, online learning was also found to incur feelings of anxiety, lack of motivation, frustration, and raise feelings of emotional resistance (Palloff and Pratt, 2013). This is mainly due to the lack of physical interaction and lack of familiarity with the online settings. Online learning also requires advanced and thorough planning which was not possible during the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis (Barbour et al., 2020). Considering the short notice that was given to teachers and schools and the short time in which the move online was expected to happen, online learning proved to be challenging. Many teachers reported their low confidence, autonomy, and need for more support to teach online (Yan and Wang, 2022) as well as an increasing level of stress (MacIntyre et al., 2020), daunting amounts of workload (Darmody et al., 2020: 34), and lower levels of well-being (Burke and Dempsey, 2020). Students, on the other hand, besides challenges with a potential complex home environment, mental health problems, and lack of motivation (Liang et al., 2020), were also left susceptible to many equity issues as a result of the shift to online learning.

Increasingly, research is showing that children and young people are facing high levels of vulnerabilities and inequalities due to school closures and the shift to online learning (Darmody et al., 2020). This is mainly because of the uneven access to resources such as computers and the internet, with children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds exhibiting significant inequalities (Coleman, 2021: 3). The digital divide, that is access, or lack thereof, to digital technologies (Coleman, 2021: 9), was not only pointed out within individual children and families but also between schools. Schools in urban areas, for instance, had better accessibility to high-speed broadband, they also varied in their accessibility to digital devices, and the level of their support to pupils (Darmody et al., 2020: 34). Montacute and Cullinane (2021) found out that almost half the number of state schools in England were only able to provide computers to half or fewer pupils within the school. Moreover, in the UK, in their study, Major et al. (2020) reported that during the first lockdown of March 2020, 74 per cent of pupils in private schools were benefitting from daily, full-day, online school days compared to only 38 per cent of pupils from state schools. Within state schools, there was also a clear divide between children from higher-income households whose parents reported they are much more likely to receive help from their schools as opposed to children from lower-income households (Andrew et al., 2020).

Research has also shown that children from disadvantaged backgrounds received little to no support from their parents to help them with the new learning technologies because the parents themselves lacked the necessary skills (Coleman, 2021: 25). Evidently, the shift to online learning has exposed and deepened some of the already existing inequalities. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, were the most affected with potentially long-standing consequences (Andrew et al., 2020; Eyles et al., 2020). Although there is a significant body of literature on the impact of COVID-19 on children's education, research addressing the impact of the emerging inequalities on disadvantaged groups, particularly migrant children, is scarce. In the following, special attention to the impact of the pandemic on children and migrant children will be given.

Migrant children in times of crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives of millions of children and adolescents around the world. This unprecedented public health emergency disrupted every aspect of children's day-to-day lives including their educational and social lives. As a result of school closures, separation from peers, limited social interactions, and reduced physical activities, many children and young people were at risk of increased feelings of loneliness, isolation, stress and anxiety about their education, besides mental and psychological challenges (UNICEF, 2021). To cope with the changes and the challenges, children and young people were spending larger amounts of time online (Ofcom, 2020). The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (2020) noted that on-screen time among children increased by 6 hours above the recommended hours. This meant further risks to children's physical and mental health can emerge such as sleep problems, myopia, and difficulties in concentration (Pandya and Lodha, 2021; Singh and Balhara, 2021). The lack of structure resulting from the pandemic also had an impact on the time that children spent on their learning. In a study of Children's Media Lives during the lockdown, 14 children across the UK were interviewed by the Office of Communications [Ofcom] (2020) to unravel their online and digital activities during the period of quarantine. Findings showed that children spent less time on schoolwork when compared to the time they would spend in regular term-time. Parents of these children also were struggling to balance between supporting their children with their online learning and their remote work. That besides the lack of extra-curricular activities resulted in children spending more time on their electronic devices and more time isolated in their rooms (Ofcom, 2020).

Although COVID-19 impacted the lives of all children around the world, it has had particularly devastating effects on vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people. The pandemic put extra burdens on families that already struggled financially. School closures meant increased costs of living as children would, for instance, no longer receive the free school meals. This also meant that children were at higher risks of harm, neglect, abuse, and exploitation, especially with limited access to support services which switched to working remotely (Barnardo's, 2020). Children from low-income families with limited access to laptops, phones, and the internet were also at risk of stigma and shame (The Children's Society, 2020). Inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic were also evident in how children from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely to experience feelings of anxiety and stress. and seek help for suicidal thoughts (Barnardo's, 2020). One particular group that was at higher risks of financial struggles, discrimination, stigmatisation, social isolation, and mental health challenges is migrant children and refugees. Refugees and migrants would usually rely on specialist services in order to access their rights and entitlements, however, as a result of the immense pressure put on these services because of COVID-19, accessibility was restricted. Incidents of increased poverty, issues of housing, linguistic barriers, and lack of familiarity with the education and health systems of the host country would put refugees and migrants at increased levels of vulnerability and make migrant children among the most disadvantaged groups during a global health crisis (The Children's Society, 2020).

The pandemic has complicated matters for children from migrant backgrounds in many aspects of their lives including their learning. Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, migrant children already faced many challenges in education; this included language barriers, lack of qualified teachers who speak their mother tongue, and teachers who are trained in intercultural competence (Child-Up, 2020). Migrant children also struggled with the negative stereotyping of their teachers, their parents not being familiar with the schools' systems which meant less support, and not being able to benefit from kindergarten and pre-school classes (Child UP, 2020). These factors greatly affected migrant children's achievement outcomes together with the differences in the socio-economic and educational backgrounds of their families. During the lockdown, these inequalities were made even worse as schools for migrant children do not only represent a space for learning but also a space for socialisation and integration. School closures interrupted this process of integration by separating migrant children from the mainstream population. This ultimately would have a negative effect on their mental health and school performance (Child UP, 2020). Additionally, after school closures, migrant children's English language skills were also affected. Teachers of English as an additional language (EAL) reported a decrease in the language skills for children acquiring English (Demie et al., 2020). Furthermore, because access to additional support and quality online learning was determined by the technical equipment and resources, migrant children's educational experiences were further affected. As such and taking into consideration the unprecedented challenges and exacerbated inequalities that migrant children faced during the COVID-19 crisis, a focus on these issues to find new ways of reducing the inequalities becomes a pressing need. The aim of this chapter is to prioritise the unheard voices of a disadvantaged group and stimulate their sustainable integration.

Approaches for the integration of migrant children

In the state of the highly diverse, mobile, and modern societies, talks about 'integration' have been long echoing. With the growing trends of global migration, the concept of integration has attracted much scholarly attention (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018). In the field of migration studies, there is no agreed-upon definition of integration, however, many scholars draw attention to the necessity of making the distinction between integration and assimilation (e.g. Phillimore, 2012). As opposed to assimilation, which is a process of fully absorbing the dominant culture and risking the abandonment of the heritage culture and identity (Smith et al., 2019), the EU foregrounds an understanding of integration as 'a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents' (European Commission, 2004). A process that aims at the inclusion of migrant groups in the host societies to create social cohesion and promote equality (Rutter, 2015). Many scholars have argued that the goal of integration can only be attained through equal access to quality education and life-long learning for migrant children (AbuJarour, 2020). Therefore, the successful integration of migrant children at schools is vital for their successful integration in the host societies.

Nevertheless, this process of integration is not hassle-free (Koehler and Schneider, 2019). At schools, besides issues of language barriers, cultural differences, socio-economic factors, and parental influence, migrant children's integration can also be hindered by the dominant approaches to integration and the adult-centred discourse around it.

Sime (2017) argues that current approaches to integration focus on concepts of community, locality, migrants' identity, and participation in the host society and holds migrants accountable for the process of their own integration and withholds any responsibility from receiving societies (Spencer, 2011). Although these approaches acknowledge the challenges that migrant children face, for instance, hostility and segregation at school (Devine, 2009) poorer educational attainment, and lower school performance (OECD, 2012), they are adult focused. They put adults in a position of power and decision-making which results in children's voices being marginalised (Sime, 2017: 5). Adult-centred approaches to integration had often stripped away migrant children's agency and depicted them as victims of migration, powerless, and passive. This led to calls for changing the discourse into one that empowers them and stimulates their agency. A child-centred approach aims at understanding children's individual experiences of migration from their perspectives and prioritises their needs and voices (Sancho-Gil et al., 2021). To date, very little attention has been given to the study of migrant children's experiences (Sime, 2017). As such, in this chapter, instead of looking at migrant children as 'trapped in a miserable structural conflict of living between two cultures' (Mannitz, 2005: 23), the aim is to focus on children's voices, agency, and resilience in issues that matters to them such as their inclusion in their schools and in the societies they inhabit. To meet this aim, this chapter addresses the following research questions: (1) How did the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to online learning affect migrant children's integration into schools? And (2) how can the employment of a child-centred approach to study the learning experiences of children during the pandemic inform and contribute to our understanding of migrant children's integration?

The study

The data presented in this chapter is part of the Migrant Children and Communities in a Transforming Europe (MiCREATE) project, which was funded by the European Union through its Horizon 2020 research programme. The MiCREATE researchers from 12 European countries, including researchers from Manchester in the United Kingdom, have conducted research activities with more than 3,000 migrant children in order to understand the contemporary experiences and challenges they face and how they can be best supported within the community and their educational environment. The project aims to promote the inclusion of migrant children by adopting a child-centred approach to migrant children's integration on educational and policy levels as well as in research. That is, to develop a policy framework that has the child's well-being and active participation at its heart and educational practices that stimulate migrant children's agency for their integration, research should be conducted through methods that recognise children as the most relevant source of information (Gornik and Sedmak, 2021). To do so, different methods were deployed including participant observation, art-based methods, and narrative interviews. The focus was on methods that keep children in the central position of the data collection and analysis processes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, one of the main points of interest that emerged from the situation was how online learning and school closures affected the integration of school children with migrant backgrounds. Therefore, MiCREATE researchers in Manchester conducted a sub-study between November and December 2021, with 13 children aged 14–15 from a public secondary school in Manchester (see Table 6.1). The aim of the sub-study was to explore the impact of school closures and distance learning on children's learning processes, integration, inclusion, well-being, and mental health. Data were elicited from the children through semi-structured interviews which were conducted by a member of staff at the school.

The inclusion criteria for recruiting participants for this study was newly arrived migrant children, that is children who arrived in the UK within the past five years, who are still in the process of getting acquainted with the schools' environment as well the host society. The disruption and interruption caused by COVID-19, therefore, could have a greater impact on the education and integration of this particular group of migrants, hence they can be more prone to social inequalities. We aimed at understanding their needs and struggles from their perspective and acknowledging the best ways to supporting them as they themselves see the best fit for that purpose. With the help of school, children who met the criteria were recruited and written consent was obtained from them and their guardians to participate in the study after explaining to them the purpose and the objectives of the project. Data were elicited from the children through semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded and then transcribed. All personal data were removed and completely anonymised, and participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms. Data were coded and analysed using a thematic analysis framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In terms of methodological ways of engaging critically and reflexively with a child-centred approach, we move away from a binary researcher–participant process. We give attention to the complexities of educational researcher positionality through both practice and identity. Moving away from the notion that researcher is often seen as homogenous, we focus on critical self-analysis in two ways. First, with all members of the research process being of migrant backgrounds, and non-foreign UK born, we bring in a diverse outlook on migration through intersectional identities, theoretical knowledge and linguistic orientation that act as reflexive and reflective tools to explore how migration affects and shapes children both as migrants and pupils. For this, we draw on Roger et al. (2018)'s finding that researcher identities are determiners of positive and negative emotions of belonging and self-confidence. Following Dennis (2018), rather than just 'asking' pre-prepared fixed questions, we strive to base the research process on participation and co-creation of dialogue to establish trust, truth-telling and interaction (See Yoon and Uliassi, 2022).

So, in the current study, the decision to recruit a teacher as a researcher was a strategic one, based on the premise that as a staff member with deep connections with students, the teacher would have high levels of rapport with the young people. Also, given the troubling times during which these interviews were conducted, it was felt that researchers asking such personal questions may pose additional distress to the young people. There are pitfalls of using a teacher as a researcher, namely that the young people may feel compelled to participate and therefore less able to access their rights to consent and withdraw. To overcome this issue, we ensured that young people received information about the study from the research team. For example, a week prior to

Table 6.1 Participants' Socio-demographic Information

No.	*Participant*	*Age*	*Gender*	*Country of Origin*	*Time in the UK*
1	C1	15	Male	Kuwait	4 years
2	C2	15	Male	Pakistan	6/7 months
3	C3	14	Male	Kuwait	2/3 years
4	C4	15	Female	Pakistan	1 year
5	C5	14	Male	Pakistan	5 years ago
6	C6	14	Female	Spain	3 years
7	C7	14	Male	Kuwait	2 years
8	C8	15	Female	Pakistan	2/3 years
9	C9	15	Female	Norway	2/3 years
10	C10	15	Male	Kuwait	2/3 years
11	C11	14	Male	Iraq	1/2 years
12	C12	15	Male	Kurdistan/Norway	7/8 months
13	C13	15	Female	Syria	4/5 years

the interviews, the teacher informed young people about the study using a script the researchers had prepared. Before the interview, the teacher played the young people a video of the researchers once again explaining the study, its purpose, their rights to consent and withdraw at any time they wish, and information related to what will happen with their data. In this interview, the researchers emphasised that the interviews are designed to elicit their views and opinions and that there are no right or wrong answers. The young people were also given this information in the form of an information sheet. It is anticipated that this will have helped to mitigate the power dynamics that naturally exist in the teacher and pupil relationship.

Findings

Interviews with migrant children during the COVID-19 pandemic and schools' closure highlighted the role of schools not only for learning but as places for socialisation and integration. Findings show that school closures during the pandemic and the switch to online learning had an impact on both children's learning as well as their well-being. The findings presented in this section will first shed light on the struggles of migrant children during the pandemic, which ultimately affected their integration. After that, we will also present some of the children's suggested solutions on how to tackle and overcome the issues emerging as a result of the global pandemic.

Grappling with forced social isolation

The pandemic affected the livelihood of millions of people around the globe causing disruptions and changes to social activities and everyday life practices. As a result of the safety and social distancing measures, many children and young people gave up outdoor activities and meeting with their friends and sometimes had to find solace in online:

> I just play outside, but like, when pandemic came, I can't go outside with my friends, and I can't play with them.
>
> (C8, Female, Pakistan, 15yrs)

> If you're going to stay like in one room you feel like you're in a prison
>
> (C1, Male, Kuwait, 15yrs)

> I used to go and play a lot with my friends but now I spent the whole day playing video games and stuff like that.
>
> (C2, Male, Pakistan, 15yrs)

During the lockdown, schools were closed, and many forms of social gatherings were prohibited. People were not allowed to leave their homes except for very limited purposes such as shopping for essentials and physical exercise once a day. The impact of this kind of forced social isolation had a significant impact on children's mental health and well-being:

> When the school closed it and being isolated at home, I feel like my heart is closed. You can't breathe and you feel like you're being a little bit Crazy, because like, at home, you don't have nothing do. Finish online lesson, like sometimes your friend is not going outside. Like going to other countries, you stay at home alone. Sometimes your family are not at home. Your brother has like school and your mom, and your dad are not at home. Like, you feel like Lonely.
>
> (C11, Male, Iraq, 14yrs)

Feelings of loneliness and isolation were recurrent themes in many of the interviews. The loss of in-person and physical contact with friends, peers, and close family, disturbed children's social lives. Some children felt they lost their confidence, especially because the online space was not a space where they could get the support they needed:

> I can't tell my friends or someone else and online telling people stuff, it's weird and it's strange, I don't know.
>
> (C1, Male, Kuwait, 15yrs)

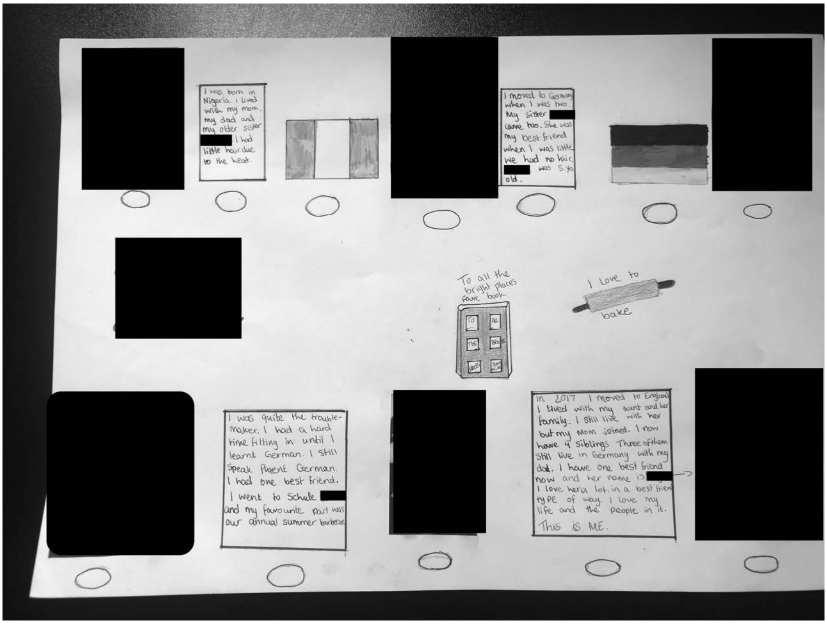
Feelings of dread and what seemed like a never-ending and continuous social isolation cycle left many young people frustrated and immensely affected their social lives, especially for those for whom the school was the only place for socialisation. This at times was aggravated by the lack of access to digital means or lack of support from family, who in turn struggled with their own digital literacy skills:

> I was feeling like… I didn't know isolation was like that. I thought it was just one week or two weeks and then it was more and more and more. The learning, the teachers didn't do online because it was like… I didn't have Teams. My sister did not know about it. My sister used to teach me at home the subjects, most of the subjects.
>
> (C9, Female, Norway, 15yrs)

It seems that overall young people's experiences were marked with negativity as is demonstrated by the word cloud in Figure 6.1.

The challenges of online learning

During the interviews, children emphasised that they preferred being at school for learning and reported that their experience with online learning



I was born in Nigeria. I lived with my mom, my dad and my older sister [redacted] I had little hair due to the heat.

I moved to Germany when I was two. My sister [redacted] came too. She was my best friend when I was little. We had no hair. [redacted] was 5 yrs old.

I was quite the trouble-maker. I had a hard time fitting in until I learnt German. I still speak fluent German. I had one best friend. I went to Schule [redacted] and my favourite part was our annual summer barbecue

In 2017 I moved to England. I lived with my aunt and her family. I still live with her but my mom joined. I now have 4 siblings. Three of them still live in Germany with my dad. I have one best friend now and her name is [redacted] I love her a lot, in a best friend type of way. I love my life and the people in it. This is ME.

Figure 6.1 Is a collection of words young people used in their interviews to describe their feelings during the pandemic

was unpleasant. All children stated that it was more difficult to learn online and that they felt their educational attainment was affected by the switch:

> In the school, you learn like more than you learn at home.
>
> (C1, Male, Kuwait, 15yrs)

> Because we can't learn in school, it's more hard to learn at home… Because in school its better, I can get help from teachers.
>
> (C13, Male, Syria, 15yrs)

> So basically, I forget what I learnt in Year 9.
>
> (C4, Female, Pakistan, 15yrs)

> Because when I was at home, in lockdown, I didn't learn anything.
>
> (C12, Male, Kurdistan/Norway, 15yrs)

> I think it affected, not only me but a lot of people and we lost a lot of time, we wasted so much time that we are bad at our level now…I think if you want to learn better, you have to be at school.
>
> (C2, Male, Pakistan, 15yrs)

For newly arrived migrant children, as is the case in this study, the struggles and difficulties are exacerbated, especially because they are still in the process of becoming familiar with the educational system in their schools.These newcomers were burdened with the extra issue of language barriers. Many of the children interviewed reported on how schools' closure impacted their learning because they struggled with their language skills and in some cases, it affected their English language learning itself:

> Because I was new here and it was lockdown, and I don't speak English.
> (C4, Female, Pakistan, 15yrs)

> It's the chance to and first time to like, to understand from the online and the, you know, when your English is not every well. So, that's the challenge. It was challenging, sir.
> (C10, Male, Kuwait, 15yrs)

> Yeah. I'm not learning English more, yeah
> (C7, Male, Kuwait, 14yrs)

This same issue of language barrier might have prevented some parents from adequately supporting their children with their homework as in the case of the below child:

> Because like my father and my mother is old and them can't speak English, and I have a brother, some brother like that work, they have job.
> (C7, Male, Kuwait, 14yrs)

Language was not the only challenge to online learning that migrant children experienced. In one case, it was also reported that technical problems might have an effect on the quality of online learning such as unreliable internet:

> Mostly, because like sometimes I have a problem with the internet.
> (C11, Male, Iraq, 14yrs)

Another child stated that even if they struggled with understanding the material, they might feel reluctant to ask the teacher for help online. This is because the child felt more self-aware of how this would make the teacher feel:

> Some of the pupils maybe are struggling to study at home because of the online learning, but to learn in school it will make it easier to learn. I feel like to learn at school it's easier than at home because online if you ask the teacher every time, she will stop and explain and it will be boring for her. But here, she can ask me every time.
> (C9, Female, Norway, 15yrs)

Online learning can also lead to reducing children's ability to focus. The physical absence of teachers might result in children's loss of interest as well as lack of structure:

> Because like learning at home, you can't learn when there are like screens or something, because the teacher is not like in front of you and then just telling you what you have to do… Like you don't learn too much. You know like sometimes, when you're at home and reading you do … sometimes, you don't focus on the teacher, because you know what? You know what you do? You're at home. Like some kids playing with the phone and doing their lessons…Yeah, because you've got your mind is going to go to other things you have to do because you stay at home, and he's not seeing me, he's not listening to me…Yeah it's harder to concentrate, yeah, but at school, you don't have nothing to play with there, you have to concentrate on the teacher.
>
> (C11, Male, Iraq, 14yrs)

Tackling the pandemic's challenges: Children's perspectives

Having presented some of the challenges that were shared during the interviews by participants, in this section, we focus on what children think about how these challenges can be tackled. To help with pupils' well-being, C2 below suggests raising awareness among children and young people at schools by creating an inclusive, shared, and safe space for all children where they can learn about mental health issues:

> Okay, so we can't help everyone, but we have to try to help people that have problems because some are good for life, because of COVID, there were a lot of suicides and I don't know, maybe they could have made it a special lesson, where we have to talk about how do we feel, an extra lesson for our online classes, where everyone could join.
>
> (C2, Male, Pakistan, 15yrs)

Besides designing lessons that would help children understand the intricacies of well-being and creating a space where they can share their experiences and struggles, professional help should also be made available to children and be easily accessible at schools as well as at home as one child suggested:

> My opinion is they need a psychologist in school or at home so they can help the kid.
>
> (C6, Female, Spain, 14yrs)

For children who struggle with the English language, more time can be allocated to their learning of the language. Issues related to linguistic discrimination as well as bullying and cyberbullying should also be highlighted and given more attention:

> So, in school, we need to give one day, for that person who doesn't speak English and we need to teach them, and we need to check if they are being bullied or not about their speech and online, we need to give more time to that one.
>
> (C4, Female, Pakistan, 15yrs)

These suggested solutions can still be relevant to the aftermath of the pandemic even with the gradual back-to-normal of everyday life in schools. This is because some of the effects can be long-lasting and require to be addressed and talked about even if we are now approaching a post-pandemic era. Furthermore, they can serve as a lesson for schools and societies in the case of similar events in future.

Discussion and conclusion

Schools' closure and the shift to online learning reshaped the practices of everyday life, education, and social life. Findings presented in this chapter shed light on migrant children's struggles both in their education and their social life during the pandemic and they accentuated the role of schools in children's socialisation and integration processes for newly arrived children particularly. During the lockdown, the day-to-day practices of migrant children and young people changed and many of them experienced feelings of isolation and lack of support with this change. Such social isolation has an impact on how migrants form meaningful, nurturing social bridges and bonds in the host country (Barker, 2021: 37). According to Barker (2021), successful social integration for newcomers requires the fostering of meaningful social bonds (ties to co-ethnic, co-religious, and co-national communities), social bridges (ties to the different, diverse groups in the community), and social links (links to the structures of the state). The formation of such social connections is essential for migrants in order to build trust and shared values in the host society to function effectively. For newly arrived children and young people who are yet to form such social connections, schools are an important resource and space where social bridges, bonds, and links can be built and maintained. Thus, schools' closure and the forced social isolation may leave a severe and long-lasting impact on their social integration.

The damaging psychosocial impact of COVID-19 on newly arrived children that was evident in Section 6.1 of the findings was also extended to children's learning. Children in this study reported many challenges to their online learning that often confirmed challenges reported in previous studies; namely learning loss (Atteberry and McEachin, 2021), lack of motivation and feelings of boredom (Liang et al., 2020), lack of access to quality internet (Morgan, 2020). Because of the lack of familiarity with the new learning setting and the absence of face-to-face interaction, pupils might also be more self-aware and reserved to ask for support and help from their teachers. These challenges were amplified in the case of migrant children as findings suggest. Online learning increased children's struggles, especially regarding their English language learning which is essential for their integration. Language is a cognitive as well as a social phenomenon and with schools' closure, children missed out on the opportunity of learning English collectively in the classroom. Language classrooms are important sites for fostering social inclusion and active participation and citizenship as well as sites where pupils can learn about the host country and build connections beyond the classroom (Bednarz, 2017: 80; Barker, 2021: 37). This coupled with having much less exposure to English at home would put EAL pupils at a disadvantaged position (Sutton, 2020) and may result in increased existing inequalities in educational attainment in the long-term.

Methodologically, we focus on the principle of researcher as instrument (following Creswell, 2009; Yoon and Uliassi, 2022) for enriching educational practice, and instrumentalising researcher positionality more reflexively (Soh et al., 2020). With the strategic use of research positionality and identity within a child-centred approach in this study, we were able to foreground children's understandings of, and reflections on, the impact of COVID-19 on their learning and well-being. This is particularly important because children are more likely to experience the impact of the pandemic for years to come. The inequalities and gaps created and aggravated by this health crisis are to be traced in their educational and career prospects in future. Echoing the voices of children and young people and including it in the pandemic discourse was also through listening to their suggestions for improvement and addressing the issues. Pupils stressed their need for an inclusive and safe space to address their particular struggles and challenges with access to specialised and professional help with their well-being and mental health as well as their struggles with language skills. These findings might help teachers, policymakers, and practitioners in understanding the educational and social struggles and needs of migrant children. Although such challenges emerged and were highlighted by the pandemic, it is important to address them during and post the pandemic, especially because their imprint on migrant children's lives is lasting and would have an impact on their integration and inclusion and equal opportunities to active participation in the society.

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