

POLSKI UNIWERSYTET NA OBCZYŹNIE
W LONDYNIE

ZESZYTY NAUKOWE

SERIA TRZECIA, NR 10, 2022

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**UNACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINORS
AND THE PERCEPTIONS OF UNDERGRADUATE
STUDENTS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION.
A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA**

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

**1.1. UNACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINORS:
A SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGE**

The phenomenon of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (UFM) represents a social and educational challenge because of its very high numbers and the political, social and educational implications it entails¹.

In 2020 16 750 children arrived in Greece, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta. Of these, 10 343 were unaccompanied. Child arrivals in these states de-

¹ The contribution was collectively designed: Federica Matera is the author of the paragraphs 1 and 2, Jennifer Serrano García – 3, 4 and 5.

creased by 50% in 2020 compared to 2019, but in Spain, the second European state only after Italy in terms of numbers of UFM, between 2019 and 2020 the number increased by 56% (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, 2020).

Between 2014 and 2020 arrivals by sea in Spain increased exponentially (Statista Research Department, 2022b). In 2020 alone, 3340 UFM arrived in Spain by sea, most of them from Morocco, Mali, Algeria and Senegal (UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, 2020) and as of December 31, 2020, 9030 minors were registered in the Registry of Unaccompanied Foreign Minors (Agencia de datos, 2022).

The majority of this population is found in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, with 4617 located in this region, compared to 12 417 of the total (Statista Research Department, 2022a). Most of them come from the African Continent, especially from Morocco (67%), and are over 17 years old (79.4%) (Save the Children, 2018).

In addition to the number of presences, it is also necessary to consider the untraceable minors. Of the 27 560 active reports of missing minors in 2019, at least 1768 correspond to minors who have escaped from reception facilities (Agencia de datos, 2022).

This figure calls into question the ability of civil society and professionals to accommodate the specific needs of these minors, but also the strength of their migration project.

These minors, in fact, are often considered as *agents of family development* (Sbraccia, 2011), bearers of expectations that take them away from the specific protection measures and that can make them enter *invisibility* (Milani, 2015) and the circuit of *deviance, trafficking* and *exploitation* (Matera, 2021).

The vulnerability of UFM lies in their own condition. They are, in fact, boys and girls *under the age of 18, migrants, separated* from their parents and *not in the care* of any other adult.

Despite the complexity of their status that demands individualised attention, there is a generalisation in the use of the acronym in the public sphere, and this leads to *dehumanisation, stigmatisation* and *criminalisation* of an extremely vulnerable group. For this reason, another narrative is needed that considers them as lonely minors at serious risk of exclusion and neglect (Save the Children, 2019; Amnistía Internacional España, equipo de Migración y Refugio, 2021).

Looking at the specific characteristics of UFM, these are young people who undertake a *physical journey*, alone or accompanied by exploiters, which exposes them to dangers and uncertainties. In fact, there are many cases in which

minors do not manage to reach the country of destination, despite the promises of traffickers and the debts that minors, or their families, have contracted at the time of departure. The risks of the journey are linked to the duration of the journey, which is often longer than expected, to the places they pass through, where they often work in order to earn money to continue their journey without the necessary safeguards, and to the results of the migration route, which may not even lead to the predetermined destination (Clayton, Gupta, Willis, 2019).

A second element of specificity can be traced back to the *identity journey* between different cultural and symbolic systems (that of the country of origin and that of the country of arrival). The encounter with unfamiliar cultural horizons can generate culture shock (Rogoff, 2004) and role conflicts (Grinberg, Grinberg, 1990).

Then, UFM often carry a *migration mandate* that is the result of the expectations of the family and/or social community to which they belong. In most cases, this mandate is unrealistic, difficult or impossible to achieve, and conflicts with the rights of minors.

Finally, often the *family* is present, although not in physical form. In fact, it manifests itself in the migration project in the form of the child's empowerment in accomplishing certain tasks of emancipation and development.

The elements of specificity presented make it necessary to rethink the concepts of childhood and adolescence, well-being, adulthood and education that make the system of protection capable of accommodating cultural diversity. Otherwise, the risk is to perpetrate discrimination based on an adult-centric and ethno-centric logic.

In the face of multiple violations of human rights and the rights of children and adolescents, the reception system must respond with an intercultural pedagogical approach, renewing its practices and interpretive models (González, Zerpa, Gutiérrez, Pirela, 2007).

1.2. MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND CHILD MIGRATION: CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL REPRESENTATION THROUGH INFORMAL EDUCATION

In this scenario of discrimination, the media play a key role in combating intolerance and xenophobia.

There are several fake news stories about UFM. Amnistía Internacional España, equipo de Migración y Refugio (2021) collected the most significant ones (*They don't work; They are an economic burden on the state; More than half are*

not minors; With them, crime is on the rise) and refuted them. Indisputably, the media help to spread these unfounded stereotypes.

Several researches show that journalistic information is a source that creates specific configurations (Benson, 2013) and constructs an interpretive framework of reality, determining the attribution of one meaning or another (Koziner, 2013), giving content to the concept of *immigrant* (Bleich, Bloemraad, Graauw, 2015), and creating symbolic boundaries between the self and the other (Dines, Montagna, Ruggiero, 2015).

Therefore, the media play a decisive role in the social construction of threat and security (Horsti, 2003; Balzacq, 2005; Carrascosa, Lacomba, 2020), being able to influence public opinion, either by presenting a certain image of a population or by amplifying or silencing specific voices (Horsti, 2003; Hoekstra, 2015).

The Spanish media is a source of misinformation, of a biased and homogenizing message. Some research highlights the risk that these dynamics have in reflecting and in reinforcing a deficient, preconceived, stereotyped and flattened image of a marginalized group of people (Traverso, 2018; Magallon-Rosa, 2021; Milani, Matera, 2022).

Prejudice, fear of the foreigner (Checa-Olmos, Arjona-Garrido, 2011) and social inequality (Martínez Lirola, Olmos Alcaraz, 2015) are then heightened by the use of the acronym, which hides minors' individuality and emphasizes only the deficient aspects, such as being alone and foreigners, drawing attention to a logic of dependence (Gimeno, 2013). Some authors point out how this causes a disavowal of their relationships and a distrust in their ability to create new ones (Gómez Quintero, Carreras Aguerri, Gimeno Monterde, 2021).

According to Penalva and La Parra (2008), the media (as disseminators of values, norms and lifestyles) legitimize direct or *structural violence* (Galtung, 1985) when, through their content, they provoke rejection, discrimination or aggression against certain groups, individuals, nations, genders, etc. Another way in which the media provoke violence is through disinformation (Penalva, 2002). A highly uninformed society is a society with a high degree of violence.

Following Galtung and Vincent's (1992) definition of violence, in this area, the gap between potential realisations (high level of technology and professionalization of communication) and actual realisations (disinformation through censorship, manipulation of facts, decontextualisation, etc.) would have a multitude of negative consequences on the development of individuals' capabilities, rights, freedom and autonomy. As Liceras (2003, 2005) shows, the mass media

have a great influence in the construction of social thinking, especially among children and adolescents. The media are agents of informal education and intervene not only in content, but also in learning modes, especially in those people who are unable to access them properly and assess their credibility.

The literature shows how the digital divide, the lack of digital literacy and the absence of critical tools to select the presence of possible false information play a decisive role in the assumption of false beliefs, because they exclude part of the population from the possibility of both participating in public discourse and understanding the bias of what they read and listen to (Dominici, 2019; Matera, 2022).

All this causes an *educational deficit*, which favours the consolidation of personal positions based on common sense and stereotypes (Dominici, 2019; Matera, 2022). Within this framework, formal education for critical media consumption is needed.

1.3. ENCOURAGING CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH FORMAL TRAINING: A RESEARCH STUDY WITH UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS FROM THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION IN GRANADA

Critical thinking education is a fundamental tool for perfecting the ability to assess the credibility of information (Lazer et al., 2018). The choice of information resources represents a skill that must be supported by critical thinking (Fontanin, 2018). Indeed, it allows for the source of knowledge not to be chosen according to the sole criterion of immediate availability or adherence to one's beliefs. On the contrary, critical thinking allows the selection to be made responsibly within a set of sources that is itself critically selected. The increasingly massive production and dissemination of digital content, even self-produced content, and the speed and ease with which any person can publish information, whether true or false, if, on the one hand, it makes the field of possible knowledge much broader, on the other, it produces a set of contents whose reliability cannot always be verified.

Formal education must foster the development of critical thinking. In fact, the task of schools and universities is to carry out what Freire (1973) called a *problematizing education* through the development of contexts for critical reflection on content proposed to students, or proposed by them, and then discussed collectively. In this perspective, the educational act must start from situations that are close to the students, directly experienced by them or that are

present in their life contexts. Schools and universities can foster the competence of learning to learn, a fundamental dimension of self-education (Tremblay, 1996), so that students can be intellectually autonomous.

The ability to think critically involves several skills, such as the ability to identify arguments and assumptions, recognize important relationships, make correct inferences, evaluate evidence and authority, and draw conclusions (Furedy, Furedy, 1985).

In this framework, creating conditions in which students are presented with news, both true and false, on a topic that is central to their daily lives and which also creates very conflicting opinions, can be an effective method for fostering the development of critical thinking. In fact, asking students to think about news without it being contextualized by the researcher/teacher causes two consequences:

- a) a cognitive dilemma arising from the fact that the news presented does not correspond to what they thought;
- b) the need to situate it, and thus to wonder who spread it and whether it is true or false.

However, the presentation of the news alone cannot guarantee the development of critical thinking; it is only the starting point. When reflection becomes collective knowledge and beliefs circulate, fostering on the one hand the broadening of one's knowledge base, and on the other the problematization of one's personal knowledge and, therefore, of one's sources of information and the ways implemented to select them.

In fact, critical thinking is also a reflective activity, because it analyses the validity of the results of one's own reflection and that of others. It is an action-oriented thinking that always emerges in a context of problem solving and in interaction with others. In addition, the evaluation of prior information and knowledge is the basis of decision making (López Aymes, 2012).

Within this framework, this project offers students a training space for the development of critical thinking, fostering their ability to dialogue to solve a problem of understanding regarding a phenomenon and its presentation by the media.

2. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Within this theoretical framework, this research has the following objectives:

General Objective 1. To demonstrate the influence of the media in the perceptions of UFM in undergraduate students in Education at the University of Granada, given their future role as teachers and educators.

Specific Objective 1. To find out the point of view of university students from the Faculty of Education in Granada on UFM.

General Objective 2. To provoke a transformation in the perception of the UFM phenomenon.

Specific Objective 1. To allow spaces for individual and collective reflection for university students.

Specific Objective 2. To allow university professors to get to know the students' point of view, so they can activate specific training actions.

According to these objectives, the research questions guiding the study are:

RQ1. What is the students' interpretation of the media message on UFM?

RQ2. Is it possible that collective reflection determines a change in the perception of the phenomenon of UFM?

3. METHODOLOGY

The research responds to a pre-experimental methodology, as this is useful for approaching the phenomenon under study, in this case, to know the perception of university students about UFM, taking into account the influence that the media have on them (Campbell, 1969; Esparza Del Villar, Rios Velasco Moreno, Chávez Valdez, 2020). Within it, a pretest-posttest and a comparison group design is used.

3.1. SAMPLE

Non-probabilistic sampling is used, therefore, it is not a random selection process, but the subjects are selected based on personal criteria framed by the researchers. A purposive strategy is applied, as the sample is selected by the researchers according to their interests (Scharager, Reyes, 2001).

A total of 100 university students from the University of Granada (UGR) were selected. These students are in the 3rd year of the Primary Education Degree and, specifically, the subject of Tutorial Action. In the present study, group A (50 students) was assigned as the experimental group (EG) and group E (50 students) as the control group (CG). Table 2 shows the data on participants according to gender, age, work experience and education.

TABLE 1. PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO GENDER, AGE, WORK EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION

		EG1		CG2	
		%	F	%	F
GENDER	Women	37	74	33	66
	Men	74	26	17	34
AGE	20 to 25	48	96	44	88
	26 to 31	2	4	3	6
WORK EXPERIENCE	NE3	31	62	33	66
	ENMENAS4	19	38	17	34
FORMATION	NH5	13	26	14	28
	NC6	36	72	36	72
	SC7	1	2		

Note: EG1: Experimental Group; CG2: Control Group; NE3: I have no work experience in the education sector; ENMENAS4: I have work experience in the education sector, but not with MENAs; NH5: I have never heard of MENAs; NC6: I have not done any courses/lectures/seminars on MENAs; SC7: I have done one or more courses/lectures/seminars on MENAs.

3.2. COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

For the correct development of this study, it has been necessary to construct and use a set of instruments that respond to the questions framed above:

QUESTIONNAIRE ON „UNIVERSITY STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION OF UNACCOMPANIED FOREIGN MINORS (UFM)”

This questionnaire was created with the aim of finding out how university students at the UGR, specifically at the Faculty of Education Sciences, perceive UFM. For this purpose, five areas were framed: educational, social, personal, health and social dangerousness. The educational area consisted of three items, the social and personal area consisted of seven items, the health area consisted of four items and, finally, the social dangerousness area consisted of six items. As for the mode of response, a 4-point Likert scale was established, with 1: totally disagree; 2: disagree; 3: agree; 4: totally agree.

After developing the set of items for the different areas according to the existing literature, they were validated by means of an expert judgement carried out by 8 teachers who are experts in the field, with an agreement index of 0.8 between all of them.

Next, negative items 6, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 26 were recoded in the database created in IBM SPSS Statistic.

Additionally, the reliability of the scale was calculated from Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, giving a value of .868. Therefore, it can be stated that the reliability of the instrument is acceptable.

TASKS THAT SEEK INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP REFLECTION

A task was created for each of the biographies and news items, so that, while the students listened to the biographical stories and news items, they could reflect on them.

3.3. PROCEDURE

In order to carry out this study, it went through five phases:

1st phase – Data collection phase - pre of EG: The questionnaire „Perception of University Students on Unaccompanied Foreign Minors” has been administered to the EG through the tool offered by Google, Google Forms.

2nd phase – Intervention phase: The students have been working with two real biographies of MENAs and a news item published in Spain by the media. One of the researchers read the documents, while the other researcher noted down gestures, non-verbal and verbal communication.

3rd phase – Reflection and individual explanation: While the EG listened to the news, they had to reflect and respond to the task set for each of the news items. All of them had to 1. write down the words that immediately came to their mind when listening to the news or biography, 2. write reflections on each of the words, any form of expression being valid.

4th phase – Debate and collective reflection: The researchers opened a debate by means of questions related to the news items presented and worked on. This was followed by a collective reflection.

5th phase – Post EG data collection phase: The questionnaire was administered again to the EG, in order to find out the effects that the intervention carried out in the session had provoked. In addition, the questionnaire was administered to the CG.

3.4. DATA ANALYSIS

The statistical analyses used in the development of the research were carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.1.0 statistical software. First, the reliability of the instrument created was calculated. Next, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to find out if the data had a normal distribution or if there were differences.

Descriptive statistics were then calculated, as well as different tests, such as Student's t-test for independent samples as well as for related samples.

The qualitative analysis, which is currently being developed, will be carried out using the WordArt tool, which will allow us to examine the individual reflections of each university student, and then collectively, in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the students' perception of UFM and the impact – positive or negative – that the media has on them.

4. RESULTS

After performing the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for a sample, it was found that the values obtained in the ECpost questionnaire, as well as in EGpre and EGpost, have $p > .05$, the data obtained being $p = .08, .15$ and $.20$. Therefore, we can accept the H_0 , so, the data have a normal distribution.

4.1. STUDENT'S T-TEST FOR RELATED SAMPLES

After making this statement, the Student's t-test for related and independent samples is performed.

It can be seen (see table 3) that there is a significant difference between EGpre – EGpost, as the $p < .05$, specifically $p = .001$. A negative mean difference was found, with a value of $.28593$.

TABLE 2. T-STUDENT FOR SAMPLE RELATED TO EGPRE – EGPOST

Group	Dif- ference in averages	95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL OF THE DIFFERENCE		t	gl	p
		Lower	Upper			
EGpre – EGpost	-.28593	-.36245	-.20940	-7.508	49	< .001

Following this statement, it can be confirmed that, after the intervention, the perception of university students studying the degree of Primary Education about the UFM improves, since, after the intervention, the EGpost ($\bar{x} = .34782$) obtains higher average values than the EGpre ($\bar{x} = .36887$). Therefore, it can be concluded that the intervention phase has positive effects on the university students.

4.2. STUDENT'S T-TEST FOR INDEPENDENT SAMPLES

It can be seen (see table 4) that there is significance between, CGpost – EGpost, since, the $p < .05$, specifically $p = .001$. Therefore, the mean difference gives a negative value: $-.39556$.

TABLE 3. T-STUDENT FOR INDEPENDENT SAMPLES: CGPOST AND EGPOST

Group	Differ- ence in averages	95% CONFIDENCE INTERVAL OF THE DIFFERENCE		t	gl	p
		Lower	Upper			
ECpost – EGpost	-.39556	-.54062	-.25049	-5.411	98	< .001

After showing the significance between the two groups, we can conclude that the intervention carried out with the UGR university students has led to an improvement in what we are trying to analyse, obtaining higher mean values in EGpost ($\bar{x} = 2.9696$) than in CGpost ($\bar{x} = 2.5741$).

5. DISCUSSION

According to the existing literature (Horsti, 2003; Balzacq, 2005; Carrascosa, Lacomba, 2020) and the results obtained in this study, it can be reaffirmed that the media play a key role in society and in the fight against intolerance and xenophobia (Defensor del Pueblo, 2019).

In Spain, the population generally presents a negative, erroneous, manipulated (Magallon-Rosa, 2021), deficient, flattened and stereotyped image of these minors (Traverso, 2018; Milani, Matera, 2022). This vision is produced because students do not have developed skills related to critical thinking and learning to learn, therefore, they are not able to analyse and select the information offered by the media, believing everything that is shown in the news, newspapers, etc., in a certain way and according to Tremblay (1996), they are not intellectually autonomous.

The study highlights the perception that university students have of UFM due to the influence of the media, as well as demonstrating that, by working on critical thinking in formal education, through individual and collective reflection, it is possible to change, according to Checa-Olmos, Arjona-Garrido (2011), the prejudiced thinking of students.

Therefore, after obtaining the data from this study, it is evident that the media have a great capacity to influence the perception that university students have of the UFM. Indeed, if we refer to EGpre with respect to EGpost, there are significant positive changes in thinking and attitude towards this population after the intervention and, therefore, EGpost's perception of this target population of study improves. The same is true for CGpost with respect to EGpost, as CGpost students have a more negative perception of UFM, as they are influenced by the media (Horsti, 2003; Hoekstra, 2015) and do not have the skills related to critical thinking. In contrast, EGpost has a more positive perception than CGpost.

However, Gómez Quintero, Carreras Aguerri and Gimeno Monterde (2021) indicate that the Spanish population thinks that UFM have difficulties in establishing future relationships with Spanish citizens. However, according to the present research, university students think just the opposite.

Therefore, it is important to highlight that, in general, the perception of the Spanish population on any subject, and specifically, on UFM, is due to this misinformation on the part of the media (Dominici, 2019).

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FEDERICA MATERA
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MAŁOLETNI CUDZOZIEMCY BEZ OPIEKI I PERCEPCJA STUDENTÓW STUDIÓW LICENCJACKICH NA KIERUNKU EDUKACJA PODSTAWOWA. BADANIE WPŁYWU MEDIÓW

STRESZCZENIE

W latach 2016–2019 przepływ migracyjny małoletnich cudzoziemców bez opieki (ang. Unaccompanied Foreign Minors, UFM) w Hiszpanii znacznie się zwiększył. Większość tej populacji znajduje się we Wspólnocie Autonomicznej Andaluzji, z 4617 zlokalizowanymi w tym regionie, w porównaniu do 12 417 ogółu, z których większość pochodzi z kontynentu afrykańskiego. Badania pokazują, że fakt ten, połączony z dezinformacją dostarczaną przez media, prowadzi społeczeństwo do posiadania z góry założonej, błędnej i zmanipulowanej wiedzy na temat tej populacji, generując formy przemocy strukturalnej. Częściowa i homologowana informacja dostarczana przez media na temat UFM generuje deficytowy, spłaszczony i stereotypowy obraz małoletniego cudzoziemca, rozpowszechniając uprzedzenia i powodując zniekształconą wiedzę, która sprzyja lękowi przed cudzoziemcami i nierównościami społecznym.

Opierając się na badaniach dotyczących relacji pomiędzy przekazem medialnym, edukacją nieformalną a myśleniem społecznym, głównym celem tego badania jest poznanie punktu widzenia na UFM studentów uniwersytetu z Wydziału Edukacji w Granadzie po obejrzeniu wiadomości przekazywanych przez media na ich temat, jak również ustalenie punktu zwrotnego na temat roli odgrywanej przez profesorów uniwersyteckich, prowokując do refleksji nad ich własnymi interpretacjami. Zastosowano metodologię przedeksperymentalną z pięcioma fazami składającymi się z kwestionariuszy i refleksji grupowej. Oczekuje się, że badanie to pokaże wpływ mediów na percepcję UFM u studentów uniwersytetu, a także refleksję zbiorową jako instrument i kontekst uczenia się w formalnym środowisku edukacyjnym.

Słowa kluczowe: massmedia, małoletni cudzoziemcy bez opieki, studenci uniwersytetów, dezinformacja, edukacja nieformalna