# ACCULTURATION OF PARAGUAYAN STUDENTS IN THE BRAZILIAN FRONTIER REGION

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## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization) of Paraguayan students in the Brazilian school context, considering their psychological and sociocultural adaptation. A quantitative study was carried out with 231 students from Paraguay, or from Paraguayan descent, aged 13 to 16 years. Most students adopted assimilation and integration as acculturation strategies and found it easy to deal with two or three languages at the same time, in writing and speaking, which suggests appropriate psychological and cultural adaptation.

**Keywords**: Acculturation; students; Brazilian frontier.

## Aculturación de estudiantes paraguayos en la región de frontera brasileña

### RESUMEN

En el presente estudio se tuvo el objetivo de identificar los patrones de aculturación (asimilación, integración, separación y marginalización) de estudiantes paraguayos en el contexto escolar brasileño, considerando su adaptación psicológica y sociocultural. Se realizó un estudio cuantitativo con 231 estudiantes paraguayos y de descendencia paraguaya, con edades entre 13 y 16 años. La mayor parte de los estudiantes adoptó asimilación e integración como estrategias de aculturación y consideró fácil lidiar con dos o tres idiomas, usándolos en la escritura y en la oralidad, lo que sugiere adaptación psicológica y cultural adecuadas.

**Palabras clave:** Aculturación; estudiantes; región de frontera.

## Aculturação de estudantes paraguaios na região de fronteira brasileira

### RESUMO

O presente estudo teve o objetivo de identificar os padrões de aculturação (assimilação, integração, separação e marginalização) de estudantes paraguaios no contexto escolar brasileiro, considerando a sua adaptação psicológica e sociocultural. Realizou-se um estudo quantitativo com 231 estudantes paraguaios e de descendência paraguaia, com idades entre 13 e 16 anos. A maioria dos estudantes adotou assimilação e integração como estratégias de aculturação e considerou fácil lidar com dois ou três idiomas, usando-os na escrita e na oralidade, o que sugere adaptação psicológica e cultural adequadas.

**Palavras-chave:** Aculturação; estudantes; fronteira brasileira.

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## INTRODUCTION

A variety of social peculiarities can be observed in the school context of the frontier regions, especially on the land frontier between the city of Ponta Porã, in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso do Sul, and Pedro Juan Caballero, in Paraguay. These social characteristics are related to a preoccupation with the students' problems regarding cultural identity (traditions, language), especially anxiety over the creation of means to promote appreciation and respect for all indigenous and immigrant people so that, essentially, plurality and integration are truly established.

In his discussion on interculturalism, Berry (2013) understands the acculturation term as the process of cultural and psychological transformation that people go through when they are in intercultural contexts. The acculturation process involves reciprocity between cultural groups and implies different strategies and results (Sam & Berry, 2010). Some of the cultural changes are related to traditions as well as political and economic life. Psychological changes involve people's attitude concerning acculturation, cultural identities, social behaviors, and so on (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). The acculturation process, consequently, generates adaptation, which includes individual, psychological comfort and the way people manage their own lives socially and culturally (Sam & Berry, 2010).

The adaptations that people, and groups of people, go through in order to thrive in an environment where they are in contact with two or more cultures can be stressful though they can result in some form of mutual accommodation (Berry & Safadar, 2007), which can be psychological as well as sociocultural. Psychological, internal, and individual adaptation includes the psychological changes that an individual goes through in the process of acculturation and accommodation to new situations (Berry & Safadar, 2007). Such adaptation might lead to successful behavioral changes or to problems, which lead to acculturation stress (Berry & Safadar, 2007). It involves psychological well-being, a disposition for good mental health, and satisfaction in the new context of cultural interaction. On the other hand, sociocultural adaptation comprehends social skills for management of relationships, for the provision of resources, and for the solution of everyday life problems (Neto, 2012). It implies a set of externally expressed psychological devices that make it possible for an individual to successfully interact with the new cultural context (Berry, 1997a, 1997b).

According to Sam and Berry (2010) and Berry (2013), the four acculturation strategies are integration, assimilation, marginalization, and separation. Integration is a dynamic, bidirectional process of acceptance between immigrants and the residents of a receiving culture, which happens continually and, in the long term, results in mutual accommodation (Berry, 2013). Integrated immigrants show interest in keeping up with the new culture in daily interactions with other groups while preserving a certain degree of original cultural integrity. Actually, individuals wish to participate in a larger, more diversified social network without losing their ethnic identity (Berry, 2010).

Assimilation happens when individuals do not intend to keep their original cultural identity and would rather seek a deeper connection with a new culture (Neto, 2012). In contrast, separation takes place when individuals try to keep their original cultural identity but, at the same time, avoid interaction with other groups. Marginalization happens when there is little possibility or little interest in intercultural interaction, the result of which is, many times, exclusion or discrimination (Berry, 2010).

Concerning discrimination, a study by Pereira (2009) demonstrated the difficulty faced by a Paraguayan student in order to get over the discrimination experience. The prejudice and harassment faced by Paraguayan students in the Brazilian school context – an environment which combines disrespectful treatment with plenty of scornful jokes and remarks – lead to the notion that total identification with the Brazilian culture is the only acceptable choice and it is perfectly acceptable to invalidate or underrate other cultural identities (Pereira, 2002).

The research works (Dalinghaus, 2013; Melo, Stivanello, da Silva, & da Silva, 2016; Nunes, 2011) realized in public schools of Ponta Porã revealed the necessity to recognize and appreciate the contributions by people from other cultures to the construction of an education system that truly supports positive intercultural relations. Even with the advancements observed in the teaching of bilingual students in Mato Grosso do Sul, it is important that educational, linguistic policies comprehend the current complexity of the context of schools located in the frontier region (Dalinghaus, 2009).

In the school context, students are expected to reflect on ethical conflicts and acquire knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are indispensable to citizenship, which involves caring for others and for nature (UNESCO, 2016). In the vision of Berry (2013), the double engagement of immigrants - with their original culture and with the receiving culture - is associated with greater well-being and satisfaction with life in general. However, when the conditions for intercultural contact are precarious, the level of psychological and social well-being might be low. Also, when immigrants go through discrimination, they are susceptible to rejecting a closer engagement with the receiving culture and to remaining

oriented towards their own ethnic group. But when they do not suffer from discrimination, they regard their new interaction context with the same level of respect with which they were treated (Berry et al., 2006).

Based on these premises, we consider that there might be a connection between acculturation strategies and the cultural, psychological adaptation of Paraguayan students in the Brazilian frontier. Therefore, the present study assesses the acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization) of Paraguayan students in the Brazilian educational context while taking their psychological and sociocultural adaptation into account.

## METHOD

### Participants

231 students from Paraguay, or of Paraguayan descent, participated in the research. Aged between 13 to 16 years ($\overline{X}$=14,08; DP= 1,31), the students were enrolled in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades of elementary school, and in the 1st year of high school of two state public schools in the municipality of Ponta Porã, close to the Paraguayan frontier. 110 students were from the school located in the center of the city. 121 students were from the school situated in the Sanga Puitã district, on the frontier with the neighboring city of Zanja Pytã, in Paraguay.

In order to participate in the research, students were supposed to: be fluent in another language besides Portuguese, Guarani or Spanish for example; have one parent of Paraguayan decent, or nationality; sign a consent term; have a Free Informed Consent Term signed by their legal guardians; and provide answers to the research instruments.

The students' descent and language were used as inclusion criteria for the study because most of the students were of double nationality. Consequently, many students considered themselves to be Brazilian even though they were of Paraguayan nationality and actually live in Paraguay. Students who were not aged between 12 and 16 years were not included in the research.

### Instruments

The instruments used in this study intended to obtain information on acculturation strategies and psychological, sociocultural adaptation. The acculturation strategies were measured by means of the Acculturation Scale for Paraguayan Adolescents (EAAP). The psychological adaptation was verified by means of the Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Scale for Children (EMSVC), and the Affection Scale. The sociocultural adaptation was observed by means of the Sociodemographic Data Questionnaire.

The Sociodemographic Data Questionnaire was developed in order to obtain information such as age, gender, level of school education, original identity of the student and family members, the capacity for adaptation to school by means of the observation of the occurrence of repetition of school years, and the use of different languages in the school and home context.

The EAAP was adopted by Santana (2018a) in order to assess the acculturation process of Paraguayan adolescents living in the land frontier region, especially between Ponta Porã, in Brazil, and the Paraguayan city of Pedro Juan Caballero, and also between Ponta Porã and the city of Zanja Pytã, in Paraguay. The original scale, made up of 29 items, was developed by Barry (2001) in order to assess the acculturation of Asian immigrants in the United States.

This scale measures the four dimensions of acculturation: assimilation (8 items), separation (7 items), integration (5 items), and marginalization (9 items) (Attachment A). In a sample of 231 students of Paraguayan descent, aged 12 to 17 years, in the two Ponta Porã schools, satisfactory reliability was found for the four subscales of acculturation. The coefficient was 0.91 for assimilation, 0.78 for marginalization, 0.73 for separation, and 0.70 for integration (Santana, 2018a).

The affection scale is made up of 28 adjectives describing subjective affections. 14 of the adjectives refer to positive affections, and 14 refer to negative affections. The options for answers were in the Likert scale format with five points corresponding to the following gradation: "Not at all", "slightly", "moderately", "very", "extremely". The internal consistency, measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was 0.88 for both subscales. Positive correlations of positive affection with self-esteem and life satisfaction, and negative correlations of negative affection with these variables, were observed (Segabinazi et al., 2012).

The EMSVA assesses the level of life satisfaction of adolescents in fields such as family, the self, compared self, nonviolence, self-efficacy, friendship, and school. This scale presented adequacy in all of the subscales: *self* ($\alpha$ = 0.87), compared self ($\alpha$ = 0.85), self-efficacy ($\alpha$ = 0.71), nonviolence ($\alpha$ = 0.70), family ($\alpha$ = 0.91), friendship ($\alpha$ = 0.82), and school ($\alpha$ = 0.87) (Segabinazi et al., 2010).

### Procedures for gathering and assessing data

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of The Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (CEP/UFMS), Decision number 2.407.166. The initial research procedure was to contact the administration, the teachers and the coordinators of the school in order to organize a schedule for research development. Later on, visitations to the classrooms were realized for the presentation of the basic objectives of the research, the invitation students to participate, and the scheduling of

study activities.

The instruments were applied in two phases. In the first phase, the researchers used the Sociodemographic Data Questionnaire and the EAAP. In the second phase, the EMSVA and the Affection Scale were used. The application was conducted in the students' classrooms by means of the following procedures: distribution of instruments, explanation that there were no right or wrong answers, previous clarifications concerning students' questions, organization, and checking of the provided answers.

The data was tabbed and transferred to a data bank by means of the SPSS (*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*) statistic software, version 18.0 for Windows. A preliminary data inspection was realized with the verification of normality by means of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Research proceeded with the discriminative analysis of data for characterization of the study sample according to school education level, gender, origin, and age. Also, descriptive statistics was used in the organization of information concerning the acculturation strategies adopted by the students according to sex, age, and difficulty to deal with more than one language.

Later on, researchers realized an analysis of the differences in the acculturation strategies used by male and female students by means of the T test. Pearson's statistical test for correlation coefficient was used in order to measure the relations between acculturation strategies and psychological adaptation (affections and life satisfaction) and verify the direction of the relationship. In addition, the Variance Analysis was used in order to independently compare distribution concerning living conditions and acculturation strategies. For these tests, the adopted parameter in the significance level was $\leq 0.05$.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After a preliminary data analysis, absent data was replaced by the average of the item data. The normality of data was also observed. The result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test accepted the hypothesis of normality for the acculturation data (s=0.53; df=231; p= 0,200), affections (s=0.52; df=231; p=0,200) and life satisfaction (s=0.57; df=231; p=0.63). In addition, there was an analysis of the internal consistency of the instruments by means of Cronbach's Alpha statistical test. The presented indicators were acceptable.

The following indicators for internal consistency in the EAAP were found: assimilation ($\alpha$=0,910), marginalization ($\alpha$=0,782), separation ($\alpha$=0,733), and integration ($\alpha$=0,704); affections scale ($\alpha$= 0,703), positive affections ($\alpha$= 0,894), and negative affections ($\alpha$=0,814); in the multidimensional scale, life satisfaction for adolescents was ($\alpha$=0,788), *self* ($\alpha$=0,752), compared

self ($\alpha$=0,772), non-violence ($\alpha$=0,774), family ($\alpha$=0,771), friendship ($\alpha$=0,733), and school ($\alpha$=0,843). A measuring instrument is considered reliable when Cronbach's Alpha is equal to or greater than 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978).

### Acculturation strategies and psychological adaptation for Paraguayan students

The acculturation process is considered an influencing element on development because every culture establishes a normative landmark and imposes restrictions to the possible forms of exchange throughout development. Contact with new cultures demands further learning or interrupts the learning of a previous culture. Difficulties might occur during the acculturation process due to interactions maintained by an individual with members of their original culture (Berry, 1997b).

The data concerning acculturation strategies were analyzed by means of the average of the gross results of every subfactor. The results were measured by means of the sum of all points for each item. For the calculation of the punctuation of negative items, the attributed value was inverted. The acculturation strategies adopted by the students of Paraguayan descent, or nationality, were organized around the greatest score obtained by the respondents in the assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization subscales.

The data on the students of the Brazilian and Paraguayan frontier made it possible to consider the existence of psychological adaptation. The reason is that, out of a total sum of 231 research participants, most of the students (197) reported that they felt integrated or assimilated. On the other hand, there was a register of the adoption of separation and marginalization by 34 students. 12 of these students were 14 years old and 6 of them were 15 years old (Table 1).

The researchers observed the average of the participants answers concerning these acculturation strategies: Assimilation ($\overline{X}$=3,38; *DP*=1,03), Integration ($\overline{X}$=3,29; *DP*=,977), Separation ($\overline{X}$=2,06; DP=,744), and Marginalization ($\overline{X}$=2,45; *DP*=,776). Acculturation strategies were also organized according to gender. The results concerning assimilation were (n=51) for male students and (n=60) for female students. Concerning integration, (n=41) for male students and (n=45) for female students. Concerning separation, (n=8) for both male and female students. Concerning marginalization, (n=7) for male students and (n=11) for female students.

The researchers also realized an average comparison analysis by means of the T test between genders and acculturation strategies. Differences were found between male and female participants for the marginalization strategy. The girls ($\overline{X}$=2,5; *DP*=,762) presented greater averages than the boys ($\overline{X}$=2,3; *DP*=,769), (t (231) = 2,92; p< 0,05).

**Table 1.** *Acculturation strategies by age.*

| Age | Assimilation (%) | Integration (%) | Separation (%) | Marginalization (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | 14 (6,1) | 10 (4,3) | 1 (0,4) | 2 (0,9) |
| 13 | 30 (13) | 19 (8,2) | 3 (1,3) | 6 (2,6) |
| 14 | 26 (11,3) | 20 (8,7) | 7 (3) | 5 (2,2) |
| 15 | 24 (10,4) | 23 (10) | 3 (1,3) | 3 (1,3) |
| 16 | 12 (5,2) | 12 (5,2) | 2 (0,7) | 1 (0,4) |
| 17 | 5 (2,2) | 2 (0,9) | - | 1 (1,4) |
| Total | 111 (48,1) | 86 (37,2) | 16 (6,9) | 18 (7,8) |

Source: research data.

Gender is a variable that influences the acculturation process. There is substantial evidence that women have a greater tendency to present problems than men do (Berry, 1997a). Most of the research results suggest the women are more likely to experience some degree of neediness for emotional engagement with the receiving culture. They also display fewer adaptation skills to do well in the receiving culture (Beiser et al., 1988). According to (Neto, 2012) this might be connected to the status of women in their original culture and in their receiving culture (Berry, 1997a).

In the Paraguayan context, it is known that in 1985 the country's legislation still prescribed a series of in anachronistic rules regarding families and women. It was a tremendous setback in comparison with the Paraguayan constitution of 1967, which embraced and legitimized equality without discrimination between women and men (Szwaco, 2012). Consequently, it is possible that historical social and cultural issues in Paraguay, as well as the status of women in this country, have been influencing the fact that girls present greater averages in the marginalization strategy than boys do.

Concerning the data on place of residence and nationality , based on the result of the Variance Analysis (Anova), researchers observed that the residents of Ponta Porã present a greater degree of assimilation than the residents of Pedro Juan caballero [F (4,506) = 6,133, p < 0,001]. The students who consider themselves Brazilian have greater integration [F (4,763) = 4,457 p < 0,001] and are less marginalized than those who consider themselves half Brazilian half Paraguayan [F (3,145) = 7,092, p < 0,001]. In the study by Berry et al. (2006), 973 young people reported high proficiency in the use of their mother tongue, but they also reported low ethnic identity. They also had little proficiency in the national language and reported a sense of national identity that was quite low, and little contact with national individuals. They also presented three contradictory acculturation attitudes: assimilation, marginalization, and separation. This inconsistent pattern suggests these young people's uncertainty concerning their place in society and maybe they just wish to be part of a greater community but lack the skills to successfully interact with the receiving culture (Berry et al., 2006).

Pearson's Correlation Analysis was realized with the acculturation data of all the students and the scores in the affections and life satisfaction scales. An inverted correlation was found between separation and marginalization, and positive affections, life satisfaction, compared self, nonviolence, family, friendship, and school (Table 2).

It is also possible to verify a positive correlation between integration and assimilation with the scores for affections, positive affections, multidimensional life satisfaction, nonviolence, friendship, and school. It is possible to suggest that the integrated or assimilated students display positive characteristics including self-esteem, a good sense of humor, and capacity to interact effectively with other students and demonstrate affection. They have the ability to realize positive comparative assessments on peers regarding themes related to leisure time, to friendship, desires, and affections. They also present lower levels of aggressive behavior. They more often refer to harmonic, affectionate, healthy family environments, and satisfactory relationships. They frequently contemplate their relationship with classmates in a positive way. They also describe the school context as important while keeping favorable interpersonal relationships with an adequate level of satisfaction regarding their environment.

However, the relations found were low or moderate. Thus, it was possible to observe moderate positive correlations between positive affections and

**Table 2.** *Correlations between acculturation strategies and psychological adaptation.*

| Associated factors | Assimilation | Integration | Separation | Marginalization |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Affections Scale | ,258** | ,326** | -,217** | - |
| Positive Affections | ,346** | ,440** | -,456** | -,442** |
| Negative Affections | - | -,144* | ,301** | ,451** |
| Multidimensional Life Satisfaction Scale for Adolescents | ,312** | ,384** | -,471** | -,462** |
| *Self* | - | ,187** | - | -,333** |
| *Compared self* | ,129* | - | -,353** | -,356** |
| Nonviolence | ,393** | ,373** | -,375** | -,335** |
| Family | - | - | -,259** | -,256** |
| Friendship | ,254** | ,355** | -,372** | -,431** |
| School | ,364** | ,360** | -,414** | -,251** |

* p<0,05. ** p<0,01.
Source: research data.

integration (r= ,440; p<0,01) and negative affections and marginalization (r= ,451; p<0,01). The researchers also perceived moderate negative correlations between positive affections and separation (r= -,456; p<0,01) and marginalization (r= -,442; p<0,01); life satisfaction and separation (r= -,471; p<0,01) and marginalization (r= -,462; p<0,01); friendship and marginalization (r= -,431; p<0,01); and school and separation (r= -,414; p<0,01). Neto (2012) did research on life satisfaction among adolescents from Portuguese immigrant families in Switzerland and found correlations between life satisfaction and the Portuguese identity; language skills and self-esteem were significant and positive. The correlations between satisfaction, perception of discrimination, and psychological symptoms were significant and negative.

**Acculturation strategies and sociocultural adaptation**

Sociocultural adaptation refers to the learning of social skills that make it possible for an individual to interact in the new cultural context, to deal with everyday life problems, and to efficiently accomplish daily activities (Neto, 2012). In this sense, school activities constitute elements for sociocultural adaptation, which include assessment activities that demand from students a good performance in problem solution and good Portuguese language skills, which is the official Brazilian language adopted in schools all over the country.

In the data concerning the research participants, it was possible to observe that, in the assimilation strategy, 36 respondents reported that they had had difficulty in some discipline, while 75 students pointed out that they had never had any difficulty. 26 integrated students emphasized difficulty in some discipline, while 60 reported that they never had such difficulty. Concerning marginalization, 3 students reported that they never had any difficulty. In the separation and marginalization strategies, the researchers registered a considerable number of respondents with difficulties. There were 13 participants for each strategy. In the separation strategy, 5 respondents affirm that they never had any difficulty. Concerning marginalization, 3 students reported never having any difficulty. According to Neto (2012), Language skills in a new society and culture make it easier for immigrants to adapt and provide them with the necessary tools to efficiently respond to new challenges. As a consequence, the difficulty experienced by the students in the school disciplines is likely to be connected with Portuguese language skills in the school context of the Brazilian frontier. It is possible to observe a negative attitude towards the presence of the Guarani or Spanish language in the context of the Brazilian schools. The presence of bilingual students "... represents a problem for some teachers in Brazilian schools. The linguistic practices that take place in the frontier region are, therefore, equally precarious" (Berger, 2015, p. 181).

The researchers also observed the acculturation strategies and the students' facility to deal with two or three languages at same time. Most of the assimilated or integrated students reported that it was easy for them to deal with the languages. Thus, in assimilation, 83 students said that it was easy, 25 said that it was not, and 3 said that it was reasonably easy. For integration, 76 students reported that it was easy, 7 said that it was not so easy, and 3 said that it was reasonably easy. For separation, 4 students said that it was easy, and 12

considered it to be not so easy. In marginalization, 5 students described it as easy while 13 said that it was difficult.

On the frontier between Pedro Juan Caballero and Ponta Porã, there is a greater expectation for students to learn Portuguese, rather than Spanish. That can be explained by commercial interests, and linguistic prejudice that still exists regarding the Guarani language (Dalinghaus, 2013). Students who do not speak Portuguese have more difficulty in their interaction with classmates. Naturally, acquisition of the Brazilian official language makes everything easier in this context (Melo et al., 2016).

Acquisition of the Portuguese language by Paraguayan students living on the frontier region between Ponta Porã and Paraguay is important because it is a tool for social ascension and it also influences the family life of Paraguayan students in Brazil (Melo et al., 2016; Ramos, 2014). This aspect is confirmed by the data from the present investigation because there is a considerable number of students that use the Portuguese language for communication at home and at school. In our group of 231 students, 141 use only the Portuguese language to communicate at home, 5 students use the Guarani language, and 7 students use Spanish. The other students use Portuguese and other languages. As a result, it is possible consider the hypothesis that the Portuguese language is the most frequently used language in the family context of the participants in this research. It is also the most frequently used language in the Brazilian frontier schools attended by Paraguayan students (n=174) (Table 3).

Students from Paraguay are often susceptible to a phenomenon named diglossia, which consists of the use of one or more linguistic codes in the same community. The research observed that the Guarani is the least frequently used language for communication at school (n=8) and it appears often appears in combination with the Portuguese language. According to Dalinghaus (2013), in Paraguay, the Guarani is considered inferior to Spanish as a language. Consequently, stereotypes concerning this language duplicate, that is, they take place in the Brazilian as well as in the Paraguayan school context. It is possible to come to this conclusion by considering that most of the research participants know how to read (n=169) and write (n=139) in the two predominant, most appreciated languages in the frontier region, Portuguese and Spanish. When it comes to these indicators, there was a greater number of students who were culturally integrated and assimilated (Table 4).

Although there were no reports on the use of Guarani in the school context, students emphasize that they know how to write (n=2) and read (n=55) in that language. According to Pereira (2009), in the Brazilian school context, Paraguayan students experience diverse

T**able 3.** *Acculturation strategies and the language used at home and at school.*

| Language used at home | Assimilation (%) | Integration (%) | Marginalization (%) | Separation (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Guarani | 3 (1,3) | 1 (0,4) | - | 1 (0,4) |
| Spanish | 2 (0,9) | 3 (1,3) | 2 (0,9) | - |
| Portuguese | 77 (33,3) | 47 (20,3) | 10 (4,3) | 7 (3,0) |
| Guarani and Spanish | - | 1 (0,4) | - | 3 (1,3) |
| Guarani and Portuguese | 4 (1,7) | 9 (3,9) | 2 (0,9) | - |
| Spanish and Portuguese | 17 (7,4) | 12 (5,2) | 1 (0,4) | 1 (0,4) |
| Guarani, Spanish, and Portuguese | 7 (3) | 12 (5,2) | 3 (1,3) | 4 (1,7) |
| Spanish, Portuguese, and others | 1 (0,4) | 1 (0,4) | - | - |
| Language used at school | | | | |
| Spanish | 1 (0,4) | - | 1 (0,4) | - |
| Portuguese | 92 (39,8) | 61 (26,4) | 11 (4,8) | 10 (4,3) |
| Guarani and Portuguese | 1 (0,4) | 4 (1,7) | 2 (0,9) | 1 (0,4) |
| Spanish and Portuguese | 14 (6,1) | 13 (5,6) | 3 (1,3) | 1 (0,4) |
| Guarani, Spanish, and Portuguese | 2 (0,9) | 8 (3,5) | 1 (0,4) | 4 (1,7) |
| Other languages | 1 (0,4) | - | - | - |

Source: research data

identity references. Most of the time, they use the Portuguese language whereas in other situations , such as swearing or dealing with delicate matters, the Guarani was used as a means to make it difficult for teachers and other authorities to understand what they were saying. In family interactions, they use their original languages, Spanish and Guarani (Pereira, 2009), which was not demonstrated in this research data.

During the acculturation process, language is considered one of the central elements for intercultural contact as well as other interactions among peers in their own group and in other cultural ethnic groups (Neto, 2012). It is up to educational institutions to engage students in the development and implantation of practices that make it possible for everyone to be included even when they do not have the Portuguese language as their mother tongue. When education is too focused on the necessities of the majorities, other groups living in the same context tend to be left behind, which might generate fragile interpersonal relations.

An analysis of the discoveries in this study points at the fact that most of the students from Paraguay, or of Paraguayan descent, are in fact integrated or assimilated by Brazilian schools. However, there were students who adopted marginalization or separation as acculturation strategies. That choice can be a sign of possible mental health problems (Neto, 2012). This problem requires educational practices oriented towards global citizenship, which comprehends the three conceptual dimensions of socioemotional, behavioral, and cognitive learning. In the context of the frontier schools, it is believed that investment is necessary so that all students can experience a feeling of belonging to the community, share values and responsibilities, protect human rights, and cultivate attitudes of empathy, solidarity, and respect for difference and diversity (UNESCO, 2016).

The results of this research allow us to recommend that educators, especially teachers and other professionals engaged in the school context, understand and have their practice based on a contextualized education, which contemplates cultural elements

Table 4. *Acculturation strategies and the language used for reading and writing.*

| Language used for writing | Assimilation (%) | Integration (%) | Marginalization (%) | Separation (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Guarani | 1 (0,4) | - | - | - |
| Spanish | 1 (0,4) | - | 1 (0,4) | - |
| Portuguese | 36 (15,6) | 14 (6,1) | 6 (2,6) | 3 (1,3) |
| Portuguese and Spanish | 52 (22,5) | 58 (25,1) | 7 (3) | 7 (3) |
| Guarani and Portuguese | - | 1 (0,4) | - | - |
| Portuguese and others | 7 (3) | - | - | - |
| Spanish, Portuguese, and others | 4 (1,7) | 3 (1,3) | - | - |
| Guarani, Spanish, Portuguese, and others | - | 1 (0,4) | - | - |
| Other languages | 1 (0,4) | - | - | - |
| *Language used for reading* | | | | |
| Guarani | 1 (0,4) | 1 (0,4) | - | - |
| Spanish | 2 (0,9) | - | 2 (0,9) | - |
| Portuguese | 32 (13,9) | 9 (3,9) | 7 (3) | 3 (1,3) |
| Portuguese and Spanish | 51 (22,1) | 51 (22,1) | 5 (2,2) | 3 (1,3) |
| Guarani and Portuguese | 1 (0,4) | 1 (0,4) | 1 (0,4) | 1 (0,4) |
| Portuguese and others | 5 (2,2) | - | - | - |
| Guarani, Spanish. and others | 12 (5,2) | 19 (8,2) | 3 (1,3) | 9 (3,9) |
| Guarani, Spanish, Portuguese, and others | 3 (1,3) | 3 (1,3) | - | - |
| Spanish, Portuguese, and others | 3 (1,3) | 2 (0,9) | - | - |
| Other languages | 1 (0,4) | - | - | - |

Source: research data.

while simultaneously producing and disseminating cultural content. By means of the educational processes realized in the centers of child education, at schools, and universities, it is possible to perceive in every posture, in every gesture, in the language, and in the body language of every actor in this context, elements that emphasize their identity, their historical background, and their dynamics. In the educational context, there are intersections of cultures that, although dynamic, are characterized by conflict and dilemma, which contributes to the development of relations of subjectivity in individuals. That makes this context singular and plural at the same time.

Psychology has a lot to contribute to inclusion in intercultural societies. In education, specifically, psychology can collaborate with schools. As one of the cornerstones of education in intercultural contexts, educational psychology can help in the initial and continuous formation of teachers by providing opportunities for theoretical and practical reflections with a focus on the formation of conscious teachers, and promote the practice of constant reflection among education professionals.

The experience reported by Santana (2018b) on the psychology discipline in the course of initial formation for teachers in the area of mathematics in a frontier region points at that direction. Such experience contributed to the construction of pedagogical sequences in order to recognize and empower difference, as well as critical respectful thinking regarding diversity. Besides that, the experience made it possible to promote a reflection on the role played by teachers as mediators of the interactions and relationships between Brazilian and Paraguayan students.

Furthermore, school psychology plays a truly relevant social role and it can contribute to the integration of immigrant students in intercultural contexts. School psychologists are capable of producing educational policies and can be a very useful tool for education, "… In the planning and assessment of teaching programs, in the formation of teachers, in the relationships between school, family, and community, and in the search for solutions for educational problems…" (Maluf, 2003, p. 138). Thus, in intercultural schools, psychologists can develop alternatives to improve collectiveness in these contexts in order to face everyday life problems with a critical, creative attitude. One example of the challenges faced by these intercultural institutions is the use of the Guarani and Spanish languages in the schools of Ponta Porã, on the frontier with Pedro Juan Caballero.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Other research works demonstrate that there are situations in which the relations between Brazilians and Paraguayans are full of conflict, especially on the land

frontier region between Ponta Porã, in Brazil, and Pedro Juan Caballero, in Paraguay. However, in this research most of the students (n=197) described the adoption of assimilation and integration strategies. In addition, they consider it easy to deal with two or three languages at the same time, in writing or in reading, which hints at an adequate cultural and psychological adaptation.

The adoption of these patterns of acculturation by Paraguayan students might lead to better results in their cultural and psychological adaptation, which include life satisfaction, positive affections, friendship, and positive relationships in the school context. The intercultural relationships between students that recognize, and respect differences are conducive to empowering experiences towards the positive development of psychosocial, cognitive, and physical aspects.

However, there were students (n=34) who adopted separation or marginalization strategies. In addition, researchers found moderate positive correlation between negative affection and marginalization, and moderate correlation in the negative direction between positive affection, and separation and marginalization; life satisfaction and separation and marginalization; and friendship and marginalization. This is probably a suggestion that intercultural education actions are necessary in order to promote the inclusion of these students.

This research is a contribution to investigations concerning intercultural education. It helps identify acculturation strategies (assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization) while taking social cultural and psychological adaptation into consideration. However, other studies are necessary in order to amplify the investigations on interculturalism in frontier schools, while comprehending the variables that might influence the social, cultural, and psychological adaptation of Paraguayan students in these contexts.

In this perspective, we emphasize the relevance of future research works on the normative, hierarchical dimension of the Portuguese language in multicultural schools. Likewise, we recommend investigations on the acceptance of Paraguayan students in Brazilian schools. Such investigations might contribute to a deeper critical understanding of pedagogical practices that still display echoes of imperialism and colonialism, which influence social, cultural, and psychological adaptation.

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