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Can peer mediation foster migrant students' inclusion in mainstream classrooms? An exploratory case study

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ABSTRACT

The growth of migration brings new challenges to contemporary societies, especially regarding the inclusion of migrant students in the education system of the host countries. Peer mediation strategies are effective in promoting the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms, but evidence about its effects on migrant students is scarce. The aim of this study was to explore teaching practices which promote the inclusion of migrant students through peer mediation. A case study was designed which involved 17 native and non-native fifth-grade students and 4 teachers. Observations and interviews were used to comprehend classroom dynamics focusing on migrant-native interactions. Teachers hold different beliefs regarding the role of peer mediation strategies as a tool to foster inclusion in the classroom. Practices, in which the teachers had the explicit aim of creating a pedagogical supportive interaction between native and migrant students, were observed, peer-mentoring schemes being the most common. It was also observed that classroom organisation, task organisation and task structure have elicited informal supportive interactions between migrant and native peers. These results suggest that peer mediation strategies may be an important resource to promote the inclusion of migrant students.

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Introduction

In Portugal, since the 2018 education reform, there has been a strong determination to promote school inclusiveness (Alves 2019). By abolishing the need for a standardised clinical evaluation as an essential requirement to promote learning adaptations to the students' curriculum, teachers were enabled to implement individual measures to the student's learning process per their needs (DL n°54/2018). Within a multidisciplinary team and stemming from a universal and a tiered learning approach to the curriculum, three

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categories of measures became available: universal measures which encompass all student's inclusion promotion, selective measures which focus on suppressing more specific needs and additional measures, aiming to support students which show serious learning needs.

Despite Portugal's reputation as a model for migrant integration, the country still faces substantial challenges in this area, particularly in integrating migrant students who confront language and socio-cultural barriers (Jeon 2019; OECD 2019; 2021; Ribeiro et al. 2019; Schleicher 2006). These barriers, leading to higher risks of exclusion, emphasise the critical nature of addressing these issues, as educational exclusion often leads to broader societal and economic impacts (Jahnukainen 2001; Koehler and Schneider 2019; Macrae, Maguire, and Milbourne 2003; Raabe 2019).

Allowing teachers and professionals to introduce pedagogical changes to help migrant students overcome barriers to inclusion demands informed action taking which does not jeopardise migrant students' future and enhances the benefits of a culturally diverse classroom (Aarsæther 2021). While peer mentoring schemes tend to be a common and effective strategy (Messiou and Azaola 2018), little is known about teachers' practices to foster migrant students' inclusion. Within this context, the aim of this case study was to explore teaching practices which promote the inclusion of migrant students through peer mediation. The following questions were designed: What peer mediation strategies do teachers use to promote the inclusion of migrant students in a mainstream classroom? What are their beliefs regarding the role of these strategies in fostering migrant students' inclusion?

Inclusion

Amongst those who migrate in search of a better life, there are minors whose future success and well-being may be at risk if their needs are not met. Education is not only a right but also a key factor in promoting the inclusion of individuals since it provides the necessary tools to attain an economically stable position and to overcome social disadvantages associated with migrant status (Fazel et al. 2012; Tajic and Bunar 2023). Through inclusion-based strategies, education can effectively play a crucial part in the healthy development of vulnerable students (Finkelstein, Sharma, and Furlonger 2021). Classroom inclusiveness can be achieved through the differentiation process of different features of the learning environment (Juvonen et al. 2019), such as content, process and assessment, providing each student equal learning opportunities (Gaitas and Martins 2017; Tomlinson 2015). Following Tomlinson's (2015) instructional strategies, inclusion-based strategies can be grouped into 5 components: activities and materials, management, assessment, planning and preparation and classroom environment. Therefore, teachers may implement inclusive learning strategies by providing different activities and material according to each student's learning profile and readiness while using what students already know to learn new things or by organising pair activities with students of similar readiness levels, as well as, changing group works so that students may interact with different colleagues and organising small group activities. Inclusive strategies are associated with higher school satisfaction, a higher sense of belonging (Montero et al. 2012) and better academic results can be fostered (Kaur, Noman, and Awang-Hashim 2016), while preventing school drop-out and without threatening each student's cultural identity (Ainscow and Messiou 2018; Ainscow, Booth, and Dyson 2006).

Peers and mentoring schemes

Because schools stumble upon several barriers to the implementation of inclusive strategies, such as the lack of material and financial resources (Sinkkonen and Kyttälä 2014), peers can have an important role in the inclusion process of vulnerable students (Bowman-Perrott et al. 2013; Brock and Huber 2017; Malone, Fodor, and Hollingshead 2019). Students interact in multiple ways during school time, offering different learning and support opportunities for each other. In general, peer support practices have shown positive effects on various aspects of student well-being, including communication skills in students with autism spectrum disorder (Bambara et al. 2016; Chan et al. 2009), socio-emotional skills (Byrd 1990; Carter et al. 2005) and improved academic performance in reading, math and sciences (McMaster, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2006). These strategies are especially valuable in managing culturally diverse classrooms, enhancing class behaviour and allowing teachers to address individual student needs with peer support as a scaffold (Kaukko et al. 2022).

Contrary to potentially segregating strategies, like introductory classes, which separate students upon the claim of providing a more individualised approach (Fandrem et al. 2024), cooperative strategies are associated with greater peer acceptance, liking and support, which can be enhanced by teachers attitudes towards migrant students which model native peers' behaviour (Juvonen et al. 2019). Although peer collaboration is a rather broad concept, Messiou and Azaola have depicted peer support according to four categories: befriending approaches, mentoring approaches, mediation approaches, counselling approaches and others (Messiou and Azaola 2018). Therefore, peer mediation strategies can be aimed to support students academically, socially and emotionally and are applied in different school set-ups with mentoring schemes being the most common practice (Avramidis et al. 2019; Juvonen et al. 2019). This strategy is based on collaborative learning in which knowledge is actively co-constructed through peer schemes such as one-on-one or small groups and where peers act as mediators or mentors (Malone, Fodor, and Hollingshead 2019; Messiou and Azaola 2018). Peer mentoring schemes have shown consistent results, not only on a socio-emotional level, by reducing bullying experiences and promoting positive attitudes towards school, such as greater engagement and confidence, but also on an academic level, by improving classroom engagement, better academic performances and an enhanced acquisition of the instruction language (Messiou and Azaola 2018). In addition, mentees and mentors can benefit from mentoring schemes since results show the development of interpersonal skills such as patience and confidence (Messiou and Azaola 2018). Additionally, mentoring programmes foster an inclusive school environment by promoting a sense of community, respect and belonging (Brock and Huber 2017). Nevertheless, mentor scheme implementation requires caution because some practices may contribute to further marginalisation by setting some students apart for being considered less competent and different (Hilt 2017). In this regard, training provided to mentors before the implementation is an important aspect of its efficacy since it provides the skills mentors need to support the mentees (Messiou and Azaola 2018).

As mentioned before, while existing international literature emphasises that migrant students benefit from peer supportive schemes, limited evidence exists regarding the

Portuguese contexts and the benefits they may yield for migrant students. Therefore, this investigation aims to characterise the teaching practices used to promote the inclusion of migrant students in a Portuguese school, with a focus on the role of peer mediation strategies in this process.

Methods

Contexts and participants

This study took place in a Portuguese public school located in the suburbs of Lisbon, with a total of 1240 students from grades 1 to 9, of which 11.6% have a foreign nationality. The population attending this school comes from a low socio-economic background, whereas in the nearby area several public housing communities can be found. This part of Lisbon has one of the highest percentages of migrant population (8.7%), 20% of these being children and teenagers.

To conduct this case study, two criteria were established to select a suitable classroom for studying the phenomenon. Firstly, the chosen class must have at least one student with a non-Portuguese nationality. Secondly, the selected student should be attending the lowest level of Portuguese as a second language (level A1 or A2). These criteria ensure the presence of a communication barrier and the necessity for teaching practices that promote the inclusion of these students.

After analysing the school records, a 5th grade class which fitted both criteria, was chosen. In this class, there were 17 students, 10 girls and 7 boys with an average age of 10 years. Four students were migrants, a Nepalese boy, a Bengali girl, a Russian girl and a Moldovan boy. The Russian girl, who was 11 years old, was listed in the school records as having special educational needs. Amongst these four migrant students, two of them were attending the first level of Portuguese as a second language, a Bengali girl and a Nepalese boy. The girl (Rani) was 11 years old and had arrived from Bangladesh with her parents and younger sister, in 2020. The boy (Deepak) was also 11 years old and had arrived from Nepal with his parents and two younger sisters in 2021. Both showed little to no use of the Portuguese language, making it hard to understand and participate in the classroom tasks. Therefore, the teachers' council decided to request that these two students be admitted into the school's mentoring programme so that classroom mentors could be assigned. The mentoring programme, WeR1, was a universal school programme in which teachers flagged students who were at risk of exclusion or falling behind academically. Although this mentoring programme had been implemented in the school two years before this investigation, there were no structured guidelines to support practitioners and mentors' intervention. The class headteacher had individual conversations with the two students who she considered to be adequate for the task of mentoring their migrant classmates, a decision which was based on her informal assessment of these students' skills. Both, girls 10 years of age, Joana and Maria, accepted the challenge and were given brief instructions of what was expected of them, specifically that they supported their migrant peers during class time by helping them to keep track of class and also during break time and in the canteen. Joana was assigned to Rani and her focus was to support her classmate during class time and free time, mediating her learning in the classroom which required her to be seated next to Rani so that she was able to

clarify teachers' instructions across all subjects. During free time, Joana was asked to include Rani in playground activities and to show her the school facilities. Maria was assigned to Deepak, and she was asked to focus solely on the academic support of her migrant peer during class time, which required both students to sit next to each other so that Maria could clarify and highlight teachers' instructions and mediate the learning process of Deepak across all subjects.

Four subjects were selected for classroom observation to explore diverse classroom dynamics. Math and History were conducted in Portuguese, but Math's focus on numbers and not words suggests different dynamics, while History's strong reliance on the language posed inclusion barriers. English class, using a common language for some migrant students, may promote distinct participation. Lastly, Physical Education was chosen for its unique nature and skill requirements, providing a different environment for students. The four teachers from each of the subjects mentioned before, accepted to be interviewed during the observation process, including the class headteacher, who taught Math. All were Portuguese females, with ages ranging from 34 to 59 years old. Only one did not have a university degree and all had different educational career backgrounds, having been working in the school for different periods.

Data collection procedures

Before data collection, the study obtained DGE (General Direction of Education) approval (0374900045) and informed consent from all participants and their legal representatives to ensure data privacy and confidentiality.

Attaining an in-depth understanding of peer mediation practises to support migrant students' inclusion in its natural context, requires the use of different sources of information (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2018), not only to increase the validity and reliability of the data-driven conclusions through data triangulation strategies (Creswell and Creswell 2018), but also because the research object is deeply connected with participants' experiences (Yin 2018). Being evidenced-based and adequate forms of qualitative context-data collection instruments, semi-structured observations (Clark et al. 2009) and semi-structured focused interviews (Lamont and Swidler 2014) were designed and used to comprehend mainstream classroom dynamics focusing on migrant-native interactions.

Classroom observation

Classroom observations started soon after the beginning of the school year and lasted throughout it in different class schedules. Data were collected using a structured observational grid based on Tomlinson's (2015) theoretical approach to inclusion and pedagogical differentiation. Four dimensions were used to allow an in-depth understanding of peer mediation practices with migrant students: classroom interactions, classroom organisation, task organisation and task structure.

Classroom interactions encompass various behavioural and communication dynamics during class time. Student-student interactions differ in nature, some being learning-driven, while others are playful. Teacher-student interactions also vary in purpose, ranging from assessing student development to managing classroom behaviour.

The classroom organisation approach which underlines this observational grid can be described as the provisions which teachers put into place to promote an effective learning environment and it encompasses different aspects of classroom arrangements such as student's placement purpose and flexibility, the variety of materials and its availability for students.

Furthermore, the observational grid considers a concept of task organisation and structure which refers to the teaching practices by which teachers design classroom tasks to fit students' individual needs and to provide learning opportunities for all. Tasks can be standardised or differentiated to adapt to each student's requirements, children can work individually or in group schemes, where the pairing or grouping may pursue different purposes and bring together students who demonstrate the same level of development towards a certain learning goal or be on different stages of the learning process, which may elicit different dynamics between classmates.

To document the observation situations, the researcher was present during class time, sitting at the back of the classroom and used field notes which were taken during and after class time, describing the interactions between migrant students and their peers, as well as other features intertwined with the interaction, namely, the ones mentioned afore.

Teachers' interviews

Participant perspectives and beliefs were considered valuable due to the close connection between the subject and experience (Lamont and Swidler 2014). Additional investigation into specific classroom dynamics led to the creation of a teacher interview script. Questions were designed, discussed, revised and organised into literature-driven categories with input from the research team.

Teachers were asked why students were seated in the observed disposition and how seats were chosen, why some students helped the migrant students more than others, and what motivated the choice of migrant students' placing in the classroom. In addition, teachers were also asked why students who worked individually sometimes helped migrant students during task time, as well as the reasons why some students participated less than others. Finally, teachers were also asked why students sometimes were seen doing different tasks and what were their perspectives on why some students helped the migrant students more than others. The final interview script had five categories, specifically working schemes, classroom organisation, task purpose and peers' roles and the teachers from the four chosen subjects were interviewed on different days of the same week.

Data analysis

The data gathered throughout the collection procedures consisted of detailed observational notes and transcripts of teachers' interviews. Data analysis was undertaken individually and in collaboration with the members of the research team to overcome possible biases which could undermine the validity of the categorisation process (Creswell and Creswell 2018; Yin 2018). This three-stage process started with the segmentation and categorisation of each interaction, aiming to identify migrant-peer interactions (Kuckartz 2014), doing so, by gathering all interactions between Rani or Deepak and any other

classmate. Subsequently, information regarding classroom organisation, task organisation and task structure was categorised and associated with its respective classroom dynamic, putting into context each migrant-peer interaction. By describing classroom inclusiveness features, such as the activities which were being undertaken and organisation, during interactions between Rani or Deepak and their classmates it was possible to have a broader representation of what was happening. Through analysis and team discussion, these contextualised migrant-peer interactions were labelled according to different aspects which either set them apart or brought them together, namely, the nature of the interaction, peers' roles, teachers' roles and task structure and organisation (Hilt 2017; Messiou and Azaola 2018). At the same time, a diverse range of questions arouse which were first categorised according to their nature, then selected to eliminate redundant information and to allow the comparison of teachers' perspectives (Fandrem et al. 2024) and finally organised into an interview script. In the third stage, a content analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken to lead to the categorisation of the different teachers' perspectives (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015).

Results

In the observed classrooms, teachers implemented different strategies, like mentor schemes and small group structured activities, which were labelled as direct peer mediation practices, as well as others, which indirectly led to mediation practices, such as classroom and task organisation, which were labelled as indirect peer mediation practices.

Direct peer mediation practices: mentoring schemes and small groups

Some of the practices observed which involved supportive and collaborative classroom interactions were directly implemented by teachers with the intent of promoting supportive dynamics between migrant students and their peers. The most common were mentoring schemes which were present in every subject although teachers held different beliefs regarding this practice. While the headteacher believed mentoring schemes should only be used for students at risk of exclusion stating that 'Some students need it more than others', the History and the English teacher both considered mentoring schemes to be a valuable resource to promote every student's inclusion and development, the last mentioning 'I always did it for all students, I place the better students next to the ones who struggle the most and they always help each other'. During Math class, Deepak was often seen talking to Maria, his mentor peer, asking for clarification and guidance to solve some of the tasks, always using the Portuguese language. Several times, it could be heard Deepak calling for his mentor peer: 'Maria, Maria', before asking her questions about the exercises they were doing. In one situation it was possible to observe Maria showing him how to use the multiplication tables to solve a math task he was struggling with, but these interactions only happened when the assistant teacher was not around. In History class, interactions between migrant and native students were not as abundant as in Math classes and mostly derived from the need to share classroom material. During a lesson, Maria forgot her history book which promoted many interactions with Deepak

throughout class time. 'Look Deepak, this is the picture teacher is speaking about, and now this one on the right', Maria told Deepak.

Furthermore, the two mentor schemes observed did not yield the same effects. In a different situation, while Deepak could easily and successfully work with his mentor peer, asking her in rusty Portuguese 'what is this (word)?' so he could understand the questions, the same did not happen for Rani and a male native peer who was assigned to work with her. Ignoring her classmate's efforts Rani did not seem to want to interact with him, and after a short moment, Rani asked if the teacher could assign her to a different classmate, which she did. But it was not only in this situation that Rani had unsuccessful interactions.

Besides mentor schemes, small group activities were also observed in History and P.E. classes but did not always have beneficial results, especially for migrant students. During a group activity where the students were asked to make a family tree of the Portuguese royal family, the teacher let the students choose the peers they wanted to work with. Even though Rani was working with girls she liked, most of the time she did not participate in the task and the native peers did not try to promote her participation in the activity. This changed after the teacher intervened, asking Rani's mentor peer Joana to support her during the activity. Deepak also had a hard time during this group task, having had his first group thorned down by the teacher due to disruptive behaviour, he was put aside by his new group, who assigned him a parallel task (making a mask), which had nothing to do with the teacher's assignment and impaired his interaction with the rest of the group.

In P.E. classes most tasks were carried out in pairs which changed from class to class, but Rani worked most of the time with her mentor-peer Joana and sometimes with the SEN student. Rani would often request Joana's help to understand what she was supposed to do in class activities. Because different games have different rules, they were seen having task-driven dialogues, which promoted Rani's full participation in the tasks, by clarifying what the P.E. teacher had said during the initial briefing. 'You can't get touched by the ball, otherwise you're out' Joana said to Rani, using the Portuguese language. Sometimes, it was the mentor student who was first aware Rani had not understood the teacher's instructions and would spontaneously support her friend. Deepak interacted with his peers using task-driven words in the Portuguese language, such as 'here', 'pass', 'faster' and 'catch', showing complete participation in most activities. On the contrary, although Rani participated in all games and activities, she did not verbally communicate with her classmates as much as Deepak. In addition, these activities also elicited some native-migrant interactions since native peers would also tell Rani and Deepak to 'pass the ball' or 'to move to a different position'.

Supportive dynamics between migrant students and their peers were inverted in some classes, meaning migrants also provided some support to their classmates. Although Rani did not engage in as many interactions as Deepak, requesting the teacher's help most of the time, there was a moment when she helped the SEN student with her math exercises. During English class activities, instead of being helped by his native peers, Deepak was often asked for help, which he gladly did, correcting his colleague's pronunciation and 'whispering' to his classmate's ear the answers when a student seated next to him did not know what to say.

Indirect peer mediation practices: classroom organisation and task organisation

Classroom organisation was the same in all classes except P.E., having a mostly rigid seating arrangement. While Deepak sat next to his mentor peer, Maria, which promoted supportive interactions to occur, Rani was most of the time between a male and a female peer and not next to Joana, her mentor peer. Sometimes she sat next to a student with special educational needs (SEN) who rarely spoke.

Teachers' perspectives on the role of classroom organisation were also different regarding their aim. Math's teachers saw classroom arrangements as an instrument to manage classroom behaviour in general adding that migrant students' seats were chosen to facilitate the intervention of both the teacher and assistant teacher, except for Rani who, due to religious concerns, could not be seated next to boys. The same teacher-support proximity was seen in History class where the teacher operated slight modifications to the sitting arrangements so that she could be closer to students who needed her most, like Rani and the SEN student. Therefore, Rani was closer to most teachers than Deepak, lessening the opportunities for peer support to take place. English class also took place in the regular classroom but was different from all other subjects, not only because the instruction language was English instead of Portuguese but also because student's places were different. Because Deepak was a better user of the English language than his classmates, he was not seated next to his mentor peer, but between two classmates who were less competent and required his help. Although Rani had her usual seat in the first row, she was most time absent from this class.

Task structure and organisation also varied across classes and promoted different dynamics. In Math class, all tasks were individual and Deepak, Rani and the SEN students had different class assignments than their classmates and sometimes an assistant teacher was present to support their learning process. To surprise, class activities which were individually assigned yielded supportive interactions between peers, with collaborative moments taking place, not only in math but also during English classes. If in these subjects it was common to see different students leaving their places to compare and discuss their answers to the ones of their classmates, in History classes not only individual taskswere individually undertaken, but small group works did not promote supportive task-driven interaction to occur between migrant and native students, suggesting that task structure consequences may be influenced by other factors. In English class, students were free to choose if they wanted to do the tasks individually or in pairs, with most students choosing the latter, making task-driven dialogues a common practice during English class. Apart from the lecture-based teaching moments, most tasks were designed to be done individually, such as doing exercises from the student's book or copying exercises from the board and doing them in the notebook. The teacher also used digital platforms with games that engaged students in learning activities promoting a cheerful and collaborative environment and the participation of most of them during big group activities. In addition, students had group read-aloud sessions, as well as small oral presentations, like 'My Dream House' and oral evaluations, in which the students would stand either in their seats or in front of the class. Deepak enjoyed these moments as he could show his English skills which were often praised by the teacher, In P.E. the same happened, students also had an enhanced level of autonomy, being responsible for setting up the space, with both Rani and Deepak

participating in these moments, helping to assemble the materials for the activities. Students were organised according to each activity, which changed throughout the class.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to characterise the teaching practices used to promote the inclusion of migrant students with a focus on the role of peer mediation strategies in this process. Our study delves into the intricate relationship between teacher-implemented strategies and the dynamics of peer support, highlighting a complex approach to inclusion in the Portuguese educational system (Gaitas and Martins 2017; Juvonen et al. 2019; Tomlinson 2015). The supportive interactions observed, both directly implemented strategies and those emerging indirectly, reflect the range of methods teachers can employ to foster inclusion. These methods, including mentoring schemes and group work, are crucial to the broader goals of inclusive education and migrant integration (Avramidis et al. 2019; Messiou and Azaola 2018; OECD 2019; 2021; Ribeiro et al. 2019). However, our findings illustrate the varied effectiveness of these strategies, echoing the complexities of individual and collective dynamics within classrooms found in existing literature (Bambara et al. 2016; Hilt 2017).

Direct mediation practices, such as mentoring and group work, were prevalent in our research. This aligns with existing studies indicating that these strategies are commonly used in mainstream classrooms to foster student inclusion and academic development (Avramidis et al. 2019; Juvonen et al. 2019). Notably, mentoring schemes played a significant role, aligning with research on migrant student inclusion (Avery 2017; Bambara et al. 2016; Messiou and Azaola 2018). However, our study also highlights that these schemes were not universally effective, as evidenced by the contrasting experiences of Deepak and Maria compared to Rani and Joana, highlighting the risks of increasing marginalisation and the critical need for tailored approaches (Hilt 2017).

Indirect mediation strategies, like classroom and task organisation, though not explicitly designed as peer mediation strategies, emerged as critical in fostering supportive interactions (Brock and Huber 2017; Farmer et al. 2019). These findings gain significance considering the varied interactions across subjects such as Physical Education and Math, where flexible seating arrangements and collaborative environments facilitated student engagement (Juvonen et al. 2019; Kaur, Noman, and Awang-Hashim 2016; Messiou and Azaola 2018). This underscores the importance of the learning environment's physical and organisational aspects in promoting inclusive education.

The interviews with teachers provided insights into their beliefs and intentions, which significantly influenced classroom dynamics and the implementation of peer mediation strategies (Avramidis et al. 2019; Farmer et al. 2019; Tan and Perren 2023). The variation in approaches, with some teachers focusing on behaviour management and others on creating supportive environments, calls for informed and consistent implementation of peer mediation strategies in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms.

Task-related variables, such as organisation and group structure, also significantly influenced peer interactions (Ainscow and Messiou 2018; Juvonen et al. 2019; Messiou and Azaola 2018). While small group arrangements did not always elicit supportive peer dynamics, individual work organisations sometimes yielded rich interactions between migrant and native students. This was often observed during math class when

students helped each other and commented on each other's work even though it was an individual task. The criteria used to form the groups were also dependent on the teacher and the task goal, so while sometimes students were paired to form heterogeneous groups, in other cases the students were allowed to choose who they preferred to work with, which may influence supportive interactions taking place, rather than playful ones (Ainscow and Messiou 2018; Juvonen et al. 2019). Not all group tasks promoted positive and supportive interactions, nor did all individual tasks prevent the occurrence of rich encounters during classroom time between native and migrant students, indicating that various types of tasks can elicit different and diverse interactions between students (Messiou and Azaola 2018) even when they don't speak the same language (Hilt 2017).

So, our study challenges the idea that group tasks inherently promote positive interactions, suggesting that the teacher's goals and criteria for group formation are crucial. Our observational records revealed that peer mentoring can address specific academic goals for migrant students, as seen in Maria's assistance to Deepak, reinforcing the dual role of peer mediation strategies in facilitating both academic development and class participation (Harris, Pretti-Frontczak, and Brown 2009; Malone, Fodor, and Hollingshead 2019; McMaster, Fuchs, and Fuchs 2006; Messiou and Azaola 2018).

In conclusion, this study underscores that teacher practices, influenced by their beliefs and intentions, can elicit supportive interactions between migrant and native students through both direct and indirect peer mediation strategies. The effectiveness of these strategies, particularly in classroom organisation and task organisation, hinges significantly on teachers' underlying beliefs and objectives.

Limitations and future investigation

While this study offers foundational insights, its qualitative nature limits the generalisability of findings. Future research should further explore the varied impacts of peer mediation strategies on migrant students' inclusion and well-being. Investigating the role of indirect peer mediation strategies, such as classroom and task organisation, in fostering academic and social support between native and migrant peers is paramount. Additionally, exploring how teachers' beliefs and intentions influence the effectiveness of these strategies remains a vital area for research.

Disclosure statement

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