

## Article

# Gender Roles in Formal Second Language Learning in a Migratory Context: L2 Teachers' Perceptions of Moroccan Origin Women in Catalonia

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**Abstract:** In Catalonia, the largest group of immigrants is that of Moroccan origin. Some Moroccan women are conditioned by a traditional family model that is concretised by the spatial separation between men and women in all spheres of society, a fact that influences the socialisation of these women and that, in a migratory context, may have an impact on their early abandonment of formal second language courses. Accordingly, this study aims to analyse the importance of accounting for the culture and gender factors in language teaching in a migratory context. We conducted semi-structured interviews with eight teachers of Catalan and Spanish as a second language, as they are the link between the institution and the students. The results suggest that providing instruction to segregated groups might grant women who are unable to participate in mixed-gender language classes the opportunity to increase their second language proficiency and thus facilitate their integration into the corresponding host territory. Offering gender-specific courses is a particular challenge for public L2 schools, where groups are organised according to the learners' levels and not according to characteristics linked to origin and gender, as the latter practice may be at odds with the criteria of equality that guide public education in the host territory.

**Keywords:** gender roles; women; formal L2 learning; migrants; Morocco; Catalonia; professionals



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## 1. Introduction

Since the first decade of the 21st century, groups of migrants emigrating from non-European countries to Europe have become widespread. Thus, for example, 1,250,665 people of foreign origin currently reside in Catalonia, which has a population of 7,747,709 people [1], representing 16.11% of the population. The most populous community in Catalonia is that of Moroccan origin, which represents 19.05% of the foreign population and 3.07% of the total population. This has always been the largest group of foreign migrants in the territory: in 2000, they already represented 33.46% of the foreign population.

In recent decades, migratory flows have not only increased but are becoming increasingly feminised [2]. This means that, according to official data [1], more and more women are migrating. The growth and composition of migration flows have revealed many inequalities; according to one source, “[a]nalyzes of social asymmetries and fragmentations focused primarily on inequalities in education and employment or income, as a result of which social class/stratum differences became defined as the most important indicators of social inequalities” [3] (p. 1). These asymmetries are produced not only between the newly arrived population and the native population but also between the men and women who constitute the first group. Currently, almost half of the people of Moroccan origin residing in Catalonia are women (105,620 women compared to 132,572 men). A significant number of these women do not work outside the home, and those who do often occupy positions

related to the domestic sector, so they find themselves “in a strongly gendered labor market, where they take up precarious, insecure jobs in areas where illegal economic activities flourish [. . .]. Many of these women are on short-term contracts or are undocumented, subjected to the vagaries of their employers” [4] (p. 6). Both situations, namely, working at home and occupying highly precarious jobs, provide women with few opportunities to use the host languages, which, moreover, are typologically and genetically distant from their first languages (usually Amazigh or Arabic).

Linguistic competence in a host language is a fundamental tool for achieving the integration of migrants into the social dynamics of the host countries [5–9]; therefore, a person who does not know the language of the country in which they reside will experience more difficulties becoming an active part of the society in which they live.

In Catalonia, in the same way that there are numerous host entities and NGOs that offer initial language courses, for more than two decades now, public institutions have been providing newly arrived people access to basic Catalan and Spanish courses. It is common for courses at the most basic language level to be organised depending on the origin of the migrants and even according to other factors such as gender. Increasingly, however, these courses organise groups according to the level of the learners rather than the particular characteristics of the people who make up the groups since it is assumed that diversity is beneficial in the sense that the interrelation of different origins improves coexistence. Even so, there is evidence that some difficulties and barriers regarding learning, and, ultimately, early dropout rates from L2 courses, have a greater incidence among specific groups, including Moroccan women [10].

In light of the information given above, the research question investigated herein is as follows: to what extent and in what way do factors such as gender, origin, and cultural background influence the learning process, and should these factors be taken into account by institutions when organising basic second language courses? Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the difficulties faced by learners in consideration of their origin, cultural background, and gender in order to determine whether and how these factors affect their learning, with a view to neutralising possible barriers to formal second language acquisition. To this end, we will focus on the population of Moroccan women in Catalonia, which, as we have pointed out, is the group of foreign origin most present in the territory. Although there is a great deal of research on migration and gender, the role played by gender in L2 acquisition in a migratory context has been scarcely analysed.

In order to achieve this objective, we conducted semi-structured interviews with eight teachers of reduced-price courses of basic levels of Catalan and Spanish as a foreign language, including both those that were public and those organised by NGOs. The participants in these interviews were exclusively teachers. This study constitutes the starting point of an investigation that aims to be extended in the future. For the moment, we considered it important to take the perceptions of professionals into consideration, as they are the only individuals who have an overall view that includes both aspects related to the institution and to the reality of their students; on the one hand, they possess knowledge of the educational system with regard to the organisation of these types of courses, and, on the other hand, as they have contact with the students, they are aware of the difficulties faced by certain groups. Even so, in subsequent studies, the study will be extended through interviews conducted with other groups, namely, Moroccan migrant women and those in charge of the organisations that organise these courses.

## 2. Migrant Women and Second Language Acquisition

Research on second language (L2) acquisition suggests that numerous factors, both external and internal, influence the L2 learning process, including age, motivation, aptitude, attitude, learning strategies, first languages, etc. [11]. In the case of migrants, the variables that most influence the process of acquiring a second language are age, time, individual or group motivations, environmental factors, learning and practice possibilities, and the efficiency of the employed learning method [12]. To all these factors one should add gender,

which is associated with cultural values that can influence men and women differently in terms of the acquisition of second languages [10].

### 2.1. Gender and Migratory Trajectories of Moroccan Women

Gender, when understood from a cultural point of view, is a social construct through which it is established, within a given context, that men and women perform different roles and behaviours. These constructs are socially shared beliefs transmitted intergenerationally through family and social relationships, and they are strongly anchored to particular social contexts; for an overview of the subject of gender as a cultural construct in relation to migratory processes, see [3] (pp. 1–5). Gender is not a fixed construct; rather, it varies according to certain conditioning factors, including cultural context [3,13]. In migratory trajectories like those analysed herein, these gender roles must, therefore, be analysed in relation to both the culture of origin and the host culture.

The migratory trajectory of a Moroccan woman is different from that of a man from the same country [14] when accounting for the contexts of origin and arrival. If analysing the context of origin from a legal point of view, in Morocco, it is established that men and women are equal. The constitution [15], within Title II (which is dedicated to fundamental freedoms and rights) in Article 19, states the following:

Men and women enjoy, on an equal level, the civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights and freedoms set out in this Title and in the other provisions of the Constitution, as well as in the international conventions and covenants duly ratified by Morocco, in compliance with the provisions of the Constitution, the constants of the Kingdom and its laws.

The State shall work to achieve parity between men and women.

[L'homme et la femme jouissent, à égalité, des droits et libertés à caractère civil, politique, économique, social, cultural et environnemental, énoncés dans le présent Titre et dans les autres dispositions de la Constitution, ainsi que dans les conventions et pactes internationaux dûment ratifiés par le Maroc et ce, dans le respect des dispositions de la Constitution, des constantes du Royaume et de ses lois.

L'État œuvre à la réalisation de la parité entre les hommes et les femmes.]

Remaining in the legal sphere, Morocco has a religiously rooted family code called Mudawana that regulates issues related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. The Mudawana (and the modifications that have been applied to it) is approved by the Parliament and by the King. Thus, this family code with religious roots legally regulates these vital aspects that we have mentioned. Despite reforms that have been implemented to achieve greater gender equity, this code deviates from the message regarding gender equality present in the country's Constitution, and it offers different provisions for men and women, which, in practice, are detrimental to the latter [16].

Many of the existing studies that address the gender issue in Moroccan society mention Islam as the main factor to be considered when analysing the situation of women in Muslim areas. However, Islam constitutes only one part of the patriarchal structural system. Being a Muslim does not necessarily imply having certain sexist attitudes [17]. What has a more important impact on gender inequality is the degree and type of religious practice, as these facets influence the practitioners' ways of life, and this influence, in the end, also has an impact on the relationships based on this patriarchal structure [14]. In this sense, Islam would constitute a part of a whole that affects the position of women in society in the same manner as other factors such as educational level, urban or rural origin, social class, marital status, etc. The factors that influence the construction of gender roles are diverse [13,14,18].

The amount and quality of education received can have an impact on the position occupied by women in society in comparison to men. This conditioning factor can be related to the educational characteristics of women in migratory environments [10]: if considering the relationship between education and immigration, it can be observed that in Spain, a large number of Moroccan migrant women (stemming from the migratory waves

produced at the beginning of the 20th century) do not know how to read or write, especially women who have migrated to join their husbands. Women of Moroccan origin with a higher level of education generally arrived as children or are part of more recent migratory flows. Although the most recent statistics on the education levels of female migrants in Spain are at least a decade old [1], language services and assistance entities have confirmed that many Moroccan women arriving in Catalonia are illiterate [8,10].<sup>1</sup>

In Moroccan society, there is a spatial and vital separation between men and women that is marked by gender roles played by both parties. This separation occurs in leisure spaces, family relationships, friendships, and even in support networks; in general, and always in consideration of traditional models, there are not many mixed spaces beyond the closest family environment. It is true that, as we have said, there are differences according to social class in the roles assigned to men and women (for example, women in higher social classes have easier access to education, which opens the door to more social and employment opportunities). However, the aforementioned separation of spaces occurs in all social classes. This separation regulates the activities carried out by men and women: in general, according to the traditional pattern of the Moroccan family and in terms of the jobs assigned to one or the other, men are in charge of public activities (working outside the home to support their families and, if necessary, carrying out all shopping), while women stay inside the house and take care of the home, the family, and the children [14].

Despite the traditional division according to which the space outside the home is eminently masculine, nowadays, more and more women are working; however, the jobs they occupy are usually those of the informal economy, with low salaries and the absence of social benefits [14,19]. Traditionally, women around the world experience some kind of inequality (labour and social); all societies share the same structural basis based on patriarchal relations that foster job insecurity for women, the reduced presence of women in masculinised fields, the greater responsibility imposed on women in terms of family and dependent care, etc. Therefore, this structure is reproduced in the context of migration.

The occupational differences based on gender cross [Spanish] society as a whole, and are imposed as one of the axes of labour market segmentation which, together with the age and racialisation of immigrant women, aggravate their labour subordination, their working conditions and wages, as well as the possibility of access not only to the labour market in general but also to certain sectors of activity. [20] (p. 185)

[Las diferencias ocupacionales por razón de género atraviesan toda la sociedad [española], y se imponen como uno de los ejes de segmentación del mercado laboral que, junto con la edad y la racialización de las mujeres inmigradas, agravan su subordinación laboral, sus condiciones de trabajo y salario, así como la posibilidad de acceso no sólo al mercado laboral en general sino también a determinados sectores de la actividad]. [20] (p. 185)

It is true that there are differences between territories that have their origin in the construction of gender roles. These differences are manifested in productive and reproductive activities, in the relational sphere, and in the use of public and private space [17]. Even so, as we have pointed out, in European migratory contexts, forms of marginalisation and exclusion of migrant women are reproduced. This situation maintains parallels with those described in the country of origin, which are aggravated, in this case, by the very vulnerability of the migratory event, e.g., in relation to the lack of knowledge of the language and customs, or the employment of undocumented women as a labour force [4].

Gendered occupational structures, including sex typing of jobs for women and men, can exist in both the sending and receiving countries. When this occurs, migrant women are usually disadvantaged, relative to men and to native-born women. [21] (p. 27, 28)

This work situation in the host country, in this case, Catalonia, has an influence on insertion into society, especially when it comes to developing relationships in the native

society within the public and private spheres: “Work is at the heart of integration. It is a fundamental part of their lives and, therefore, the work situation clearly determines the feeling of integration. [El treball és l'eix central de la integració. És una part fonamental en les seves vides i, consegüentment, la situació laboral determina de manera clara sentir-se integrat]”. [6] (p. 68). There are other elements that condition the sociocultural insertion of newly arrived Moroccan women, namely, on the one hand, male dependence and, on the other hand, their migratory endeavour, and both aspects are interrelated [22]. Marriage has a great significance in Moroccan society and conditions the social position of women; therefore, it can define their life expectations. Since the beginning of the 20th century, migration has usually taken place within the framework of family regrouping [22],<sup>2</sup> which is a legal procedure through which a person residing in Spain can bring a family member over by granting them residence authorisation. According to the Spanish law regarding foreigners [23], a foreign person has the right to request the reunification of his or her spouse when he or she has held a temporary residence permit for one year and has permission to stay for at least another year in addition to other conditions that the aforementioned law details [23,24]. Within this framework, and in the case of Moroccan women, migration takes place so that women are capable of following their husbands to the host country, so it may be an imposed migration project. These women do not leave their country in search of work (despite the fact that once they arrive, some end up being active in the labour market),<sup>3</sup> and they replicate, in the migratory context, the role dynamics that predominate in Moroccan society with respect to family organisation, so the main occupations of women are still predominantly related to the completion of domestic chores; consequently, the difficulties in actively participating in the host society are increased [14] (p. 35).

There is another, smaller group of women who migrate alone and on their own initiative [14]. This group consists of unmarried migrant women, especially divorced women whose marital status is closely related to their migratory trajectory. In Moroccan society, these women are not well regarded socially and have difficulty remarrying. As they generally represent a family burden in Morocco, they do not usually encounter impediments to migrating. Moreover, if they migrate, they can help their families financially. Emigrating, therefore, is a very favourable option for them, as in the host society, they no longer suffer from the pressure to remarry that they would in Morocco. There are also (a few) single women who migrate alone. Their migratory trajectory differs from that of men in the same situation, as they rely on informal networks that support migrants from departure to settlement in the host country. These networks are made up of acquaintances who have already migrated [14] (p. 36).

There is a relationship between the life projects and migratory projects of Moroccan women, and in order to analyse them, the link between male dependence and the perpetuation of the traditional family organisation in the target society must be taken into account. This dependence is also closely related to the employment situation of women, and all these factors will determine the strategies of social insertion and, consequently, the acquisition of the Spanish and Catalan languages.

## *2.2. Sociability of Moroccan Women and L2 Acquisition*

Moroccans arriving in Catalonia generally speak Amazigh and/or Moroccan Arabic as their first languages. Despite a lack of reliable data, several experts estimate that Amazigh is the most widely spoken immigrant language in Catalonia [25–27]. In Morocco, French has an important presence, serving as a former colonial language that is still used today in educational or administrative fields. For the same reason, Spanish has a certain presence (much smaller) in the Rif area (Moroccans established in certain areas of the Catalan-speaking territory come from the Rif area) [26]. Thus, and with some exceptions due to the aforementioned phenomenon, when women of Moroccan origin arrive in Catalonia, they do not understand or speak Spanish or Catalan. Many of them do not speak French either, so there is a great genetic and typological distance between the languages they speak and the host languages. This typological distance may be an obstacle to the rapid acquisition of



second languages, but this distance is not the only factor that hinders the acquisition of Spanish and Catalan.

The fact that some women are not literate (even in the languages they speak) (v. 2.1) implies a difficulty not only in learning the second language but also one that can contribute to fewer job opportunities outside of the home/domestic sector. Catalan and Spanish law [23] stipulates that adult education should include education for cohesion, social participation, and the formative reception of people who have immigrated. In this way, it establishes that newcomers can acquire, through the first reception service, the basic literacy skills required to access Catalan language training. Despite the fact that there is legislation around this situation in Catalonia, the literacy acquisition process is generally very long and complex [10] (p. 275).

Other issues that are less linked to strictly linguistic factors and more related to socialisation can interfere in the acquisition of second languages. As we have already mentioned, many of these women work at home or have domestic and precarious jobs; this fact has consequences for their socialisation, as they have fewer opportunities to use the host language in conversation with Catalan or Spanish speakers, and the less use, the less acquisition [11]. Another extra-linguistic factor that can affect socialisation and, consequently, the use of second languages is the stereotyped vision that natives have of Moroccan migrants. Among the stereotypes that can affect communication between migrants and Catalan or Spanish speakers is the belief that people who have migrated do not know how to speak Spanish or Catalan, and this results in native Spanish or Catalan speakers avoiding communication with Moroccan migrants altogether. This is especially important in the case of Catalan: being a minoritized language, Catalan speakers do not usually initiate conversations with strangers in this language, especially if they presume that the interlocutor is a foreigner [28]. The fact that some migrant women have relational circles in which they communicate in their native languages along with the prejudices of Catalan and Spanish speakers regarding their linguistic competence are extralinguistic factors that feed into each other [10] and greatly and negatively influence the L2 acquisition process.

Moreover, some studies [8,10,29] report that some women who begin the formal process of learning Catalan or Spanish abandon it early, which is likely due to reasons related to job instability, changes of residence, family priorities, linguistic insecurity or a lack of spaces to practice, etc. In the case of Moroccan women, it seems that family factors are particularly relevant [10]: the prioritisation of family needs may be a reason why many women drop out of classes and their learning is stalled, especially at the most basic levels.

Taking these factors into account, we aim to determine whether organising Catalan and Spanish courses according to a student's gender and origin could have an impact on women's continuation of their studies.

### 3. Methodology

To achieve the described objective, we carried out a study using a qualitative methodology.

The participants of this study consisted of 8 Catalan- and Spanish-teaching professionals (aged between 36 and 52 years) working in centres that offer basic-level courses at reduced prices; except for the NGOs, the rest are public centres, namely, adult schools (Escoles d'Adults (EA)), specifically Consorci per la Normalització Lingüística (CPNL) and Escoles Oficials d'Idiomes (EOI) (v. Table 1). CPNL and EOI are language schools that offer accredited courses. In the NGOs and the EAs, not only language courses but courses of all kinds are offered. Although all these centres offer initial courses (that is, classes for beginners in a second language), the EOIs do not offer literacy courses. The centres where the informants work are located in the province of Girona (Alt Empordà, Baix Empordà, and Gironès). A high percentage of the citizens of foreign origin living in these areas have Moroccan origins [1]. Data collection has been carried out in two phases: between the years 2021 and 2022/23.

**Table 1.** Participants: Catalan and Spanish as L2 teachers.

Participant	Centre	Gender	City	Studies Related to L2 Teaching
CIR	Escola d'adults	Male	Torroella de Montgrí	No
ROS	Escola d'adults	Female	Torroella de Montgrí	No
SIL	Escola d'adults	Female	Torroella de Montgrí	No
SUB	NGO	Female	Girona	No
MAR	NGO	Male	Girona	No
MAC	CPNL	Female	Figueres	Yes
MIM	EOI	Female	Girona	Yes
PAM	EOI	Male	Girona	Yes

Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 and 45 min. Interviews were carried out online in the first period (due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19) and in person at a participant's place of work in the second period. The interviews were recorded and stored as a WAV file under a name identifiable only by the authors in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants.

The interview guide was structured based on the following general aspects:

- Data related to the professional's career (career path, type of school, and characteristics of the pupils);
- Data related to teaching migrants;
- Data related to basic L2 teaching—particularities;
- Data related to teaching migrant women and migrant men;
- Experience with teaching in gender-segregated groups;
- Perceptions of teaching in gender-segregated groups.

The interviews were transcribed in order to extract the most relevant units of meaning that emerged from the discourses. They were grouped into categories that agglutinated those smaller units of meaning that had something in common. The analysis of the results will be presented on the basis of the categories created. All interviews were conducted in Catalan, and the excerpts reproduced herein have been translated by the authors of the study.

The informants participated in the study after having given informed consent. They were given sufficient information to understand the implications of their participation. Participation in the study was anonymous; thus, informants are mentioned using the first two letters of their first names and the first letter of their surnames, followed by an acronym of the type of centre where they work (NGO = Non Governmental Organisation, EA = Escola d'Adults, EOI = Escola Oficial d'Idiomes, and CPNL = Consorci per a la Normalització Lingüística).

#### 4. Results

The results presented below are organised according to the categories created in the analysis of the interviews.

##### 4.1. Professionals' Perceptions of Moroccan Women Attending Courses

###### 4.1.1. Demand for Courses Exclusively for Women

All the interviewed professionals affirmed that, in general, Moroccan women who start language courses have a preference for attending segregated courses. It is more common for entities such as NGOs and adult schools to form groups exclusively for women than for public institutions.

They prefer to go to a place where they feel comfortable, where there are only women, they don't want to go to mixed classes. That's why the first years they didn't come here, and when they asked if there were men, you could see that they were reluctant because there were other places that offered this. (CIR, EA)

All the informants, regardless of the type of centre in which they worked, reported a demand for segregated classes from some users in this regard:

At the beginning, courses were made specifically for Moroccan women and for Moroccan men, because we saw that both men and women told us that they wanted to go separately. They also asked us for the teacher to be of a specific gender. (MAC, CPNL)

Regarding instances where groups are mixed, some of the professionals expressed concern that some groups of Moroccan women drop out of courses but that the presence of women increases when women of the same origin are already attending the courses: "I get the feeling that women carry women, I think that's the best network", explains MAR. Otherwise, it is difficult to even provide them with the information:

We do not know how to reach this group [Moroccan origin women]. We do outreach on the web, on Facebook, but it doesn't reach them. It's a bit difficult. We go to the halal stores to bring publicity, to the mosque, and when we tell them to tell their wives they say yes, but they don't come because they have children and things... it's difficult. (CIR, EA)

#### 4.1.2. Reasons for Preferring Segregated Classes Socialisation in the Classroom

One of the most predominant reasons the informants provided in support of the organisation of exclusively female courses is that in this type of group, the participants build a space that transcends language learning and more heavily concerns socialisation and the acquisition of knowledge that is useful to them in the early stages of their arrival from their countries of origin. This is especially true with respect to the types of courses developed by NGOs:

I believe that this [organising segregated groups] is an important differential feature that makes us reach a type of collective with more needs and more illiterate. Our classes are above all a meeting place for women. The women who come are very illiterate, and our objective is the welcoming and oral part. (SUB, ONG)

For some women (who were often illiterate, engaged in few social interactions, and possessed very low levels of L2 proficiency), attending classes in segregated groups facilitates interaction with other participants. However, while the professionals maintained that it is beneficial for female students to socialise, they also stated that the high level of interaction, which often leads to the use of L1s, may prevent them from achieving the objective of the classes:

There was a good atmosphere because they all got along, they met each other, they socialised... But sometimes we didn't make progress in terms of work because they spoke more in their own language. (ROS, EA)

#### Family Reconciliation

One of the issues highlighted by the professionals is that many women have young children, some of whom are not yet in school. When it is possible to create female groups (especially for courses organised by NGOs and adult schools), efforts are made to choose time slots that allow women to perform tasks associated with family care. Even so, faced with the problem of family reconciliation, they sometimes bring their children to class. In the centres where the interviewed professionals work, this is not allowed, and this policy has led to a decrease in the number of women attending the courses.



At the beginning they came with the children, and I understand that it is difficult to leave the children, but it is unfeasible. First, because the city council does not allow us to do so, and second, because children are children and they behave like children. It used to be allowed, but if you have one or two children in class you can't do anything. It was very difficult for us to make them understand. (CIR, EA)

#### Social Pressures

The preference of some women for segregated courses is also occasionally related to social pressures: in some cases, these women's families and society do not favourably perceive their attendance of mixed groups, which have been composed of both men and women:

They say they can't because of their husbands, because they don't want it. (ROS, EA)

They say "people talk", but when you ask what they mean, they say: "no, not you, but the other people. . .". It's a bit cultural. (CIR, EA)

#### 4.1.3. Motivations for Formal Learning

Moroccan women who attend language lessons have different motivations, such as seeking to socialise with other women outside their homes, to allow themselves to develop minimally in society, to obtain a certificate for a residence permit, to obtain some type of formal training because they had never been able to do so before, or to be part of the educational community of their children's school and thus help them with their homework:

I had a Moroccan student who reached a very high grade, C1. Other women said they also wanted to learn Catalan because they saw it as the language with which they could participate in their children's school life and help them. (MIM, EOI)

However, some participants (especially those working in adult schools and NGOs) stated that the Moroccan female attendees start with a lack of motivation, and they argue that this is an important factor that leads them to fail to recognise that the mixed classes are part of the cultural learning process and thus valuable:<sup>4</sup>

They have to be taught the importance of learning, despite the fact that there are men. Because the purpose is to learn, and the fact that the classes are mixed also helps them to learn that in this society, public and private spaces are mixed. Sharing a space to learn. Since they do not know the value of learning, they do not come. If they knew that they are the ones who lose the opportunity for this reason. . . (CIR, EA)

In fact, professionals believe that motivation is the most important factor to consider in the fight against early dropout from L2 courses and that all other factors that may hinder formal language learning will disappear over time:

It takes time [. . .]. It is the complementarity of all gender and training programs. As they adapt to the social reality and that this is the offer that exists, they will be adapted. What happens is that the migratory movements have been exponential and this makes it impossible to raise certain mixed programs because they come from a reality where this still clashes too much. (SIL, EA)

#### 4.2. Professionals' Perceptions about Group Organisation

##### 4.2.1. NGOs and Adult Schools: The Need for Segregated Groups

Despite the fact that the instructors believed that migrants sometimes misvalue the importance of second language learning, interviewed professionals working for NGOs or in adult schools explained that the demand for attendance at initial levels in non-mixed groups has remained stable over time, that the courses are full and that they are demanded by some groups of women, and that their courses are attended by a profile of women who would not attend formal mixed-gender courses:

We have always had an excess of female students [in courses for women] because word of mouth. . . enrollment never drops. (SUB, NGO)

#### 4.2.2. Public Language Schools: The Need for Mixed Groups

On the other hand, professionals working in public centres for formal language teaching (CPNL and EOI) explained that they did not perceive a need to implement segregated courses because they perceived that there is no longer a demand for them at present:<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning, we had a different profile of Moroccan women than the one we have now: very illiterate, going from home to the school and back. They did not socialise, they did not integrate into the city. The fact that there were men in the classroom made them very self-conscious when it came to speaking, expressing themselves or giving their opinion on a subject [...]. In the segregated classes it was very different. I remember these courses that the first thing they did when they arrived was to take off their headscarves, they felt relaxed and, in this sense, it had advantages. But now this no longer happens to us, because we have a different profile of women, who have no problems when it comes to expressing themselves, to express their opinion, they are not ashamed to do so. Now it would not work for us. (MAC, CPNL)

#### 4.2.3. Reasons for the Decrease in the Scheduling of Gender-Segregated Courses

Although there is a demand for scheduling non-mixed courses, as observed by teachers working in NGOs or adult schools, fewer and fewer non-mixed courses are being scheduled for various reasons. In this regard, a significant problem is the attendance in the same classroom of women with different language proficiency levels, e.g., literate and non-literate women, women who have a greater degree of oral proficiency in the L2 than others, etc.

At school level, when you organise segregated courses, you end up mixing levels because otherwise the groups would be too small. And when it comes to work, it is complicated because there are different levels. (ROS, EA)

This generates the need to prepare individualised content on demand; if separate courses are offered for women and men, it would be more important (based on staffing and numbers) to combine levels in the same classroom than it would be if mixed classes were offered.

The difference in the proficiency levels of the learners in the same class is not the only reason for the disappearance of non-mixed courses, especially in the public centres that offer regulated courses (CPNL and EOI); the philosophy of the public centres is one of integration, inclusion, and equality, regardless of nationality and gender.

It was concluded that it was not too... I don't know if I should say "ethical" to divide by gender, right? In the end they are people, no matter where they come from and what gender they are, and they all have to go in the same group if they have the same level. The Consorci is based more on their language level than on their nationality, gender or... these criteria. (MAC, CPNL)

We do not offer courses for a nationality. I think it would go a bit against the philosophy of the school, which is integration. The best thing for me is to see that a woman from India, a Russian man and a Moroccan woman are struggling to speak the language I teach them [...] and they don't have English or any other language as a resource, this is perfect. (PAM, EOI)

## 5. Discussion

The starting point of this study was exploring second-language-learning experiences while accounting for the gender, origins, and cultural background of the students (in this case, Moroccan migrant women) to uncover the extent to which and in what way these characteristics may have an impact on the learning process and determine whether they should be taken into account in the organisation of formal L2 courses. This study was based on the perceptions of L2 teachers in relation to Moroccan women who attend courses in order to understand the needs of this group and the reasons and criteria regarding the organisation of language courses by public and private institutions at reduced prices.

Before discussing the results, it is important to remember that the role of gender cannot be considered immutably and in isolation; this role changes, and it must be studied in relation to categories such as ethnicity, nationality, educational level, or social class [3,13]. In this study, we have focused on a group of migrant women of Moroccan origin, and we have observed that the interaction of these factors generates differences among these women; for example, certain characteristics such as the level of education and others conditioned by social class coincide with a greater desire to attend courses without a male presence. Thus, in general terms, interviews with teachers working in schools with different characteristics have allowed us to determine that CPNL is attended by women with a certain level of education, without problems regarding socialising with men and women, and with gender roles similar to those of the host society. This same profile was found in with respect to EOI, although this type of centre has a specific factor to account for: it prepares students for official exams, thus attracting more diverse profiles in terms of origin, gender, social class, etc. (even so, only literate students can enrol in its courses). As can be seen from the results, adult schools and NGOs attract newcomers, and professionals working in and for these schools and NGOs report that there is a demand for the formation of segregated groups of Moroccan women.

Although group segregation is employed increasingly infrequently, segregated groups have their own characteristics that need to be taken into consideration. On the one hand, the interviewed teachers maintained that such groups are attended by women who feel they are in a safe environment in which to socialise and thus speak with more confidence. According to the participants, the main objective of the women who request this type of group is not to obtain a certificate or reach a certain language level but rather to feel that they are in a safe environment. According to the data, this environment is partly due to the absence of men, and this fact constitutes a key point to be analysed because of its important influence on the learning process [10]. The fact that there is a vital separation in all contexts between men and women in Moroccan society (at least as far as families living according to a traditional model are concerned) [14] allows female learners coming from these traditional contexts to feel more comfortable socialising in non-mixed environments. One of the most important influential factors in second language learning is the attitude of the learners: the more motivation that is produced with respect to the L2, the more the learning progresses [11,30]. In this sense, having spaces where interaction between learners is promoted improves language learning.

Class attendance for Moroccan migrant women appears to be impacted by their culturally prescribed gender roles in various ways, not only by the presence or absence of men in class but also by their family responsibilities. Some female learners are responsible for children who are not yet in school, and not being able to attend class with them leads many women to abandon their L2 classes prematurely. As the presence of children in class makes teaching difficult, centres have stopped allowing their presence, and this action might have led to a decrease in attendance by women. The learner's decision not to attend classes in the presence of men and the difficulties in reconciling school attendance with family duties is related to the role of women in Moroccan society, which is reproduced in the migratory context.

The situation in which these women find themselves is sometimes not perceived by some professionals, who explain their refusal to attend mixed courses on the grounds of a lack of motivation: "They have to be taught the importance of learning, despite the fact that there are men [. . .]. If they knew that they are the ones who lose the opportunity for this reason. . ." exclaimed CIR, a teacher at an adult school. As can be seen from the results, some professionals perceive that female apprentices have not identified language learning as a key point for their full societal integration despite the fact that this rejection of mixed groups by a certain profile of women seems to be a more complex issue (some professionals note that the environmental and familial factors have an influence on the lives of these women: "They say they can't because of their husbands, because they don't want it", explains ROS, a teacher at an adult school). In any case, the possibility that language

may be not perceived as a key point in the process of full integration is due, to a large extent, to the type of socialisation and the learner's employment situation. The former is a very complex issue since, to a large extent, it is the host language that will allow the learners' to open their relational circles; however, since they are within the circle, they do not believe it is necessary to leave it, nor do they have opportunities to use the L2, and the fewer opportunities for use, the worse the level of learning. In addition, the jobs these women perform are domestic or traditionally feminised tasks for which they do not need the host language.

Despite recognising the demand (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the workplace) for segregated groups, all the informants pointed out that the organisation of groups according to proficiency level offers some advantages. One such advantage is that organisation according to proficiency level makes it possible to reduce the presence in the same group of women who have different levels of L2 proficiency, and this facilitates the formal learning process. Not only is the disparity of levels a barrier to formal language acquisition, but the socialisation promoted in these female spaces ends up becoming an impediment to the acquisition of the L2 since it promotes the greater use of the L1 in the classroom. But one should not forget the importance of affective factors with respect to second language acquisition: being in a comfortable environment in which one is willing to speak seems to be more conducive to L2 acquisition [11,12,30]. So, and although it may seem contradictory, what emerges from the different points of view is that despite the added difficulty of the formal second language acquisition process resulting from the existence of mixed levels, participation in mixed-level language courses seems to be better than no second language acquisition at all, which means that learners drop out of school because there are no appropriate classes for them (only mixed groups offer courses for both sexes).

However, according to the teachers' views in relation to the priorities of schools, the fundamental factor of organising groups by levels and not according to the characteristics of the gender and origin of the learners is related to the criterion of equality and the perception of diversity as a richness, and the teachers argue that this favours the acquisition of the host language and the learners' integration in the corresponding community. This relationship, which seems indisputable from the point of view of the host society, can end up contributing to increasing inequalities: as mentioned, some learners do not attend courses organised by public entities such as the EOI or CPNL, which are specialised in formal L2 teaching, instead turning to adult schools and courses organised by NGOs. The demand for this type of group exists despite the fact that teachers working in formal centres such as CPNL do not perceive it in this way and are often unaware that this cohort continues to exist but attends other types of centres.

The learning barriers of this group are a very complex issue, as they involve extra-linguistic factors that cannot be ignored. It seems that a model closer to the one proposed by NGOs and adult schools would contribute to the greater inclusion of the most vulnerable, less literate groups of Moroccan women. However, public centres such as CPNL or EOI have been moving in the opposite direction, abandoning segregated courses and promoting organisation according to levels. Since the most vulnerable women cannot access centres dedicated exclusively to L2 teaching, many end up attending courses organised by NGOs and entities whose main objective is not L2 teaching, and they also receive less adept help since the professionals working in NGOs are generally not as highly trained as those in the public centres.

## 6. Conclusions

In migratory contexts, L2 learning plays a fundamental role in overcoming the obstacles linked to their conditions as women and migrants. Although courses in Catalan or Spanish should not be organised around the needs of one group of students, we believe that factors linked to gender, origin, social class, and educational level should be taken into account when understanding why some migrant women are unable or unwilling to attend mixed-group classes.

This cohort constitutes a group of people who find it difficult to participate in the host society. For them, learning a L2 means acquiring an instrument (the language) that allows them to create an inter-relational network and access a less precarious labour market, and these affordances can help them to change certain imposed gender roles. Although the ultimate objective of Catalan or Spanish courses is the acquisition of a certain competence in Catalan and Spanish, the reality is that the needs of certain female learners of Moroccan origin are related to other motivations that must be taken into account when analysing and describing their learning processes.

This study is not without its limitations, most of which stem from the fact that the sample from which the results have been obtained is made up of exclusively teachers (we have already advanced that it is planned, in future work, to extend our analysis to the population of Moroccan women and to the institutional managers of the course organisation). It should be borne in mind that teachers (albeit sometimes partially) are aware of both realities, namely, that of the institution and that of their students. The fact that they work in institutions with different characteristics has allowed us to acquire a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study. Thus, their perceptions have allowed us to determine that there are indeed particularities that affect this group of Moroccan women, and, considering everything described above, we believe that a “need” for segregated groups could have emerged (and in public centres of formal L2 education as well), although it may seem that the fact that the public centres organise groups according to characteristics linked to origin and gender may be at odds with the criteria of equality that guide public education in the host territory. The fact is that there is a group of women, i.e., those most vulnerable within the analysed population, who cannot attend mixed groups. Ignoring them means ignoring their reality and leaving them with fewer opportunities to hold better jobs and expand their social networks should they wish to do so, as competence in the language of the host country is essential for the integration of migrants and refugees.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In this case, we consider both the lack of knowledge of the Latin alphabet and the Alifafat alphabet (that is, the alphabet that transcribes Catalan and Spanish and the alphabet that transcribes one of their L1s, Arabic). Furthermore, it is important to mention that there are women who are partially illiterate since they are familiar with reading but not writing.
- <sup>2</sup> The opposite case can occur, but much less frequently. There are also migration projects in which women emigrate first and men leave the country to join them, and even joint projects in which the planning of migration strategies is shared. Both situations, however, (that of women migrating first and shared migratory projects) are much less frequent.
- <sup>3</sup> In addition, family reunification precipitates the legal dependency of the reunited person (usually the woman) with respect to the sponsor (that is, the man). This means that the legal residence of the woman in Spain is much more vulnerable than that of the man since in a divorce case the regrouped (that is, the women) finds themselves in a situation of irregularity and illegality in the host country.
- <sup>4</sup> Although it is not the objective of this work, for future studies, it is important to consider the difference in the motivations and objectives of the students who enrol in Spanish or Catalan classes: Yes, they see that Spanish is something that will be useful, to work, to live, to communicate, because many people demand Spanish rather than Catalan. Catalan is good because they need a



45-h course to obtain the *papers d'arrelament*, but if the students do not try, surely they will be Spanish, they will grow up. (MAC, CPNL)

- 5 In the case of EOI, when preparing for the official language exams, one of which allows for the acquisition of citizenship, the situation is a little different: On the one hand, they do not admit non-literate people. On the other hand, some women attend these courses because there is no alternative despite the fact that some professors have observed the preference that they and their husbands or families would have for them to attend classes in segregated groups: With the A2 you can apply for citizenship. Our certificate is comparable to the Cervantes certificate, and there is a profile of people who demand it. Women sometimes come with their husbands. I talk to them; I try to explain directly to them [the women] because they are the ones who will stay in class. They seem to be reluctant, but it is necessary to get the level. (PAM, EOI)

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