School Permanence Through Migrant Perspectives: Insights from Chilean Secondary Education Communities

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ABSTRACT: This article explores the meanings attributed to the school permanence of migrant students from two Chilean state high schools based on the narratives of the students, their families, and diverse education stakeholders. A qualitative phenomenological approach is employed to identify three interpretative categories: permanence as a promise for the future, as a practice sustained over time, and as a relational experience anchored in affective bonds. The findings allow us to understand permanence not merely as statistical data but as a complex experience that shapes migrant trajectories, school relationships, and life projects in highly vulnerable educational contexts.

KEYWORDS: Immigrant students, school retention, secondary education, Immigrant families, education stakeholders

In recent years, Chile has received significant migratory flows (Oyarzún et al., 2021), partly associated with its political stability and economic performance since the return to democracy in 1990 (Reinoso et al., 2025). As of December 2023, Venezuelan nationals led these flows (38%), followed by Peruvian (13.6%) and Colombian (10.9%) citizens, predominantly concentrated in urban areas such as the Metropolitan Region (National Migration Service [Servicio Nacional de Migraciones], 2025).

A large part of this population corresponds to children and adolescents of school age (National Institute of Statistics [INE, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas], 2024), whose enrollment in the education system represents 8% at the national level (Chilean Ministry of Education [MINEDUC, Ministerio de Educación de Chile], 2025a). These children often attend public schools, which are administered either by municipalities or by Public Education Local Services (in Spanish, Servicios

Locales de Educación Pública or SLEP) (MINEDUC, 2024a). These public schools are characterized by high socio-educational vulnerability and lower academic outcomes (Bellei, 2018; Eyzaguirre et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, the current situation for migrant students reveals a number of challenging scenarios. For example, diverse studies show numerous experiences of discrimination, stigmatization, and racism (Caqueo et al., 2019; Céspedes et al., 2019; Galaz et al., 2021; Segovia & Rendón, 2020; Stang et al., 2021). Administrative and bureaucratic barriers also can hinder not only student access to educational establishments but also the provision of benefits such as meals and scholarships (Joiko, 2019; Poblete & Galaz, 2017), among other difficulties.

Adding to these tensions is a concerning phenomenon: The sustained increase in school dropout rates among migrant students between 2017 and 2024 (MINEDUC, 2025b), specifically during ninth grade—the first year of Chilean secondary education (MINEDUC, 2021). This trend shows the limits of enrollment-based indicators, as it reveals that remaining in school depends on conditions that go beyond formal access. This scenario has prompted the state to revise its institutional responses to the schooling of migrant children and adolescents.

Against this backdrop, the recent update of the “Policy for Migrant Children and Students” [originally, Política de Niños, Niñas y Estudiantes Extranjeros] (MINEDUC, 2024b) explicitly seeks to guarantee the right to education, access, permanence, and educational progress of foreign-origin students, establishing the monitoring of educational trajectories as a central strategic axis. Likewise, the School Inclusion Law No. 20.845 (Chile, 2015) reoriented Chilean educational policy toward non-discrimination and equitable access, restricting exclusionary practices such as profit-based provision and student selection.

Taken together, these frameworks position school permanence as a systemic concern that requires institutional responsibility, pedagogical actions, and robust networks of support across educational communities. However, there is currently insufficient research portraying the situation of migrant populations settled in Chile. Most studies on school retention and dropout do not distinguish between native and foreign populations, which overlooks the specific conditions that the latter face in the Chilean education system (e.g., Arriagada et al., 2022; Contreras et al., 2022; Mendoza et al., 2023).

One exception is the study by Mendoza et al. (2024), in which an initial exploration of this phenomenon was conducted through interviews with teachers, management teams, and support professionals from four high schools in the Valparaíso region of Chile. Despite the valuable information provided by that study, its scope was limited as neither migrant students nor their families participated. As indicated by the authors, the study was the product of an emergent reality, as its initial objective was to address institutional and teaching practices for school retention in vulnerable educational communities, without differentiation between students born in Chile and students born abroad. Nevertheless, during fieldwork,

the interviewees constantly referred to migrant students; therefore, the researchers decided to pay attention to this new dimension.

Contrary to that first approach, this study was designed to explore the school permanence of migrant students from a comprehensive educational perspective, considering the meanings and experiences that diverse stakeholders attribute to their school trajectories. In this study, the notion of school permanence refers not only to administrative indicators of retention or continued enrollment, but also to the lived processes through which migrant students and their families sustain their presence in school. This understanding acknowledges institutional dimensions—such as access to benefits and school progression—while foregrounding the relational, affective, and aspirational factors that shape the experience of "staying" in educational spaces (MINEDUC, 2024b). To this end, the voices of migrant students and their guardians are included, as well as those of teachers, management staff, and support professionals from two public high schools in Valparaíso, Chile. Overall, the study provides empirical insights into how school permanence is maintained, disrupted, or reconfigured through everyday educational dynamics, identifying both hindering and strengthening factors.

From the above, the following research question arises: What meanings do migrant students and their families attribute to their permanence in the school system, and how do these meanings interact with the perceptions of educational stakeholders in highly vulnerable educational contexts? Based on this question, the objective of this study is to analyze how the meanings attributed to school permanence by migrant students and their families are formed, encompassing the perceptions of teachers, management staff, and support teams from two public high schools of the Valparaíso region of Chile.

Literature Review

At the global level, the migratory phenomenon has increasingly gained relevance; however, its effects are particularly evident in Latin America and the Caribbean (Avis, 2024). The political, economic, and social crises experienced by several countries in the region have intensified the intra-Latin American migratory flows, weakening the institutional capacities of national governments in the region, especially in socioeconomic terms (Blyde et al., 2019). As such, the demands of migrant populations become particularly urgent, especially in contexts marked by deep structural inequalities, expressed in persistent socioeconomic segmentation, territorial disparities in access to public services, and unequal access to quality education (Zapata & Prieto, 2020). Therefore, the coexistence between the historical needs of the host countries and those of migrant people poses multiple challenges: guaranteeing equal access to social, political, and educational resources that are already under pressure (Summers et al., 2022).

Among these challenges, education is one of the most complex, as many migrant projects involve children and adolescents who see themselves immersed

in schooling processes while their families pursue more dignified life conditions (Inter-American Development Bank et al., 2023; Summers et al., 2022). These processes are often interrupted or limited by experiences of discrimination or precarious conditions, which call into question the effective right to quality education (Lamas et al., 2024). Although several Latin American countries have made progress in the formal access to compulsory schooling, continued enrollment and successful continuity require approaches that go beyond traditional indicators of school enrollment, attendance, or attrition (Kattan & Székely, 2017; Mendoza & Ballesta, 2024).

The complexity intensifies in the case of migrant students, whose trajectories are usually marked by disruptions, forced transitions, and obstacles inherent to displacement and adaptation to a new school and cultural environment (Bartlett & Bajaj, 2023; Caqueo et al., 2021). In these contexts, schools can become key spaces for validating family efforts and expanding future horizons, as long as there are real and sustained reception conditions—that is, concrete institutional practices and support mechanisms that effectively facilitate their integration (Martínez et al., 2021; Seynhaeve et al., 2024). Particularly, the role of teachers and school teams is fundamental: Their practices and dispositions can promote inclusion or, on the contrary, reinforce marginalization (Mendoza et al., 2024). Recent studies show that the creation of affective bonds, the acknowledgment of diversity, and the sharing of emotional support strengthen the school experience, enhance the learning process, and contribute to supporting the educational trajectories of migrant students (Ayala, 2022; Azevedo et al., 2024; Pino et al., 2020; Zoe & Magdalini, 2024).

In the Chilean context, the educational trajectories of migrant students are construed at the intersection between family projects—understood as shared aspirations directed toward educational advancement—institutional structures, and everyday relationships (Castillo et al., 2018; Poblete & Galaz, 2017). School simultaneously appears as a resistance territory and a human relationship network that may enable or disable permanence. Consequently, as observed by Mendoza et al. (2024), the retention of migrant students cannot be examined from a merely administrative or technical lens, but rather it should be addressed as a complex phenomenon that involves individual, social-familial, and institutional factors that, as a whole, form the scope of possibilities for a sustained educational trajectory.

The review of the Chilean national literature from recent years reveals that school permanence is a bet for the future that is not free from tensions. As indicated by Lamas and Bachmann (2024), migrant families often project their social mobility expectations onto the education of their children, thereby building an intergenerational promise for improvement. This prospective dimension is supported by the evidence provided by Muñoz and Mendoza (2023), who demonstrated that second-generation students tend to have better academic results, as a product of more established settling processes and clearer family expectations about the value of schooling. In this line of thinking, the study by Díaz et al. (2023) emphasizes that migrant adolescents often include explicit aspirations

for higher education in their narratives about educational trajectories, even when these coexist on many occasions with fears of precarity and discrimination.

Nevertheless, the promising nature of education is not built on air. For Jiménez (2022), the Chilean educational model, deeply shaped by a neoliberal logic, hinders the possibility of inclusive migratory trajectories. Schools face standardized demands that often contradict the principles of social justice and attention to diversity. Despite this, the study reports "adaptative resistance practices" by school stakeholders, among which are affective bonds, which allow the teaching relationship to become a zone of comfort and accompaniment. This shift agrees with the posits of Aguilera (2023), recognizing that "performative teaching practices" arise from the biographies of committed teachers, who are able to make the curriculum more flexible and support permanence beyond the institutional regulations.

In this context, school permanence is a sustained practice that is frequently fragile and pursued in adverse conditions. The study by Galaz et al. (2021) on child polyvictimization shows how multiple forms of violence (institutional, social, and family) negatively impact the school trajectories of migrant children. Despite these conditions, the authors underscore child agency as a resistance factor that allows children to continue in the education system, even if it does not always offer dignified or safe conditions. However, this agency should be put into context. As observed by Stang et al. (2021), the ways in which schools deal with cultural diversity are mediated by functional discourses (whether assimilation or tolerance discourses) which, instead of transforming the structural conditions that marginalize migrant students, tend to reproduce them, hampering the possibilities of building inclusive and sustained trajectories.

In turn, the sustainability of educational trajectories is also affected by the way in which schools face the migratory phenomenon. From the teaching field, Flanagan et al. (2021) and Muñoz et al. (2021) agree that the educational inclusion of migrant students depends, to a great extent, on the individual disposition of teachers, rather than on a coordinated institutional policy. In this regard, Contreras (2021) indicates that, although teachers value the diversity of migrant students, their own learning and other structural limitations make it difficult to build continuous relationships. This dependence on a teacher's goodwill creates a scenario where permanence is uncertain, especially when interpersonal relationships fail to consolidate or when cultural tensions are not addressed from a teaching perspective (Valdés, et al., 2019; Vera & Riquelme, 2022).

Meanwhile, from an institutional perspective, research by Gómez and Sepúlveda (2022) on school leadership underscores that the absence of strategies for strengthening the bonds between school stakeholders leaves inclusion in the hands of sporadic efforts that have limited impact. For Valdés et al. (2024), this is explained by the fact that the Chilean public policy has established a "self-taught school" (p. 263) where the responsibility for migrant inclusion lies exclusively with the establishments, without actual state support or clear teaching guidelines. This forced autonomy not only generates disparate and fragmented responses but also increases the institutional and teaching burden in already vulnerable contexts.

When institutional responsibility for migrant inclusion is displaced onto schools and its implementation depends on teacher goodwill, family relationships become relevant as alternative support for the school permanence of migrant students (Bartlett & Bajaj, 2023; Mendoza et al., 2024). Consistent with this, the study on “funds of knowledge” conducted by Lamas and Bachmann (2024) shows how the valuation of family knowledge strengthens the school-family bond, allowing for deeper and more significant inclusion. This approach implies a shift from “folklorizing” practices, understood as those that reduce migrant cultures to symbolic or superficial expression, towards curricular proposals that acknowledge and legitimize the trajectories of migrant lives. Despite this, the potential is limited by the absence of intercultural teacher training and by the persistence of administrative barriers that hinder access to institutional benefits and support (Poblete & Galaz, 2017). A clear example of this is the Temporary School Identifier (in Spanish, Identificador Provisorio Escolar or IPE) for migrant students, a device intended to enable enrollment for those without a national ID; however, its scope is limited, as its effective use and follow-up depend largely on local school initiatives (Poblete & Moraru, 2020).

From a structural perspective, this reveals that the conditions for sustained participation in schooling are not given by default but should be built day by day. In contexts where the state does not guarantee the right to education equitably, schools become a place of daily struggles for permanence, where symbolic acknowledgement is as important as material support. Therefore, advancing towards inclusive educational trajectories requires overcoming the assimilationist approach and promoting an intercultural model based on respect for identity and the guarantee of rights (Contreras, 2021; Flanagan et al., 2021; Poblete, 2021). Staying at school, in light of the above, is a daily success and not inherently guaranteed; thus, a radical transformation is urgently needed in the design, implementation, and assessment of educational policies in human mobility contexts.

Conceptual Framework

Migration, understood as a social and relational process (Klarenbeek, 2024), cannot be examined solely through administrative indicators. This perspective is particularly relevant in educational settings, where the trajectories of migrant students are shaped in contexts in which institutional positions, family expectations, teaching practices, and experiences of belonging intersect (Choi et al., 2025; Peras & Bezjak, 2025). To elucidate this complexity, it is necessary to adopt a conceptual framework capable of addressing both the structures that organize school life and the cultural resources that educational communities mobilize to navigate it. Accordingly, this study draws on two complementary perspectives: Bourdieu’s notion of field and cultural capital and Yosso’s framework of community cultural wealth.

Following Bourdieu (1990; 1993), schools constitute a social field in which actors occupy differentiated positions depending on the resources or forms of power they possess. Within this field, certain forms of capital—such as mastery of school-relevant cultural codes, familiarity with dominant communication styles, or the ability to navigate educational bureaucracies—gain greater legitimacy than others. These dynamics generate tensions for migrant students, whose educational experiences are shaped by implicit norms, performance expectations, and institutional mechanisms that often fail to acknowledge their prior trajectories. Consequently, school permanence is articulated through processes of recognition and exclusion that exceed formal access and become embedded in contextualized power relations.

Reducing migrant experience to a position of disadvantage, however, reproduces deficit views. To avoid this, the study engages with Yosso's (2005) proposal that racialized communities sustain their social participation through a set of cultural resources that schools typically fail to recognize. These resources include families' aspirations toward the future (aspirational capital), networks of care and knowledge transmission (familial capital), community bonds that facilitate access to information and opportunities (social capital), the ability to navigate unfamiliar institutional environments (navigational capital), and strategies of resistance to exclusionary experiences (resistant capital).

For migrant students, these forms of capital do not operate as substitutes for public policy; rather, they constitute an assemblage that enables them to confront inequality, respond to institutional gaps, and negotiate the academic and normative demands prescribed by schools. Thus, school permanence cannot be explained by an individual willingness to "not drop out," but by the capacity to activate these resources in interaction with teachers, psychosocial teams, and school networks (Nakhaie et al., 2022). This perspective allows school permanence to be examined through the relational processes and concrete practices that foster—or disrupt—educational continuity in highly vulnerable contexts.

Methods

This study consists of original research, different from previous work by the same author on the school retention of migrant students (Mendoza et al., 2024). Compared with the previous study that was centered on the perceptions of teachers and management teams from four public establishments from the Valparaíso region, this new investigation was designed, from its conception, to address school permanence as a situated and relational process with a more comprehensive orientation. To this end, in addition to working with two different high schools (selected based on specific criteria that will be explained below), the voices of migrant students and their families were actively incorporated, as well as those of teachers and professionals from the school system. This design not only

broadens the empirical scope but also allows for a deeper examination of the processes that shape school trajectories from a situated teaching perspective.

In this way, and to meet the research objective, a qualitative perspective was adopted, which focuses on understanding the phenomena under study from the participants' experiences (Maxwell, 2019). From a phenomenological approach (Yin, 2018), the study sought to capture how school permanence is experienced and interpreted by migrant students, their families, and school professionals, emphasizing the meanings attributed to their trajectories. Regarding sample selection, the study was carried out in the Valparaíso region of Chile, the third area with the highest migrant population after Santiago and Antofagasta (MINEDUC, 2025a).This decision stems first from the need for a non-centralized view of the migration phenomenon in the educational context and second from the fact that the higher education institution with which the researcher of this study is affiliated has several agreements with high schools in the region, which ensured the feasibility of the fieldwork.

Consistent with this methodological positioning, using intentional sampling (Flick, 2015), secondary education establishments from the municipality of Valparaíso, Chile that met the following criteria were selected: (1) high schools under the jurisdiction of the Public Education Local Service (in Spanish, SLEP) with the modalities of vocational-technical or scientific-humanistic tracks; (2) and a School Vulnerability Index (originally in Spanish, Índice de Vulnerabilidad Escolar or IVE) of 75% or above according to the data from the National Board for School Aid and Scholarships (in Spanish, Junta Nacional de Auxilio Escolar y Becas or JUNAEB) available by 2024; (3) and high enrollment of foreign students (information directly provided by Valparaíso's SLEP). Four educational establishments met the criteria above; therefore, their management teams were invited via e-mail to participate in the study and informed about the objectives and scope of the project. However, only two high schools agreed to participate. Both schools share a relational institutional climate in which migrant students are primarily supported through informal interactions with homeroom teachers and psychosocial staff, rather than through formalized inclusion policies.

Once access to the schools was granted, a meeting was set with each principal and the head of the Technical-Pedagogical Unit in order to explain the study's procedures, present the informed consent and assent forms, and propose a Gantt chart for data collection. In both cases, the management teams appointed a member of the psychosocial staff—a social worker—to act as the liaison between the researcher and the school community. Through direct communication with these stakeholders, fieldwork was coordinated and took place onsite from May to November 2024. The delay in the data collection process resulted from last-minute cancellations due to unexpected institutional responsibilities within the schools, which required rescheduling.

Data Collection

The data production process employed the individual active-reflexive interview technique (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), in which interviewer and interviewee interact based on a flexible thematic script (see Appendix 1). In each establishment, members of the management team (principals and heads of the Technical-Pedagogical Unit, responsible for curriculum and instructional leadership), ninth-grade homeroom teachers, subject teachers, psychosocial staff (psychologists, social workers, and counselors), ninth-grade migrant students, and their families (father, mother, or legal guardian) were interviewed. Although both schools enrolled migrant students from Venezuelan, Colombian, and Haitian backgrounds, all student and family participants who agreed to participate in the study were Venezuelan. No participant reported explicit cases of interrupted schooling during the interviews.

Given the diversity of the roles, interview scripts were adapted to each category of participant but kept focus on the positive and negative experiences that shaped the educational trajectories of the migrant students in terms of school permanence, and were constructed based on the review of relevant literature. In total, 39 interviews were conducted: 23 at high school 1 and 16 at high school 2 (Table 1). These interactions took place inside the educational establishments, in classrooms especially designated for the purpose. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 50 minutes each. It should be noted that participants' interventions were treated with anonymity and confidentiality, following the recommendations and protocols suggested by the affiliated university's ethics committee. Therefore, while adults signed an informed consent, underage participants were required to have their family's approval as well as to sign an informed assent form. In addition, an alphanumeric coding system was established to identify the interviewees based on their role and high school of belonging: e.g., Student 1_High School 1; Psychologist_High School 2.

It is worth noting that the researcher entered the field as an external academic affiliated with a higher education institution. Access to the schools was mediated through existing institutional agreements, which facilitated entry while requiring particular care in interactions with migrant students and their families. To minimize interpretive bias, reflexive notes were kept throughout the interview process and the subsequent stages of analysis.

Table 1
Distribution of Participants by Educational Institution

Institution	Management Team	Teachers	Psychosocial Staff	Families	Students	Total
High School 1	2	5	3	5	8	**23**
High School 2	2	5	2	3	4	**16**
Overall total	4	10	5	8	12	**39**

Data Analysis

To understand how the school trajectories of migrant students take shape during the first year of secondary education in relation to their sustained presence in vulnerable public high schools, qualitative content analysis was selected (Flick, 2015). This technique is characterized by the use of categories that emerge inductively from the narratives analyzed, privileging participants' experiences as the primary interpretative source. In doing so, a dialogue is created between the data and existing literature, fostering an open and flexible interpretive framework. Based on this practice, and following the transcription and comprehensive reading of the interview corpus, an open coding phase was carried out using ATLAS.ti 25. This process involved identifying the first units of meaning linked to school permanence, as well as an initial conceptual approach to the phenomenon under study. Subsequently, the codes were grouped into broader thematic categories through thematic cycles, considering recurring patterns and relationships between fragments. From the emerging categories, those selected were the ones that, in addition to showing a higher density of fragments and associated codes, offered greater explanatory value for the overall interpretation of the phenomenon (see Appendix 2).

Results

The analysis of the interview data allowed for the identification of three categories that express the meanings attributed by migrant students and their families to school permanence and how these are recognized—and in some cases reinforced—by school stakeholders such as management staff, teachers, and support professionals. More than merely enumerating the causes of school retention or attrition, these categories explain how the act of "staying" in school is experienced, especially in the context of migrant trajectories marked by multiple challenges, aspirations, and family decisions. In this sense, school permanence is not perceived as a simple education indicator nor as arising from the implementation of an education policy but as a situated practice that intertwines personal expectations, family projects, and shared experiences. Therefore, the categories presented below aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of this educational phenomenon: (1) The future as a promise; (2) 'staying' as a sustained and uneven practice; and (3) the bond as an anchor.

The Future as a Promise

In this category, school permanence is revealed as a life projection built on the desire for stability, success, and validation of the migrant project. Therefore, permanence is not seen as mere regular attendance to class, but as a value-oriented practice through which migrant students and their families seek to

transform migration efforts into legitimate forms of progress within the school field. From this perspective, staying in school is for many the way of transforming migratory sacrifice and the effort to attend school into opportunities, autonomy, and, especially, dignity. The school, then, would not be an end in itself but a continuity link, a platform to achieve new goals whether in Chile or in other destinations. This is clearly reflected in the words of some students, who create permanence meanings associated with concrete and significant goals: “I hope to have many things as well. Well, the first thing that I’ve always wanted—after having my own things and becoming a professional—is to buy a house for my mom” (Student 1_High School 2).

These accounts do not reveal a passive school permanence but a commitment consistent with personal and professional goals. Such aspirations illustrate how migrant students mobilize long-term expectations as a form of aspirational capital, anchoring school permanence in the pursuit of future possibilities rather than in a present obligation. This future horizon is also expressed as a desire for continuity: “No, I want to study to be an early childhood teaching assistant and, maybe look for something else later” (Student 3_High School 1). In this way, school becomes a place of life reorganization, especially in the case of trajectories disrupted by forced migration: “If I was still there [Venezuela], I would not be studying” (Student 2_High School 2). As observed, these voices build school permanence with meaning: not as an imposition, but as a promise, a desire, and an assertion of a life project that migration forced them to reshape.

From the accounts of migrant families, continuity in the school trajectory is not only structured as an educational need but as a central component of the shared migratory process: “For her to become a nurse, to fulfill her dreams, so that all this effort is worth it” (Guardian 4_High School 1). This longing for family rebuilding, directed towards a better future with more opportunities, is marked by sacrifices and renunciations. Here, school permanence is sustained through familial capital—networks of care, reciprocity, and responsibility that frame schooling as a collective investment rather than an individual endeavor. In this context, the willingness of families to ensure the educational permanence of their children is frequently pressured by structural conditions of precarity. This problem is disclosed in the comments of one parent: “Another high school is closer for us, because to come here we need to take two buses, but I enrolled her here because it’s better. I want a good education for her” (Guardian 1_High School 1).

As a whole, the experiences shared by migrant students and their families show that continuity in the educational system represents a hopeful bet for the future. For many of them, attending high school is not only a duty or routine, but the possibility to access a more dignified, stable, and healing future: “Because I believe that studying in the future will help me somehow” (Student 1_High School 1). This logic exemplifies how permanence is linked to the capacity to navigate institutional settings, investing effort and resources to access the educational opportunities perceived as legitimate within the host society. This perspective is not only functional but deeply affective, as observed in the account of a guardian:

"My expectations are that she truly becomes a professional, that she feels good about what she wants to do for her own good" (Guardian 2_High School 2). Education is, consequently, the means to achieve not only personal fulfillment but also shared well-being, which is often associated with migration sacrifices.

The meaning attributed by the individuals that lead or encompass these school trajectories is complemented by the perspective of teachers, which interprets school permanence as a process marked by aspirations, discipline, and professional projection: "I would say, they are more optimistic, have more energy, and set some clear goals for themselves" (Teacher 1_High School 1). These perceptions indicate a positive appraisal of migrant students, who are seen as individuals that plan their future based on their commitment to their studies. Teachers identify a future-oriented disposition that they read as academic merit, reinforcing forms of capital recognized and legitimized by the school. For many teachers, this attitude is closely related with a family migratory process, where education is not only experienced as a social requirement but as a way of fulfillment and generational advancement: "This girl's mom always tells me: 'Teacher, she is going to get her technical degree here and then she's going to continue with another one.' That's the spirit that I see in these students and their families" (Teacher 3_High School 1).

Likewise, other school stakeholders acknowledge that Chilean schools represent an opportunity that was not always available in their countries of origin: "Normally, when I talk with them, they speak about their dreams, what they want to achieve in Chile, because they think that in their countries they wouldn't have had the opportunity to study" (Teacher 5_High School 2). In this context, the school acquires a structuring value to imagine and enable possible futures, as synthesized by a member of the psychosocial team: "If they have the chance to continue, obviously they do so, because for them it's very important to further their education" (Social worker_High School 2). In institutional narratives, permanence is understood as an avenue of mobility, reinforcing the school's position as a legitimate space for advancement within the educational field. From these voices, permanence becomes a bridge for social mobility, and, at the same time, a concrete expression of the commitment and value deposited on education by migrant students and their families.

'Staying' as a Sustained and Uneven Practice

In addition to the views that perceive school permanence as a promise for the future, the stories analyzed in this second category allow for a more situated and concrete understanding about school permanence, positioning it as a practice maintained amidst unequal conditions, daily conflicts, and scarce institutional support. This way of understanding permanence does not negate its value nor its desirability but frames it in a context where its realization depends, to a great extent, on the resources available, affective support networks and the ability of the different stakeholders to tackle sometimes invisible obstacles.

Under this logic, school permanence is no longer merely framed as a guaranteed condition but instead becomes a fragile process that must be continuously sustained by students themselves and their families, who often lack institutional support and protective social networks. From this perspective, "staying" at school does not constitute a direct consequence of formal inclusion but a continuous action that involves adaptations, efforts, and negotiations with daily life, often filled with uncertainty, anguish, and resignation. In the words of a teacher: "Man, when it comes to resources, I mean, it's very hard for me to ask them for something for the subject, because I see them struggling with money" (Teacher 2_High School 2). These economic difficulties, recognized from the adult world, are also assumed by migrant students, who need to deal with how the scarcity of family resources can affect some of their educational activities: "No, my mom sometimes doesn't have money for the Visual Arts materials, for example. She tells me, "Borrow some. I don't know.' But I feel ashamed and I don't ask anyone" (Student 2_High School 2).

The accounts above are only some examples of the conflict between today's pressing issues and educational projections. As a result, the need to contribute to the family economy, assume domestic responsibilities, or work irregular schedules are possible scenarios where schooling is subordinated to other priorities. As explained by a member of management: "They either provide care, have household chores, or even take care of siblings, and sometimes that makes it difficult for them to attend school regularly" (Management Member 2_High School 1). In this context, permanence is not experienced as a linear trajectory but as a process that can be disrupted by variables that often exceed individual agency and take a high personal and family toll, placing migrant students and their households in subordinated positions within the school space.

In addition to the above, institutional barriers reinforce the fragility of school continuity rather than facilitating the process. Difficulties in accessing state benefits, scarce information about support programs, and deficiencies in the implementation of inclusion strategies are elements that make the educational experience of migrant students complex. For example, support professionals acknowledge that the lack of family and community networks limits effective accompaniment. This silent marginalization, which is not based on a lack of rights but rather on the impossibility of exercising them, exacerbates the vulnerability of the people who have to support their education from a position of precarity, despite formally "being included." This is indicated by a member of the psychosocial team: "I haven't seen undocumented students, but I have seen students who cannot access benefits. So, I don't know up to what point being documented is useful for them " (Psychologist_ High School 2).

Meanwhile, the omission of institutional information indicates a lack of adequate orientation and a disconnect between the available mechanisms and their actual accessibility, which leaves many migrant students and their families without the support they need, restricting their access to the kinds of institutional resources that schools recognize as legitimate. As a guardian indicates: "My daughter has difficulties with math. I'm just now realizing that there is a School

Integration Project that she could attend and receive help. I was shown a very ordinary high school, without this type of help that my girl could have benefited from before" (Guardian 3_High School 2).

The teaching body also identifies structural limitations that hinder the effective accompaniment of these students: "We have an educational system that is very nice on paper but when it comes to implementation, it doesn't work. We don't know what the best strategies are to integrate them, so they don't leave the system " (Teacher 1_High School 2). This gap between design and execution translates into uncoordinated efforts that leave the school stakeholders without tools for sustaining inclusion in practice. As a result, the success or failure of school permanence often depends on both the adaptation capacity of the students themselves, their families, and the efforts of other educational stakeholders.

In turn, the affective dimension also has a significant incidence in this understanding of school permanence as a sustained practice. Besides academic performance, the possibility of building trust and belonging relationships in the school space is key to maintaining commitment to the educational trajectory. However, conditions are not always in place for these relationships to be established: "The truth is that I don't know why it's so hard for me, because I have gone through many situations at home, but I'm embarrassed to address them here at the school" (Student 4_High School 1). This reluctance to share personal aspects indicates an emotional barrier that weakens the bond with the school, especially when there are no safe spaces for listening, empathy, and support spaces established with significant adults.

The Bond as Anchor

Together with the structural factors already mentioned, experiences of school permanence are also nurtured—or weakened—by the quality of the bonds established in the school space. Therefore, staying in school is not an individual decision nor a solitary action, as it is supported, sustained, and enriched in relation to others. The bond then operates as an emotional, symbolic, and practical anchor for resisting abandonment, recovering a sense of belonging, and navigating the daily challenges of the school context. When these bonds are consolidated, schools become a significant space; when they do not, permanence can be threatened by experiences of marginalization and isolation.

This relational dimension is observed across the accounts of the different school stakeholders. For several teachers, the bonds generated between teachers and migrant students are fundamental to creating trust, support, and continuity. As indicated by a female teacher: "I'm not the type of teacher that gives them exercises and calls it a day. I sit next to the student, we talk, I listen to her" (Teacher 6_High School 1). This gesture of proximity not only enables academic monitoring but is a way of being at school that is not only limited to academic performance but also implies being welcomed. This same logic is asserted from the experience of

support professionals: “Although we do not always handle all the cases, the school climate team makes an effort to have spaces for open dialogue, especially with students who seem to be more alone” (Psychologists_ High School 1).

In turn, professionals in the area of counseling also highlight the role of peers in the building of these relationships: “Classmates are fundamental as they are the closest, the ones who listen to them, who cheer them up” (Counselor 1_High School 2). This statement shows that school permanence is not only reliant on the curriculum or the teaching body but also on the affective fabric built during the daily coexistence with other students. Therefore, for migrant students, closeness with their peers can be a source of horizontal support, cultural identification, and emotional stability. These networks reflect forms of social capital that allow students to maintain their trajectories even when other institutional resources are absent. This experience is confirmed by a student who, when asked about their current school experience, says: “Yes, extremely happy. I say that this is the life I want, I’m happy with my classmates and teachers” (Student 6_ High School 2).

Although peers play a relevant role, significant adult figures—such as teachers, homeroom teachers, and support professionals—can lead to decisive shifts in school trajectories. Particularly, the role of homeroom teachers is valued as a figure of closeness, stable reference, and an emotional support point. As indicated by a member of management: “All teachers, but especially homeroom teachers, have to be closely monitoring, supporting students, and conducting affective follow-up. This is what sustains many students” (Management Member 3, High School 1). This emotional availability is also expressed in the work of the psychosocial team, as shown by this account: “I had a student who wanted to drop out, but I talked to her many times. I told her she could count on me, that I was going to support her and, in the end, she decided to stay” (Social Worker _High School 1).

This type of intervention, despite not always being formalized, has a direct impact on the students’ trajectory and their decision to continue attending school; therefore, what sometimes prevents attrition is not a policy but a relationship. However, not all students are able to consolidate these bonds. As analyzed in the previous category, some people report having difficulties sharing their experiences, which shows that spaces for listening and accompaniment are not always guaranteed. These tensions do not invalidate the meaning of the bond but also show the fragility of the conditions for maintaining it, which in turn points to the urgency of deliberate practices that encourage it systematically. Therefore, the construction of relationships of trust should not be understood as an extra-pedagogical element but as a condition to sustain schooling in highly vulnerable contexts.

Nevertheless, the bond also acquires sense in contexts where the extended family is absent or dislocated, which is frequent in migratory experiences. In these cases, the school can assume a substitute or complementary role in terms of care and emotional containment: "Some students are here without their parents or only with an older sibling. So, they need a network, an adult reference. The schools

need to pay attention to that" (Management Member 2_ High School 1). This affective support role becomes particularly relevant when families cannot fulfill it due to structural reasons. Nevertheless, for this role to be effective, the relationship needs time, availability, and institutional conditions that allow teachers and support teams to conduct comprehensive accompaniment.

Discussion

The findings of this study challenge the instrumental view that associates school permanence with mere attendance. In fact, far from being an automatic guarantee, staying in school implies transiting complex scenarios where structural, affective, institutional, and teaching conditions intersect, all of which need constant support. Thus, permanence appears as a negotiated position within the school field rather than as an individual attribute, one that requires nurturing through significant relationships and institutional conditions that enable it over time. This interpretation agrees with Mendoza et al. (2024), who observe that, in addition to both family and school protective factors, conditions of high social vulnerability still persist. Consequently, they propose to replace explanations exclusively centered on individual resilience and instead understand permanence as a process conditioned by multiple contextual dimensions.

From this perspective, the category of *Future as a Promise* acquires a density that exceeds school aspirations. In this sense, the voices of students and their families frame permanence as a reparation strategy for uprooting and a way to legitimize the migratory project. This is in line with the findings of Lamas and Bachmann (2024), who document how the cultural and ethical capital of migrant families, especially the value attributed to educational effort, is projected in their school trajectories as a bet for the future. However, this promise operates unevenly, as the capacity to mobilize these resources is mediated by institutional recognition and the legitimacy assigned to different student positions. As shown by Díaz et al. (2023), this promise is not built under equal conditions as it is marked by marginalization, economic vulnerability, and the absence of a long-term support policy.

Furthermore, this study calls into question the scope of some public policies that have been presented as inclusion mechanisms. As observed by Poblete and Moraru (2020), instruments like the Temporary School Identifier, despite being effective in enabling administrative enrollment, have not been enough to ensure sustained educational trajectories. In our interviews, families report a lack of information and orientation, which agrees with Joiko's study (2019), which demonstrated that many migrant guardians learn "in the dark" how the Chilean educational system operates, thereby reproducing inequalities in access to opportunities.

The category of *Staying as a Sustained Practice* reveals this specific issue with stark clarity. School permanence would not be a result of efficient policies but

of family decisions in conflict with unfavorable economic, logistic, and institutional policies. This finding invites us to shift focus from the individual responsibility of families to public accountability that acknowledges the structural conditions that influence school trajectories. In line with Córdoba et al. (2022) and Galaz et al. (2021), this position challenges the technocratic concepts of inclusion, showing that, without systematic support devices, permanence becomes circumstantial, unequal, and, in many cases, unsustainable.

Unfortunately, the weight of school permanence lies on school communities, which often lack state support. As argued by Jiménez (2022), the neoliberal model has forced schools to develop "adaptative resistances" to sustain inclusion, but the data analyzed in this paper suggests that these practices—if they exist—are fragile, fragmented, and held together through individual efforts rather than institutional efforts. For instance, Aguilera (2023) shows how some teachers, from their own experiences of marginalization, deploy onboarding teaching strategies outside the traditional curriculum. However, without institutional recognition, these practices remain informal and constitute isolated responses rather than part of the school's legitimate repertoire, as indicated by Flanagan et al. (2021) and Muñoz et al. (2021).

The third category, *The Bond as an Anchor*, offers an analytical key to move beyond the conventional understanding of the teaching bond as simply emotional support. Although significant relationships emerge as a key factor to prevent dropout (Gómez & Sepúlveda, 2022; Mendoza et al., 2024; Mendoza & Ballesta, 2024), the findings of this study indicate that such bonds are not spontaneously generated but instead are deeply influenced by institutional, training, and discursive frameworks. According to Contreras (2021) and Stang et al. (2021), the limitations of teaching training and standardized school discourses restrict the possibilities of establishing genuine relationships with migrant students. Consequently, maintaining permanence does not only require affective presence but also structures that enable the recognition of bonds as a legitimate and necessary part of the school fabric.

In turn, peer relationships, especially between migrant students, emerge as a source of support often overlooked and undervalued by institutions. Although studies such as those by Campos (2021) and Vera and Riquelme (2022) show that prejudices, negative social representations, and identity conflicts can undermine self-esteem and a sense of belonging, this study revealed that the companionship of migrant peers is a fundamental affective support for those who want to "stay" in the educational system, as also observed by Mendoza et al. (2024). These networks operate as social capital, providing recognition and guidance that help students navigate the school field when formal resources are insufficient.

Finally, the findings prompt a debate on how schools implement inclusion. Rather than an articulated intercultural policy, a fragmented practice is observed, which is sustained by individual actions and scarce institutional support. As indicated by Valdés et al. (2024), Chilean schools act as though children are "self-taught" when it comes to migrant inclusion; as such, the schools assume multiple responsibilities, taking on roles beyond their pedagogical mandate, particularly in

social, emotional, and administrative domains, without having clear guidelines or technical support. In turn, Segovia and Rendón (2020) reinforce this criticism by indicating that, in many cases, foreign students are represented from a reductionist logic, whether folkloric or problematic, which perpetuates their position as “others” within the school system.

In summary, this study reasserts that the school permanence of migrant students is not a linear nor guaranteed trajectory, but a dynamic process shaped by structural and affective tensions. In light of the discourses that celebrate multiculturality as an added value, the findings presented in this study invite us to rethink inclusion policy not only in terms of access but from a perspective that acknowledges and supports the bonds, resources, and concrete conditions that make it possible to meaningfully stay in the school system. From this lens, educational permanence is not sustained by resilience discourses but by institutional recognition and the social and familial capital that migrant students and their families mobilize.

Conclusion

This study examined the meanings attributed to school permanence by migrant students, their families, and other educational stakeholders in the context of two public high schools in the region of Valparaíso, Chile. Permanence was not only expressed as an automatic condition linked to access but as an unstable process conditioned by structural, affective, and institutional factors. In the accounts analyzed, staying in school was an experience often sustained in scenarios of precarity and was accompanied by relationships that provided meaning, a sense of belonging, and future orientation.

The three analytical categories show that continuing in the educational system stems from the intersection of family projects, adaptation strategies, and personal efforts, but also under unequal conditions that are not always addressed with clarity by institutions. In this context, school communities experience a conflict between their real capacities and the normative expectations deposited on them by a system that does not provide enough resources to sustain inclusive processes in the long term.

Despite the contributions of this research, one of the main limitations of this study is its territorial and population scope. By being conducted in two high schools with a large number of ninth grade Venezuelan students, the findings do not capture the diversity of migrant trajectories present in other grades, regions, or nationalities. Nevertheless, the depth of the empirical work and the qualitative approach provide relevant elements to understand less explored dimensions of school permanence in educational environments characterized by high vulnerability.

Future research should deepen the analysis of institutional conditions that favor or hinder the school continuity of migrant students, especially in terms of

teacher training with an intercultural approach, the articulation of psychosocial support networks, and the design of school support strategies that are more coherent with the reality of this population. Likewise, the study opens up possibilities for longitudinal research aimed at observing how these trajectories evolve over time and what transformations are necessary for the school to guarantee a sense of belonging and educational justice for people who arrive at it due to migration.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Representative Interview Questions by Participant Type and Focus of Inquiry

Participant Type	Example Interview Questions	Main Focus of the Question
Families	How was your experience with enrollment and initial adaptation in the high school?	School Entry Experiences
	What factors helped or made it difficult for your child to adapt?	Family Perceptions and Concerns
	How do you value the education your child receives here?	Barriers and Facilitators of Adaptation
	What kind of support would you expect from the school if your child considered dropping out?	Expectations of School Support
Migrant Students	How has your experience in this high school been since you arrived?	Personal Adaptation Processes
	What aspects of the school helped you adapt better?	Support and Obstacles in School Life
	How has your relationship with teachers and peers influenced your decision to stay?	Role of Peers and Teachers
	What factors could lead a migrant student to leave school?	Perceptions of Risks of Dropping Out
Teachers	What has your experience been working with migrant students?	Teaching Challenges and Responses
	How do you adapt your classes to make them more inclusive?	Classroom Adjustments
	What signs do you observe that might indicate dropout risk?	Early Warning Indicators
	What strategies do you use (or could use) to promote student continuity?	Practices to Support Students
Psychosocial Team	How do you identify migrant students who need psychosocial support?	Detection Practices
	What interventions do you implement?	Forms of School Support
	How do you coordinate with teachers and leadership to prevent dropout?	Coordination Within the School
	How do you work with families to support permanence?	Family Involvement
School Leadership	What role do the school's mission and values play in student retention?	Institutional Priorities
	What strategies has the school implemented to address these challenges?	Schoolwide Initiatives
	How do you involve migrant families in decision-making?	Family Participation
	How effective have the implemented strategies been?	Evaluation of Actions

Note: The table presents only representative examples of interview questions due to the extensive nature of the full instruments.

Appendix 2: Categories, Codes, and Brief Descriptions of the Analytical Framework

Code: The Future as a Promise	
Category	Short Description
Migration as Investment	Education is seen as the way to give meaning and value to migration efforts.
Education as Pathway	Schooling functions as a step toward concrete goals (technical degree, profession, independence).
Family Mandate	Continuity is sustained by family expectations, responsibility and mutual support.
Dignity and Stability	School provides a way to rebuild disrupted life trajectories and pursue a dignified future.
Code: Staying as a Sustained and Uneven Practice	
Category	Short Description
Everyday Scarcity	Limited material resources interfere with participation, learning and school activities.
Family Burden	Domestic care, work and household duties compete with attendance and school continuity.
Institutional Gaps	Insufficient information, poor access to support and weak implementation hinder permanence.
Emotional Barriers	Shame, mistrust or a lack of safe spaces prevent students from asking for help.
Code: The Bond as Anchor	
Category	Short Description
Supportive Adults	Teachers and professionals who listen, follow-up and remain emotionally available.
Peer Companionship	Friendships and horizontal support that provide belonging and everyday encouragement.
Trust and Safe Spaces	Conditions that allow students to speak openly, feel acknowledged and seek support.
Substitute care	School becomes a reference of care when families are distant or fragmented.
Ongoing Accompaniment	Continuity of relationships over time sustains trajectories and prevents dropout.

Note: The table presents the core analytical categories and the condense emergent codes used to organize the analysis.

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