Interculturality in Greek Education: Practices and Challenges of Implementation

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Abstract

Intercultural education is an educational movement that aims to ensure all students have equal learning opportunities at school and in society. Intercultural education seeks to achieve a harmonious co-existence of all these different cultural groups. In intercultural education, diversity is deconstructed, and the boundaries of power between dominant and non-dominant groups are not fixed. The research aimed to study the views of primary and secondary school teachers on implementing interculturalism of immigrant/refugee students in Greek educational policy. Qualitative research through the semi-structured interview method was chosen for the data collection. The constructed interview guide was based on the literature on migration and its theoretical framework. The participants in the research were twenty-two primary and secondary school teachers. Eight of them were males, and fourteen were females. The results showed that most primary and secondary education teachers positively approached immigrant/refugee students in Greek education. Furthermore, teachers mentioned that the Greek language is essential in the educational inclusion of students from migrant and refugee backgrounds. However, at the same time, some teachers had negative attitudes based on ethnocentric elements. The inadequately organized educational policy mediated their mentioned views. Therefore, it is more than a necessity to establish learning strategies and educational practices based on an educational approach that transcends the mainstream cultural elements, enhances multilingualism and diversity of social identities, and yet seeks to provide equal opportunities and eliminate educational exclusions from groups of the student population experiencing school failure or school marginalization.
Keywords: Intercultural Education, Primary and Secondary School Teachers, Greek Educational System.

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural Education was introduced into the educational discourse in the USA in 1960 in an attempt by the official state to address the low performance of immigrant children (Androussou, 2000). Intercultural education is an educational movement that aims to ensure all students have equal learning opportunities at school and in society (Markou, 1997). The aim is not for immigrant students to develop knowledge and skills comparable to native students but to make general reformative changes in education and society. The changes are necessary to promote the acceptance and respect for the cultural elements of immigrants as egalitarian in the context of social justice (Markou, 1997). Intercultural education is "a program of egalitarian interaction of cultures to overcome their boundaries and form a transcultural identity" (Govaris, 2001, pp. 77–78). Intercultural education aims to achieve a harmonious co-existence of all these different cultural groups. In intercultural education, diversity is deconstructed, and the boundaries of power between dominant and non-dominant groups are not fixed. The formations of social groups are not based on the homogeneity of, e.g., ethnicity or social class, but are determined by all social categorizations as they intersect. The interpretation and analysis of any relations in a social structure and the emergence of its causes ensure processes of egalitarian expression and access of all (dominant and non-dominant) to social resources. The universality of a reality considered objective and including social inequalities between different groups is challenged. The questioning is posed in a discourse where relationships, concepts, and processes are redefined in the context of egalitarianism and

social justice (Mikander et al., 2018). Through the above methods, intercultural education aims to strengthen all students' social identity regardless of ethnic or other diverse elements and characteristics (Cummins, 2000; Govaris, 2001; Damanakis, 2005).

There are four basic principles of the intercultural model according to Essinger (1991 as cited in Georgogiannis, 1999; Markou, 1996): (a) empathy, i.e., decentralization from individuality and understanding the position of the "other" and its diversity; (b) solidarity; (c) respect for cultural diversity, and (d) the elimination of ethnocentric ways of reasoning and prejudices, for more effective communication of the different ethnopolitical groups. Intercultural education aims to eliminate the reproduction of educational inequalities that lead to social inequality (Damanakis, 2005; Markou, 1997). Nikolaou (2000) states that an intercultural model focuses on immigrant students and natives. It is based on cultural enrichment, overcoming ethnocentrism, and raising awareness because ignorance can lead to prejudice. The intercultural school ensures that all students, regardless of cultural background, have the same opportunities to learn and cultivates attitudes that provide equality among students (Nikolaou, 2000). As Garcia (2022) pointed out, "A truly just education for ALL must incorporate all language and cultural practices to transform the oppressive educational practices that minoritized groups have received… it must disrupt linguistic and cultural hierarchies" (p. 157).

Migrant's Inclusive Education Policy in Greece

The first Greek state legislation on including students from foreign schools in the Greek educational system can be found in the late 60s. From the initial stages of introducing legislation for foreign students, the Greek educational system did not care about including immigrant/refugee students. It is only concerned with legislation or at the level of implementation in educational practice with expatriate and returning students. Later, after the 1980s, the approach to the inclusion of immigrant students initially moved from the framework of the assimilationist model to a model that goes marginally beyond the limits of integration (Dafermakis, 2007).

Thus, the first regulations of the educational policy for the inclusion of immigrants were made in the 80s with the Ministerial Decision 1105/1980 and referred to the formation of the institution of reception classes and tutorial classes as a necessary policy for the integration of repatriates. Later in the early 90s, according to the Ministerial Decision 930/1994, the establishment and operation of reception and tutorial classes had additional support for integrating foreign students into the Greek educational system.

In the 1990s, there was a massive influx of immigrants from countries from the break- up of the Soviet Union. Thus, the educational policy applied in Greece is pushed towards including intercultural education as a model for organizing the school unit in compulsory and post-compulsory education. As a result, Law 2413/1996 is enacted, which has as its major transformation target the school of intercultural education. Law 2413/1996 recognizes the multiculturalism of Greek society. It establishes intercultural education in the Greek educational system—Ministerial Decision 1789/1999 regulates teaching Greek as a second foreign language and as a necessary qualification for teachers of intercultural education units. At the same time, the operation of the reception classes is also changed, as students who do not know the Greek language are included in type 1 classes. In contrast, in type 2 classes, students with sufficient knowledge of Greek are included.

With the new Interdisciplinary Unified Curriculum Framework (I.U.C.F.), the Ministry of Education adopted intercultural education. In I.U.C.F., it is recognized that new social subjects must develop skills of living with and respecting diversity and its culture and language and maintain their ethnic and cultural identity (Dafermakis, 2007). As a result, Greek immigration legislation is beginning to align with the general framework of European policy. More specifically, Law 3386/2005 introduces clear improvements compared to previous laws. Furthermore, in 2010, with Law 3879, the Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) started functioning.

After 2015, due to the massive movement of migrants, especially refugees, the Greek state enacted more detailed legislation to establish structures to deal with this large influx of migration

and defined intercultural education. Law 4415/2016, Article 20, par 1, mentions that intercultural education concerns interactions "between different cultural groups to remove inequalities and social exclusion." In addition, Article 21 of the law mentioned above defines the aims of intercultural education with the main goals of strengthening the democratic functioning of the school and tackling discrimination in the school environment. The Ministerial Decision 131024/D1/2016 established the Reception Centres for the Education of Refugees ZEP (D.Y.E.P. ZEP). The D.Y.E.P. ZEPs compensate refugee students' educational needs and function on a pre-entry basis. Law 4547/2018 in Articles 71–82 defines the categories of refugee students receiving education, the forms of education, the method of registration and attendance at the ZPEs, their functioning and responsibilities in them, the method of choosing and the duties of the Refugee Education Coordinators, the staffing of the ZPEs by teachers and their supervision and pedagogical guidance. At the same time, the enriching use of languages is supported through the cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary approach. It can be identified in various curricula in the Greek educational system. Still, there is a different approach between levels or curricula in the same or other programs. (Institute of Educational Policy [IEP], 2023). Despite the continuous arrangements for refugee centers, bureaucratic constraints are making the educational inclusion of these students harder. Thus, the definition of a minimum number of refugee children, the lack of support in the language field, the delayed staffing and operation of the centers, and local reactions in school settings are among the issues that affect the inclusion processes and are not effectively tackled by the institutional framework (Tramountanis, 2022).

The Greek educational system has the characteristics of a monolithic and centrally coordinated bureaucratic system, where the curricula, despite the innovative reformist concept of diversity in the Greek Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, emphasize a monocultural approach in all academic disciplines, failing to recognize the necessity of teaching foreign native languages. At the same time, the cultural elements of immigrant/refugee students should be considered since more than the existing texts are needed to highlight them. Thus, educational policy is based on a monolingual and monocultural approach, where different cultures during the learning process are silenced, marginalized, and ultimately not considered (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2011; Karananou et al., 2022). As a result, students whose cultural capital is different from that of the Greek educational system are often excluded from having access to essential aspects of the knowledge capital since the only way out is to internalize the dominant cultural elements of the Greek school (Androulakis et al., 2018; Chatzisotiriou & Xenophontos, 2014; Kessidou, 2008).

Statistical Data on Migration Influxes into Greece

Since 1990, Greece, which encourages migration, has become the host country for ex-socialist countries' migrants. The first significant influx of migrants came from Albania in 1990-1996, where unskilled migrants were recorded, followed in 1996- 2001 by migration flows from the Soviet Union, Pakistan, and India (Gemi et al., 2010). As Georgoulas (2003) states, Greece seemed unprepared for the large influx of economic migrants. The number of migrants who came to Greece cannot be estimated because most migrants entered Greece without official authorization. However, using data from the 2001 census, it is estimated that the number of immigrants residing in Greece in 2001 was 630,000 more than in 1991. Also, the nationalities of origin of migrants were twenty-seven according to the 2001 census, with Albanians ranked first (55.67%), followed by countries such as Bulgaria (4.67%), Georgia, and Romania (2.90%) with an extensive range of percentages. At the bottom of the rankings were migrants from Syria (0.71%) and Bangladesh (0.62%) (Haliapa, 2009). Regarding the gender of migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, India, and Egypt, the percentage of males was 80%, while the rate of male migrants was also high from Albania and Romania (60%). In contrast to the above countries, women are more than men in the flows from countries such as Ukraine, Philippines, and Moldova (70%) as well as from Bulgaria, Georgia, Russia, and Poland (50-60%) (Haliapa, 2009).

Migration flows to Greece continued into the 21st century. In the years between 2006 and

2015, according to data from the Ministry of Interior, Greece received around 1.8 million migrants and refugees. Between 2006-2011, 50% of these migration flows consisted mainly of economic migrants from Albania, while in the period 2012-2015; migrants came from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (Karkouli, 2016). During 2013-2017, 121,467 people applied for asylum, most from Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Albania. The number of refugees in 2014-2019 is estimated at 1,068,240 people. The migration wave culminated in 2015 when inflows were estimated at 861,630 people, most of whom moved by sea. In recent years, the number of migration flows has tended to have a downward trend. For example 2018, there were only 50,508 arrivals in 2019, 55,348 (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy [ELIAMEP], 2017).

This decline in migrant inflows continued in 2020 and 2021. Characteristically, in the first five months of 2020, there was a 68% drop in inflows. In May 2020, data from the Ministry of Immigration and Asylum (2021) indicated a 42% decrease in migrant arrivals compared to April 2020. Departures also increased in 2021 compared to arrivals (4,951 departures compared to 2,981). In 2020, the arrivals in the first five months in the Aegean islands and Evros were 9,421 migrants, while in the corresponding period of 2021; there was a significant drop of 68% (2,981 arrivals).

Regarding the school inclusion of refugee students, according to data from the Ministry of Education, in the school year 2018-2019, the total number of refugee students in all grades of education was 12,867 students. Among them, 4,577 students attend D.Y.E.P. ZEP, 4,050 students attend reception classes, and the total number of students attending schools with no reception classes was 4,240 students. Therefore, the total number of students attending reception classes in primary and secondary schools during the same school year is 4,050. These include 1,774 students in primary schools, 807 in secondary schools, and 1,469 upper secondary schools. According to data from "My School," a database system for Greek schools, in June 2019, the total number of students enrolled in D.Y.E.P. ZEP in primary and secondary education was 4,577. Of these, 1,506 students were enrolled in pre-primary education, 2,267 in primary, and 804 in secondary education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Greek studies regarding the inclusion of migrant students, the majority of primary and secondary school teachers adopted a positive attitude (Sgoura et al., 2018; Theodorou, 2011), as well as the preservation of cultural elements, such as their native language (Gkaintartzi et al., 2015; Griva & Chostelidou, 2012; Mitits, 2018). However, in other empirical studies, teachers believe that the coexistence of migrant students in school should be based only on learning the Greek language (Fotiadou & Mattheoudakis, 2019; Sakka, 2010) because the lack of knowledge of it causes problems in social and learning inclusion for migrant students (Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017; Gkaintartzi et al., 2015; Gogonas, 2007. Mattheoudaki et al., 2017). Research in the prefecture of Achaia (Greece) among primary and secondary school teachers revealed limited inclusion of immigrants. Still, the teachers were positive about including these children in the Greek educational system. In a study by Sakka (2010) in the prefecture of Pella (Greece), it was evident that primary school teachers were willing and stated to have a positive attitude toward refugee students, claimed that through their experiences and knowledge, they would help native and migrant students coexist in the classroom and argued the importance of acquiring the Greek language from these students as the only language they should use in school (Sakka, 2010). Another study in the prefecture of Achaia (Greece) showed that the school achievement of students with an immigrant or refugee background, especially learning the language of the host country, is their responsibility, a fact reinforced further by stereotypical perceptions of teachers with inadequate training (Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017). In a survey conducted during the school years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 in the region of Thessaly (Greece), teachers stated that the challenges faced by students with a migrant or refugee background at school are the outcome of their lack of knowledge of the Greek language (Gkaintartzi et al., 2015). Another study conducted among primary school teachers in Thessaloniki, Athens, and Ioannina (Greece) showed that half favored bilingualism and had a positive attitude toward its benefit. In contrast, the other half were more conservative and did not show such a positive attitude

towards adopting new practices (Mattheoudakis et al., 2017). Mitits (2018), in a study in Thrace (Greece), in schools of primary and secondary education, showed that teachers claimed that maintaining their mother tongue would help these children preserve their culture and that the teachers themselves would like to know more about this language (Mitits, 2018). Also, in teachers' opinions, there are mentions of the lack of infrastructure (Katsigianni & Kaila, 2019; Papachristos, 2011) and that teachers do not have the appropriate competency and training to deal with such learning environments (Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017; Papapostolou et al., 2020; Zotou, 2017). A characteristic example is a study in Volos and Lamia (Greece), where a lack of teacher training and poor infrastructure is noted (Mogli et al., 2020).

The above review of the relevant literature concerning research on including students with an immigrant or refugee background in the Greek educational system revealed insufficient data for islands such as Lesvos, Chios, Samos, and Leros (Greece). The present study aimed to research the views of primary and secondary school teachers from the above islands on implementing interculturalism for students with immigrant/refugee backgrounds in Greek educational policy.

Method Participants

The interviewees were selected during the academic year 2020-2021 by using criterion sampling. This method selects participants from a population, not randomly but according to specific criteria (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of teachers was based on the criteria that they all worked in primary and secondary schools and interacted in the teaching context with migrant or refugee students and that they were located on Greek islands (Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros), which received the main influx of migrants after 2015. The islands in the study are seen as a 'gateway' for migrants and refugees to Greece and Europe (Petrakou & Iosifidis, 2012; Petrakou, 2019). Furthermore, the increasing flow of migrants from Asia and Africa in recent years has often highlighted the 'synergy' of Greek and European institutions (Troubeta, 2012). The necessity of the research was that in these islands, there is insufficient research on the functioning of school structures regarding migrants and refugees, as well as the views of teachers, and that a considerable period has passed since the first arrival of the last migrant influx to assess the opinions of teachers. In addition, the research supplements data from earlier studies in other areas of Greece (e.g., Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017; Gkaintartzi et al., 2015; Mitits, 2018; Sgoura et al., 2018).

Table 1: Participants Demographic Characteristics

Participants	Discipline	Gender	Qualification	Years of service
S1	Primary school teacher	Male	Bachelor	32
S2	Language and Literature	Female	Bachelor & master	10
S3	Gym teacher	Male	Bachelor	15
S4	Primary school teacher	Female	Bachelor	24
S5	Mathematician	Female	Bachelor & PhD.	28
S6	Nurse	Female	Bachelor	4
S7	Primary school teacher	Male	Bachelor & master	8
S8	Mathematician	Female	Bachelor	16
S9	Primary school teacher	Female	Bachelor	12
S10	Gym teacher	Female	Bachelor & PhD.	5
S11	Language and Literature	Male	Bachelor & master	14
S12	Language and Literature	Female	Bachelor	1
S13	Primary school teacher	Female	Bachelor	8
S14	Mathematician	Male	Bachelor & master	11
S15	Language and Literature	Female	Bachelor	9
S16	Nurse	Female	Bachelor	8
S17	Mathematician	Male	Bachelor	3
S18	Primary school teacher	Female	Bachelor	7

S19	Primary school teacher	Female	Bachelor & master	9
S20	Language and Literature	Male	Bachelor & master	11
S21	Primary school teacher	Female	Bachelor	2
S22	Mathematician	Male	Bachelor	7

The participants in the research were twenty-two teachers from eight primary and six secondary schools. Eight were males, and fourteen were females, with many years of experience in public schools. In addition, ten teachers worked in Lesvos, six in Chios, four in Samos, and two in Leros. At the same time, their qualification and the length of contact with migrants was considered a critical factor. Therefore, the discipline's teachers who were selected for the research were: 8 primary school teachers, five teachers of language and literature, and five mathematicians, as they spend more hours in classes with migrants, but also disciplines such as two gym teachers and two nurses from vocational schools, who work in schools with migrants. The teachers participating in the research were permanent and substitute teachers with experience ranging from 1-32 years (Table 1).

Research Tool

For the data collection of the research, qualitative research through the semi-structured interview method was chosen because it is a discussion organized through two main participants, the interviewer and the interviewee, as well as the in-depth analysis of a social phenomenon through the discourse of individuals (Iosifidis, 2003; Tsiolis, 2018). The constructed interview guide was based on the literature on migration and its theoretical framework, as it was analyzed in the first part of the paper. In the first part of the interview guide, the questions referred to teachers' conceptualizations of migration, its causes, its characteristics, and their views on the social inclusion of migrants. More specifically, the questions were of the type: "What does the concept of migration mean to you?" and "What are the reasons and causes of migration?" The second part of the guide included questions related to teachers' views on including immigrant/refugee students and the implemented educational policy. More specifically, the questions included on educational policy were of the following form: "What is your opinion on the state's intention to include the children of migrant or refugee background into education in Greek schools?" "To what extent is it considered that there are sufficient, qualified staffs to deal with such situations?"

The Procedure of Research and Data Analysis

The research was conducted from November 2020 to March 2021. The interviews lasted approximately 35-35 minutes each. During the interviews, participants were informed about ethical issues (anonymity, confidentiality, recording objectivity, etc.) and signed the consent form. Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Based on the research participants' discussion and conceptualization, we constructed categories and subcategories to explore the realities in schools where migrants and refugees are included. Thus, after the interviews were transcribed, they were coded, highlighting the categorizations of the social phenomenon through the teachers' conceptualizations (Iosifidis, 2003; Tsiolis, 2018).

In addition, research limitations in using the qualitative method are that it is a small sample, characterized by a relatively limited generalization and comparison possibilities and that the participation or involvement of the researcher may influence the characteristics of the social phenomenon studied. Moreover, the method of selection of participants does not ensure representativeness. Nevertheless, examining different types of cases is very helpful, a fact that is regarded as essential for qualitative research and highlighting individual characteristics (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tsiolis, 2018). Furthermore, the results refer to a specific geographical area, four Aegean islands in Greece, and the research was conducted among particular categories of teachers and schools on these islands.

The non-generalizability of the results and the limited geographical coverage of the research raise the necessity for quantitative research, which will establish the generalization of results in the

Greek area. Furthermore, extending the research to all education levels and the participation of additional teachers with different subjects is essential. At the same time, further research on this topic would also help to achieve a comparative study between island regions and urban centers and a comparative study between Mediterranean countries.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of the research conducted among teachers, we present their opinions on the educational inclusion of migrant and refugee students and the existing educational policy as they emerged from the thematic analysis.

Interculturality

According to our research findings, teachers mentioned that inclusion requires the availability of an intercultural school, which needs to be sufficiently implemented in Greece. They referred to its characteristics emphasizing the reciprocity of mutual cultural exchange, the acceptance of history, and the cultural elements of immigrants and refugees. Unfortunately, interculturality is lacking in Greece and is a utopia for the Greek school. As the participants stated:

*S11: For them to be included, there should be an intercultural education system lacking in Greece.

*S2:...they should enter the schools, the Greek schools, to learn the Greek culture and give things from their own culture so that there is a coexistence in the groups, an interaction, a cooperation that will pay off later, and

*S3: I do not believe that it can be done in Greece directly, but I believe that it is a utopia, and I believe in it.

These positive views are found in Greek and international literature (Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017; Kast & Schwab, 2023; Klein, 2017; Kurbegovic, 2016; Saklan & Erginer, 2017). Most teachers are dealing with migration issues, with an understanding of the multicultural environment that is emerging in the post-modern era. Facing diversity with solidarity and empathy is dominant in their discourse, and their conceptualization derives from their interaction with migrant populations since the 1990s. They have not experienced fear and threat, their social identity contains no racist dimensions, and their attitude emphasizes the education project for all. Their perception of the above is similar to the distance of the proximity of social groups.

Consequences of Intercultural Inclusion

Teachers considered that educational inclusion and intercultural interaction have positive effects, broaden horizons, and support social development. Besides, children can learn and be included in society because they are still building their character and personality. Intercultural communication fosters equitable interaction between individuals to overcome their boundaries and form a transcultural identity (Govaris, 2001; Roiha & Sommier, 2021). In intercultural education, the establishment of social relations with "others" is facilitated and supports an education that has a focus on the harmonious coexistence of different cultures and the elimination of prejudice and racism (Cummins, 2000; Damanakis, 2005; Gorski, 2008; Markou, 1997; Nikolaou, 2000). Intercultural education conceptualizes school as part of the social context where students, as non-passive beings, act, influence, and are affected by their cultural elements (Cummins, 2000). As the participants stated:

*S2: I believe that mixing with other cultures opens up horizons, and I think it is positive to mix children from different cultures and civilizations.

*S8: Greek children will also be allowed to learn, to get to know the culture of their friends, because I believe that these children will become their friends, their customs, their traditions; this does not mean, of course, that we will embrace them and that we will make them our own experiences, everyone has their own culture, their traditions, their customs, so that they will have the opportunity to get to know each other better and understand each other better.

Inclusion Strategies

Most teachers, about the educational policies of immigrant/refugees students' inclusion, mentioned: (a) the formation of a culture of acceptance and recognition of diversity, (b) the inclusion of intercultural elements in school programs, and (c) the establishment of flexible programs and their adaptation to the needs of all students. Teachers argued that the curriculum needs to have the necessary flexibility and recognize the cultural needs of students with immigrant or refugee backgrounds. In addition, acculturation processes shape the inclusion conditions and the status of individuals in the host societies (Shiraev & Levy, 2018). In line with their views on interculturality, teachers recognized the importance of including the cultural elements of immigrants and refugees in the curricula and the flexibility necessary for teaching disciplines in Greek schools. These data align with the positivity expressed in other research on including immigrants and refugees (Gkaintartzi et al., 2015; Griva & Chostelidou, 2012; Mitits, 2018). As the participants stated:

*S4: The child has to form his own culture first, a clear culture; it is a big problem because it creates confusion among children, and

*S15: This is difficult; teaching must be shaped to be flexible with educational programs...

*S6: There should be an inclusion of cultural elements of these peoples in our country's textbooks because this will be a way to get to know these people better and, in this sense, to coexist more peacefully and better with these people.

*S18: It would be good if the humanities-based subjects, that is, those that have to do with religion, language, and literature, could be given an intercultural character ... So, I can imagine a future school where the textbooks will have a new, more intercultural content and will be an opportunity better to understand people, cultures, countries, etc.

Interculturality and Implementation Challenges

Despite the positive attitude of most teachers towards inclusion and the educational advantages of intercultural education, they argued that initially, migrant students should learn Greek from qualified teachers because only with the necessary language skills will they be able to have equal opportunities with native students. Understanding the host country's language is the main barrier to inclusion for teachers. As the participants stated:

*S16: To teach them the Greek language,... since they will be staying here, I think it is essential that they learn the Greek language, get in touch with the culture they will live in, and of course learn English, S14: E with the aim that at least in the integration class these people will be in and that these children can slowly integrate linguistically into the school environment because how will they attend Greek if they do not get over the language...

*S13:   i.e., the creation of small groups of 6 or 7 people after school hours to learn the Greek language, with the help of translators...

Teachers' attitude towards the native language of immigrant/refugees students and their strong perception that the acquisition of the Greek language is a critical factor of inclusion, a finding also noted in other studies (Gkaintartzi et al., 2016), does not attribute to the teachers' majority the characteristics of an intercultural attitude, but rather a monolingual and multicultural approach (Sella-Mazi, 2015). The responsibility is transferred to students with an immigrant or refugee background, and they need to make more effort to reach the educational level of the monolingual students in their class (Tourtouras, 2017). In addition, migrants are treated as passersby and guests, as temporary, a feeling linked to the refusal of equal coexistence, accepting diversity, and establishing cooperation contexts (Savvakis, 2012).

Their views are more influenced by the issues that emerge on a teaching and pedagogical level in everyday practice due to their inadequacy and lack of organized training and education in managing bilingual students (Katsigianni & Kaila, 2019; Papachristos, 2011). The educational policy on language issues in the Greek educational system mediates their views. Its monocultural approach and refusal to recognize the necessity of teaching other native languages also shape a largely

monolingual policy. Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD, 2015) research data documented that a percentage of fewer than 10% of countries worldwide offered the native language of immigrant/refugee students in their formal education system.

Also, some teachers were against the immediate inclusion of students with an immigrant or refugee background, arguing that they initially need to be enrolled in intensive courses and become familiar with the language of the host country and the curriculum, as well as to be "healthy" (e.g., physical hygiene, vaccinations). As the participants stated:

*S20: ... I believe that … intensive lessons will be given to migrant children, especially those who will be older as they will have to understand the language and integrate into society and at the level of the lessons", and

*S17 the child, the migrant child, will come to school, and he will be taken care of, he will live in a house, he will have had his vaccinations...

Furthermore, teachers argued that the education system handled many issues sloppily and inadequately. As the participants stated:

*S10: this was done sloppily, without any planning, and has brought too many problems to migrant and native children", and

*S6: Our classes are huge, we work with 25 classes, ... for an area in Menidi, where things are challenging then we talk about such uneven classes in terms of educational level, issues of dyslexia, disorders, attention deficit disorder...

In addition, the heterogeneous structure of the migrant student population, which does not facilitate the learning coping processes, and the teaching staff's insufficient preparation in intercultural education are also obstacles. As the participants stated:

*S13: ... we were not prepared as teachers to welcome such groups we had a general education...

*S19: ...The thing is that I think integration will be very, very, very difficult because there are so many problems. First of all, there is the origin of the immigrants; they come from a huge number of countries that are different from each other; they have different cultural standards, social values, different languages, different religions, and different beliefs; it is tough, I think.

As mentioned above, some teachers: (a) referred to only partial inclusion of the cultural elements of migrants and refugees, (b) was against the immediate inclusion of students with migrant or refugee background, indicating that they should first be given intensive lessons and become familiar, mainly, with the host country's language, as well as being 'healthy' (e.g., physical hygiene, vaccinations). They also noted that the achievement of native students may be affected. These views are found in research in previous decades, where ethnocentrism is embedded in teachers' perceptions (Damanakis, 1987; Nakas, 1994; Nikolaou, 2000). These perceptions and the fear and threat the teachers in our study may have experienced are expressed as issues with acquiring the dominant language, hindering their social and educational adjustment (see Cummins, 2000), or as school health issues. Moreover, in the post-modern era, several times, the stereotypical treatment of diversity, of the 'foreigner,' is addressed in terms of cultural superiority (Christopoulos, 2002), and language and social habits are instrumentalized for the incorporation (or even assimilation) of immigrants and refugees. The above is facilitated not only by the monolingualism of the educational system but is exacerbated by its inadequate organizational structure (e.g., overcrowded classes, unqualified staff) and the intercultural inadequacy and unpreparedness of the teaching staff due to the lack of intercultural education and training (in-school or not), to deal with the needs of students with an immigrant or refugee background. Moreover, the recent regulations on the D.Y.E.P. ZEP and the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the education system further emphasize education's monolingual, monocultural, and ethnocentric nature, as no native language is taught. At the same time, these structures operate in different classrooms and at other times from the mainstream education system.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to research teachers' views of primary and secondary education on

implementing interculturalism of immigrant/refugee students in Greek educational policy. Based on the findings mentioned above, considering the limitations of the qualitative research, most of the teachers in our study have a positive approach to including migrant and refugee students in education because it is their right and has positive implications for all students' social and educational development. However, there are also opposing voices to inclusion, mainly related to the difficulties existing within the educational system (non-flexibility of programs, inadequate structures, insufficient training). The most critical barrier to inclusion is the bilingualism of migrant and refugee students, which affects all teachers. These views are related to stereotypical perceptions and ethnocentric dimensions. An essential role in the formation of teachers' conceptualizations is therefore played by teachers' social identity concerning the cultural profile of migrants and refugees (bilingualism, different cultural elements), the context of increased migratory flows, and the way the state mechanism addresses them (deficiencies in organizational structures, inadequate teacher training), as well as the position of the islands as a geographical 'border.' The research raises concerns about intercultural policies in the field of education. The discrepancies between the public and institutional discourse and teachers' school practices are evidenced in relevant research (Kantzou et al., 2017; Karanikola & Pitsiou, 2015; Koiliari, 2015; OECD, 2015; Sella-Mazi, 2015; Wiltgren, 2023). Also, teachers' lack of readiness and competence intensifies the problems in effectively managing such ethnic groups. The training and education of teachers are crucial factors in integrating migrant and refugee students (Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017; Papapostolou et al., 2020; Zotou, 2017).

Therefore, it is more than a necessity to establish learning strategies and educational practices based on an educational policy that transcends the mainstream cultural elements, enhances multilingualism and diversity of social identities, and yet seeks to provide equal opportunities and eliminate educational exclusions from groups of the student population experiencing school failure or school marginalization. Broader national studies should record these groups' needs, such as native students, parents, and teachers at all levels. Also, research topics to be addressed are the conflicting beliefs and practices regarding the use of languages and other cultural elements of origin of students in Greek schools, along with the monocultural and monolingual approach to diversity. Furthermore, the teachers' training, competence, readiness, personal perceptions and practices, and power relations between teachers and students in the school must be at the center of decisions (Bailey & Marsden, 2017). Policymakers and educational leaders must design curricula and educational materials (Malazonia et al., 2021; Mary et al., 2021) that recognize diversity and encompass objectives related to translingualism, solidarity, intercultural empathy, and the deconstruction of power relations in their target societies (Byram et al., 2023; Chaparro & Sepúlveda, 2022; Cummins, 2021; Marsden, 2017; Shohamy, 2022). A democratic education, a premise of the modern era, must be rooted in justice and success for all, and a decolonial education must be reflected in a non-hegemonic mindset (García et al., 2023). Based on the conclusions of the above research, we have outlined five implications: (a) the reduction of barriers at the individual and educational level for the inclusion of migrants with an immigrant or refugee background; (b) the enhancement of students' and teachers' intercultural competence skills; (c) the elimination of institutional and learning inequalities, as well as the deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices; (d) the development of an organized plan for the training of teachers concerning intercultural education, and (e) the principles of interculturality and co-teaching should drive interventions at primary and secondary prevention levels (Cummins, 2021; Flanagan-Bórquez et al., 2022; Giavrimis, 2022).

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