RESEARCH ARTICLE

Educational inclusion of migrants/refugees. Secondary school teachers' views

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Abstract

Including immigrants and refugees in the host countries' education is an educational process encompassing political, social, and individual processes. Teachers, as an essential factor in the socialisation and inclusion of students in a particular society, play a mediating role in including students with migrant and refugee backgrounds. This study aimed to research the views of secondary school teachers in the Greek educational system regarding including migrant and refugee students in it. The participants were fourteen secondary school teachers. Qualitative research was chosen as a design of the research to investigate the teachers' views deeply. A semi-structured interview was used as a research tool. The analysis of the teachers' interviews revealed that most are positive towards including migrant and refugee students. Still, they consider using the Greek language as a prerequisite for inclusion. However, due to issues related to biosomatic and educational factors, some of the study teachers reported objections. Insufficient and inadequate educational policy plays a mediating role in shaping the above arguments.

Keywords: Immigrants/refugees, inclusion, Greek Secondary education, Educators

Introduction

Migration is a diachronic, multidimensional, and multilevel phenomenon related to many aspects of social reality (e.g. politics, economy, culture). The 2015 migration crisis in Greece fostered changes in the social structure and raised issues related to including immigrants and refugees in the public debate (Giavrimis, 2023; Giavrimis, Dimitriadou, 2023).

Inclusion is perceived as a process that refers to the placement and adaptation of an individual within a social group. Social inclusion refers to a continuous dynamic process of managing social groups, highlighting social context dimensions (Zoniou & Sideri, 2000). Inclusion is related to intercultural interaction, where several social variables influence each other and shape the context (Berry, 2017). Members of society's attitudes towards the personal identity of the included people determine the inclusion factors. Cohesion and solidarity issues emerge as critical themes for analysis and discussion during inclusion processes. The context of social cohesion determines the mechanisms and policies of practices implemented in the social structure for inclusion. Including immigrants/refugees and the procedures practised in host countries shape social cohesion and the variables of the interactions of immigrants and refugees with natives (Kyprianou, 2011). Individuals who face challenges to inclusion face social exclusion and have no access to social resources.

School inclusion in the Greek literature is approached as an adaptive process of the educational system to manage students with diversity, equality and justice concerning accessibility to education and its content (Giavrimis, 2023; Vafea & Hountoumadi, 2017). Kyprianou (2011: 139) states that school inclusion is: "the body of pedagogical and educational theories and practices aimed at respecting and the recognition of diversity, removing prejudices and stereotypes towards the diverse and providing equitable opportunities and possibilities for their fair and egalitarian participation in political, social and educational life". The ideology of the educational reforms and processes applied in including immigrants and refugees in the

educational context moves from a conservative to a more deconstructive and radical approach (Giavrimis, 2022). Concepts such as mutual acceptance, mutual respect and accessibility to social resources are crucial points that are considered.

Theoretical approach. Theory of Social Identity

Social Identity Theory, formulated by Tajfel & Turner (1979), is "the theory of group membership and intergroup relations based on self-categorisation, social comparison and the construction of a shared self-definition in terms of properties that characterise an in-group" (Hogg, & Vaughan, 2010: 177). Social identity is related to categorising the social context into social groups (Dragona et al., 2001; Froehlich et al., 2023). A central parameter of this view is the contrast between the self-image individuals in the in-group have of their social group and that of the out-groups. The transition from personal to social identity occurs through interaction and comparison between individuals within the same group and between different groups. The individuals define themselves by their environment (Psimitis, 2011).

According to Hogg and Abrams (2010), social categorisations are formed concerning different variables such as the position of power, prestige, etc. (Burke & Stets, 2008), as well as with varying reflections on perceptual (cognitive), affective and behavioural responses (Ellemers et al., 2002). Social categories precede individuals, meaning that individuals are born into an already structured society of categorisations (Burke & Stets, 2008). Social identity, formed by membership in a group, does not have a positive or negative connotation but is conceptualised by the effects of comparison with the out-group and by the dimensions of contrast in the social context (Ellemers et al., 2002). The appraisal of social identity is based on three principles: (a) individuals aim to attain and maintain a positive social identity, which in turn will work positively on their self-esteem; (b) social identity is based on comparisons between the group to which the individual belongs and to other groups; and (c) members of a group with a negative identity will attempt to either move away from it (Tajfel, 1978) or seek alternative ways of giving them a positive evaluation (Burke, & Stets, 2000). At the same time, categorising individuals concerning their group leads to creating stereotypes associated with social group membership and self-image. It has been observed that members of dominant social groups display prejudice as they try to protect their sense of distinctiveness and superiority (Burke & Stets, 2022; Lambrides, 2004). Regarding individuals' behaviour as an outcome of their social identity (Turner, 1986), four categories of action strategies can be distinguished. Two refer to the individual and the other two to the group and are associated with the cognitive and behavioural dimensions. Thus, at the individual level are assimilation and individualisation, that is, the effort of individuals to resemble other members of a society and simultaneously separate themselves from other members. In contrast, at the collective level, social and realistic competition is distinguished, and at the same time, the comparison is reconstructed at all social classes (Besevegis, 2008). Important roles are played by the boundaries between groups and their permeability, the stability of the in-group position and the legitimacy of the social and institutional system (Dragona, 2007).

The Greek educational system facing the inclusion of immigrant and refugee students

The Greek educational system is characterised by a uniform and centrally coordinated bureaucratic system, where the curricula, despite the innovative reformist concept of diversity in the IEPs, emphasise a monocultural approach in all subjects as there is an inability to recognise the necessity of teaching other mother tongues (Giavrimis, 2023; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023). Moreover, teachers' competence, preparedness, attitudes and perceptions exacerbate this situation (Gkaintartzi et al., 2015; Maligkoudi et al., 2018). Therefore, based on their inadequate education and training, teachers are called upon to manage the diversity of the student population, leading to classroom educational practices that must meet the intercultural model (Nikolaou, 2011).

Regarding teachers in the Greek literature, teachers do not have a consistent view on including migrant and refugee students. Most teachers have a positive attitude towards the educational integration of this group (Megalonidou & Vitoulis, 2022; Sgoura et al., 2018) and their cultural elements (e.g. mother tongue). Gkaintartzi et al. (2015) believe segregation can lead to social and emotional exclusion (Theodorou, 2011). Also, teachers express a more positive attitude towards developing multilingualism when developing "strong" European languages (Griva & Chostelidou, 2012). Moreover, teachers in a survey favoured the knowledge of several foreign languages, as this is a prerequisite for later professional life (Mitits, 2017). At the same time, some teachers advocate the acquisition of the Greek language as a necessary element of

inclusion (Matheoudaki et al., 2017; Papadimitriou, 2020; Sakka, 2010) or have ethnocentric perceptions (e.g. integration in different classes) (Gkaintartzi et al., 2015). Moreover, research has revealed that students' academic performance and especially the acquisition of the language of the host country is the responsibility of immigrant and refugee students (Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017), which is further reinforced by stereotypical perceptions among teachers with inadequate training (Fotiadou et al., 2022; Papapostolou et al., 2020; Papadimitriou, 2020) the lack of logistical infrastructure (Katsigianni, & Kaila, 2019) and the lack of intercultural competence leading to the failure to accomplish the instructional tasks (Kurbegovic, 2016; Katsigianni, & Kaila, 2019).

The present study aimed to research the attitudes of secondary education teachers regarding the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in Greek schools. The research questions concern: a) teachers' attitudes towards the inclusion of immigrant and refugee students, b) their views on inclusion processes and inclusive teaching, and c) their role as teachers and parents.

Method

The qualitative method was used in the present research. The qualitative method aims to describe and analyse events in the external world as constructed by social subjects. The qualitative approach highlights social phenomena through subjective and conceptual experience. Therefore, the research subjects' lived experience of school leaving is a crucial variable. Interpreting it more deeply requires exploring the social subjects' experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs (Jackson & Mazzei, 2022; Iosifidis, 2003; Kvale, 2008; Tsiolis, 2018). The use of the qualitative method was deemed necessary since a) recording the personal views of individuals directly involved in the phenomenon under investigation is easier and b) there is not enough research in Lesvos, Chios, Samos, and Leros that delves deeper into the interpretations of inclusion of immigrants and refugees in Greek schools.

Participants

The participants come from schools located at the gateways of migrants and refugees in the European area (Leros, Chios, Lesvos, Samos). The participants were 14 teachers from secondary education. Of these, five were philologists, five were mathematicians, as they spent more hours in classrooms with immigrants and refugees, and specialists, such as two gymnasts and specialities from vocational schools (a nurse, a child care worker), worked in schools with immigrants and refugees. Also, eight were women. There were nine permanent and five substitute teachers. Secondary school teachers were selected because their primary education does not provide them with the necessary pedagogical competence to deal with the multiculturalism of the school context. Therefore, it is essential to explore their competence, readiness, and views on including immigrants and refugees in the Greek educational system. Their attitudes mediate a more effective management of the specific educational issue.

Data collection instrument

Qualitative research through the semi-structured interview tool was chosen for the data selection because it is a communicative interaction between the two. Usually, participants aim to analyse the phenomenon under study (Iosifidis, 2003; Tsiolis, 2018). In the first part of the interview guide, the questions referred to teachers' conceptualisations of migration, its causes, its characteristics, and their views on the social inclusion of immigrants and refugees. More specifically, the questions were of the type: "What does the concept of migration mean to you?", "What are the reasons and causes of migration?". The second part of the guide included questions related to teachers' attitudes towards including immigrants and refugees and the implemented educational policy. More specifically, the questions included were of the type: "What is your opinion on the state's intention to include in education immigrant - refugee children in Greek schools?", " To what extent is it considered that there is sufficient, qualified staff to deal with such situations." This paper analyses teachers' attitudes towards including immigrant refugees in the educational system (Giavrimis, 2023; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023).

Regarding the reliability of the research, the criteria of "long-term contact experience" and "participant control" were used (Simeou, 2007). Regarding the first criterion, the researchers have experience both on a didactic-pedagogical and theoretical level with the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in Greek education. Three pilot interviews were also conducted, transcribed, and given to the interviewees to check the reliability of the recorded discourse. Concerning the research's validity, the transferability and confirmability criteria were observed. A coherent and vivid depiction of the results and their substantiation through the interviewees' discourse was followed (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Simeou, 2007).

Findings

The research on the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in Greek education through the discourse of the teachers of secondary education highlighted as thematic axes of analysis the teachers' attitudes towards the educational inclusion of immigrants/refugees, their views on the inclusion processes, teaching and their role, as well as their attitude as parents.

a) Teachers' attitudes to inclusion

Most teachers were positive towards including students with an immigrant or refugee background in the Greek educational system. They considered that it is an obligation of the state and a right of children to have access to education and training and that they have the right to a "normal" life after what they have experienced. Otherwise, they felt ghettoisation, isolation, exclusion, and possibly violent conflicts would occur. At the same time, they said that their inclusion positively contributes to the host country's development. Interaction with native students, according to one teacher, would lead migrant children to learn the Greek culture and co-exist harmoniously, bringing positive outcomes later. Another teacher was pessimistic about the coexistence of native and migrant students in the same school. At the same time, another considered that there should be a transitional stage for migrant students to adapt to a different environment. Once they have become familiar with the school's requirements, they should move to the formal education system at a later stage.

S2. "That is right. The children of refugees and immigrants must be included in education. They should be placed in Greek schools, not in isolation, because this will lead to the ghettoisation of children instead of inclusion. Exclusion and marginalisation cause situations that can bring violence ...".

S4. "Uh (pause), there is no educational policy on inclusion. It is impossible to integrate into the same classes as Greek children. Uh, because this is a problem for both sides. The Ministry of Education programme is sketchy and does not provide a solution to the problem."

S7. " I have no problem, and these are children of God. However, it would be better for them to attend a separate class in the school initially, adjusted to their learning needs, to gradually achieve their smooth integration into Greek education and society and their social acceptance by their peers."

According to teachers, including immigrant/refugee students in secondary education is complex and requires much time, organisation, effort and perseverance. Greece is a conservative country, and including these students will expand Greek students' horizons into new cultures and civilisations. A teacher mentioned the need to integrate these students into technical education to be more easily incorporated into the labour market. Another teacher had a more optimistic view and believed that it would be easy to include these children in the education system because there is a way for bilingual students to be helped.

S1. "So, it is not easy; it needs time, effort, organisation, will, will."

S3. "I am in favour of intercultural schools. I think Greece still has a conservative view on many issues. Interaction with other cultures expands horizons, and I think the idea of children from different cultures and civilisations interacting with each other is positive".

S4. "....... we could put more emphasis on their Technical Education. Umm... in learning to be vehicle mechanics, to be plumbers, to be electricians ... in technical professions, where these people could, after finishing their education, be absorbed in certain positions, to be employed in some jobs".

S6.. "Everything will be all right because we have a way to teach bilingual children, to help them and to include them in the educational system."

According to the teachers, the right to education is a right that all children have regardless of race, colour or religion.

S2. "Everyone has the right to education, even for one day. Everyone, regardless of race, colour, or religion. This is the hallmark of civilised societies and democracy. It develops culture and removes violence".

Through education, reported a teacher, these children will be included in society, get a job, become politically and socially aware, and be cultivated spiritually and morally. As one teacher stated, the lack of education will lead these children into dark paths and difficulties in coexistence with the natives. However, there are also some children out of school and, as one teacher mentioned, this is a decision of their families because in some cultural communities, the role of girls, for example, is underestimated. They do not allow them to join school.

S4. "Education is necessary for immigrants because it helps them to find a job, to integrate into society, to acquire social and political awareness and even contributes to their broader spiritual and moral cultivation".

b) Views on inclusion procedures

Most teachers felt that immigrant students should first learn the Greek language because only with this basic knowledge will they have equal opportunities as native students. Teachers argued that the success of the inclusion of these children will be made more effective through the reception classes. Therefore, the Ministry of Education needs to develop its establishment in schools. Two teachers suggested that it could be more effectively accomplished by teaching the mother tongue primarily. According to them, parallel support and intercultural education would help all students respect other countries' diversity and culture. One teacher argued that it is challenging but achievable with the right actions.

S2. "With the reception classes, they can very quickly achieve the educational level of the class they are attending and keep up ... In the beginning, they could acquire the language... first of all, acquire the Greek language so that they can then be able to integrate without difficulty and easily into a school".

S7. "Intercultural education is needed, as it happens in other countries, so that children learn to respect the diversity, personality and culture of other countries to feel that we are all equal and most of all humans.".

S1. "Umm ... Lessons are taught and should be taught in their language in their mother tongue in their language of origin...".

c) Teachers' views on teaching

Teachers referred to the educational process, stating that teaching and learning are not an easy matter for students with migrant and refugee backgrounds because primarily most children do not acquire knowledge of Greek and English (which can be achieved through intensive courses), but also because there is a conservatism regarding such issues, as many parents and students are pessimistic about their inclusion. As one teacher mentioned, it is also difficult because they are not prepared to host such groups; there is no educational background, even at an experimental stage.

S1. "..... We know that both teachers and refugees to promote teaching and learning should be willing and should be far from any prejudice beyond any stereotype ...".

S2. "In the beginning, teaching and learning will be difficult because most do not know Greek or English. But with intensive language learning programmes, children quickly learn and become grouped".

S8. "It is difficult to say how teaching and learning will be shaped. Primarily the teaching because there was uh... there is no background for that.... ".

d) Views on the teacher's role

Teachers stress that they need to be trained and acquire the appropriate expertise, but also the suitable educational material, which should be aimed at the psychological aspects of students with an immigrant and refugee background because, as one teacher mentioned, these are children who are "wounded", who are dominated by feelings of inferiority. Teachers should be aware of these societies' diversity and culture, and seminars should be held to ensure their work has positive outcomes. One teacher stated that a homogeneous curriculum should not be applied at all in g practices, but provision should be given for learning needs.

S1. "Uh... more than anything else, you need suitable qualifications. It requires organisation, it needs the right material, properly formulated, in addition to the psychological part, the part of psychology and support, because we are dealing with children who are wounded, we are dealing with children who are affected by feelings of inferiority, so in addition to the learning part, teachers have an important role to play, that of the educational psychologist".

S4. "Teachers in no case to follow a single educational programme, but to care for the learning needs of children of two different educational levels".

S7. "Perhaps attend training seminars and programmes to cope successfully with the educational needs of immigrants/refugees ...".

e) Teachers' attitudes as parents

Most teachers stated that parents would have no problem if their child had to share the same desk with an immigrant/refugee. They felt that this coexistence would yield beneficial outcomes in learning the new culture and help in acquiring a new language. Only one teacher raised the vaccination of immigrants and refugees as a prerequisite for his child to be at the same desk as an immigrant/refugee student. At the

same time, another one mentioned the issue of allowing ghettoisation in the classroom and therefore considered that it would be better to include a few students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds in native classes, emphasising that if ghettoisation is formed, then there is a fear that the course will not be able to progress.

S1. "Uh... I would not have any problem at all...... No, for me, there is no difference whether my child was sitting with a child... with a child from the same country or was a refugee or an immigrant. I think he would have only positive things to gain from this interaction. He would have nothing to lose but to gain.

S2. "My third child, a 3rd-grade girl, in the afternoons when the children from the reception classes come to our school, plays and draws with them; she has even made friends and tries to communicate with them in English. So, I have no problem at all regarding the question."

S9. "...... if I had a child, would be if these children in the classroom, let us say, did not know the language well. That would make it difficult for me, or if I saw that the children were ghettoised gangs ..."

S8. ".... uh... I would have no problem with my child sitting at the same desk .... as long as the necessary conditions, such as adequate vaccination, were met...".

Discussion- Conclusions

The present study aimed to research the attitudes of secondary education teachers regarding the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in Greek schools. Based on the teachers' discourse, issues concerning teachers' attitudes towards the educational inclusion of migrants/refugees, their views on the inclusion processes, the role of teaching, and their attitudes as parents emerged.

Most teachers were positive towards including migrants and refugees in the Greek educational system since it is their inalienable, legal, and institutionalised right. In addition, as parents, they are also quite positive. They also considered that their educational and social inclusion can positively affect human capital, the local and regional development of the host country, and the self-improvement of students (native and non-native). Furthermore, most teachers believe that non-inclusion raises issues of marginalisation and educational and social exclusion. The above positive views are diachronic and are reflected in both Greek and international literature (Angelopoulou & Manesis, 2017; Gkaintartzi et al., 2015; Klein, 2017. Kurbegovic, 2016; Papapostolou et al., 2020; Saklan, & Erginer, 2017). Most of the teachers in our study appeared to hold an "open social identity" characterised by tolerance, solidarity, and self-respect for difference. They did not experience fear or threat from the "others", immigrants/refugees. They regarded the boundaries of social groups as transparent, legitimised the right of migrants and refugees to education and considered that social mobility should not be hindered as it has positive effects. Their perception regarding the aforementioned does not seem to be differentiated by the distance of the proximity of social groups. At the same time, stereotypes and prejudices do not appear in their discourse. However, their attitude towards the native language of immigrants and refugees and their stable perception that the acquisition of the Greek language is a crucial factor of inclusion, which is also revealed in other studies (Gkaintartzi et al., 2016), does not attribute the majority of teachers with the characteristics of an intercultural attitude, but more of a monolingual and multicultural approach. The influx of immigrant population since the late 1990s positively affected these teachers' perspectives. Contact and information (in-service or individually initiated) and the lived experience of previous migrant flows played a dominant role in establishing positive attitudes or transforming negative ones. Moreover, monocultural and monolingual Greek education appears to mediate their views on the features an intercultural education should have.

At the same time, some teachers have been opposed to the intercultural integration of immigrants and refugees (e.g. integration in technical education, learning the Greek language), while they suggested as barriers to inclusion immigrants' health issues and the establishment of ghettos in a classroom, which would cause problems in the educational level of the natives. Teachers (intra-group), according to social identity theory, evaluate themselves as a dominant group concerning the immigrant/refugee group (extra-group), i.e. they perform a social group favouritism, which is aimed at highlighting the perceived differences between the two groups and strengthening the characteristics of the intra-group. The intra-group struggles to maintain its positive self-image, which feels challenged by the out-group. Furthermore, they considered that the social boundaries between groups are not transparent. At the same time, legitimisation is based on the dominant group's values, customs, and traditions, so social mobility needs to occur on its terms (e.g. host country familiarisation). In this context, certain practices impose the intra-group as the dominant

group (e.g. vaccination, monolingualism, affecting native performance) (Cummins, 2000; 2021). The responsibility for adapting and re-placing required elements is transferred to the immigrant groups (e.g., native language acquisition).

These teachers perceived the arrival of migrants/refugees as an external bio-physical or educational threat. Simultaneously, the sense of depersonalisation they experienced (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010) acts as a tool to eliminate individual differentiation and shift responsibility to the social context. Such actions reflect intra-group favouritism, manifested in their opposition to the rightful educational inclusion of a group due to its cultural background. In the post-modern era, the negative attitude towards diversity is infiltrated in terms of cultural superiority (Christopoulos, 2002), and the object of discrimination becomes language, customs and attitudes (Noutsos, 2014). The attitudes of these teachers are more in line with the model of integration of immigrants and refugees.

For the implementation of intercultural education, the reinforcement of teachers' undergraduate curricula on these issues is essential, as well as their education and training (in-service or not), something that is highlighted as a necessary prerequisite for the effective inclusion of students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds in the teachers' discourse. There is a need for teachers to have adequate qualifications and to be provided with appropriate training materials. The contemporary role of the teacher requires that they possess intercultural competencies involving communication skills and management of intercultural interactions effectively and be free from prejudice and racism (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). In addition, teachers' training and education must ensure their intercultural competence and readiness. Both intercultural competence and readiness are closely related concepts; one follows the other since one is derived from training, and the other is its applied level (Georgogiannis, 2006).

In conclusion, according to our research on the attitudes of secondary school teachers towards the inclusion of students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds in Greek education, the majority of teachers expressed a positive attitude, as they considered that it is their right and that there are several positive outcomes regarding their personal and social development, as well as that of the native students. They considered, however, that an essential factor of inclusion is the acquisition of the Greek language. In addition, some teachers hold a negative stance on the intercultural inclusion of students with immigrant and refugee backgrounds, associating it with biosomatic and educational factors (e.g. vaccination, low school performance). These attitudes, regardless of whether they are positive or negative, are mediated by inadequately organised educational policy (e.g. inadequate training and material infrastructure, underfunding, etc.). Our research has highlighted the necessity for an educational policy which should integrate the principles of intercultural education in its practical implementations in the everyday life of schools, as well as at its institutional level, more decisively. The information and awareness of teachers and other members of the educational community, as well as the development of the appropriate material and technical infrastructure, seems to be the only way to implement an intercultural education that respects the cultural elements, language and identity of students with an immigrant and refugee background. In an environment where global conditions are forcing groups of populations to move, the only solution is forming a social and educational environment of mutual acceptance, mutual respect, and equal opportunities for accessibility to social resources.

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