

The attitudes and outlooks of teachers accepting refugees in Greek schools in uncertain times¹

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Abstract

Even though we live in uncertain times, education has been one of the first basic rights given to refugees after covering the first basic needs during their stay in Greece. However, although the Greek schools have opened their doors to refugee children, what has not been reported on and has to do reaffirming citizenship are the reactions of teachers and their willingness to integrate refugee children into their classroom. The aim of this study was to approach teachers of primary schools and to assess whether they are willing to accept the refugee students in their class. Furthermore, we sought to identify whether they consider that they have the appropriate cognitive and teaching skills needed in order to cope with the challenges integrating refugee children might bring to their teaching. Finally, we investigated what social and intercultural consequences they believe refugees will bring about in school when associate with natives. For the purposes of our research, a questionnaire was prepared and distributed to a sample of primary school teachers in Western Greece. The subsequent analysis of the data focuses on the intentions of teachers to integrate refugees at schools, their expectations for social acceptance of refugees by the other students, and the

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weaknesses that they believe they have in order to carry out an obviously more demanding teaching.

Key Words

refugee children, teachers' attitudes, refugee integration, intercultural consequences, intercultural competence, intercultural readiness

Introduction

The war situation in Syria and the wider region forced more than 700.000 refugees and migrants to leave their homes and to reach Greece by sea for salvation in 2015. Their stay on the Greek islands required the recruitment of basic needs such as housing, food, pharmaceuticals and education. The latter was given to refugees within a relatively short period of time, not knowing the attitudes of teachers regarding refugee acceptance and also their sufficiency and readiness to respond to their demands. In the context of an ever-evolving and re-adapting society to a new reality, continuous teacher education is essential. The continuous integration of refugees and immigrants into Greek schools tends to create an environment of intercultural nature and this requires well-educated, intercultural educators, able to respond to the needs of an intercultural school.

The purpose of this research is to examine the willingness of teachers in Western Region of Greece to teach in refugee schools and to investigate their intercultural competence and readiness, whether they have the appropriate cognitive and teaching skills to respond to a multicultural class and of course whether they feel ready to do so. An additional purpose of this research is to formulate teachers' views on what they believe will be the social and intercultural implications of the arrival of refugees in the school environment. Teachers' responses to these intercultural issues

are personal opinions and assessments of their own on the basis of their experience as teachers and their knowledge of any training in intercultural education and specialization in the teaching of Greek as a second language. Their views on the above issues also shape their attitude towards the treatment of refugee students and their acceptance by Greek schools. This research was primarily designed to assess the level of teachers as far as attitudes, outlooks and abilities are concerned, confronted with an intercultural school. A great change that will certainly affect, to a certain extent, the daily routine of Greek schools.

Literature view

In the context of the multicultural dimension of today's society, student population in schools is made up of children from different cultural backgrounds. According to Davis and Turner (1993), although student population becoming increasingly multicultural, teachers retain a mono-cultural nature. A gap like this is likely to pose problems, if teachers' monocultural composition cannot keep pace with society. As the linguistic, national, economic and socio-political diversity in the Greek school class increases, the teacher has to teach his students both their own culture and their classmates', who originate from a different country (Stamelos, 1999). Therefore, the role of teacher tends to be mediating. In the context of this role, he/she will also have to face possible conflicts between Greek students and those from other countries, while at the same time empathy is required, by understanding the experiences and habits of children from different cultural environments and by showing respect. More specifically, according to Helmut Essinger, the intercultural education consists of four basic principles:

- Empathy with understanding of diversity
- Solidarity, which discourages social inequality and injustice

- Respect for the diversity of cultures and the acceptance and exchange of elements
- Eliminating nationalist attitudes and stereotypes, aiming at the communication of peoples (Georgogiannis, 1999, p. 50-51).

Research results of Bougioukli (2014) showed that although the majority of Greek teachers had years of teaching experience in intercultural schools. However, readiness rates on intercultural issues were reduced, which means that their training lacks in this field (Bougioukli, 2014). According to Koutiva's (2009) research, pre-service teachers faced problems in the management of an intercultural classroom which required the need for more specialization not so much in the theoretical but in the teaching approach of an intercultural class from the curriculum of the department (Koutiva, 2009). According to Liliou (2009) and Hollins (1993), if teachers are properly guided, they can show the value of multiculturalism and the acceptance of diversity by transmitting them to their students. But are the Greek teachers adequately prepared and ready to do so? Various surveys in Greece and abroad (Bombaridou, Kouneli & Georgogiannis, 2004, Zeichner, 1994, Spinthourakis & Katsillis, 2003) argue that teachers feel unprepared to learn how to tailor their teaching to the needs of this students population and therefore need further training, since in Greece the curricula of the Pedagogical Departments offer insufficient intercultural training (Koutiva, 2009). Nevertheless, in recent years there has been a significant improvement on the part of Greek Universities in enhancing curricula on intercultural issues and the development of relevant conferences, which is a very important step forward in the field of interculturalism.

The Greek and foreign literature has given some insights on both the theoretical and practical preparation as well as the psychological and emotional formation of behaviors towards students from different intercultural contexts (Koutiva, 2009); Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Readiness (Georgogiannis, 2004);

intercultural awareness (Hall & Toll, 1999), intercultural theoretical training and Intercultural Action Ability (Zografou, 2003), intercultural competence (Conclaves et., al., 2006), multicultural competence (Spinthourakis, 2006), intercultural capability (Hall & Toll, 1999); (Koutiva, 2009).

In this respect, Georgogiannis (2009) argues that

intercultural competence is any theoretical, scientific, research and teaching knowledge that the educator has about cultures, languages, living conditions from etc., from people of other countries, who participate in the social life of our country. It includes the training the teacher has to acquire during his studies or in the context of training programs while he or she works as a teacher and which is certified either by the degree or by program training certificates so that be considered intercultural sufficient.

He further asserts that in order to obtain intercultural readiness *except for knowledge that each teacher should acquire in basic studies in intercultural education or every active teacher in the context of training programs, he should have knowledge and skills in order to practice his theoretical, scientific and research knowledge in the school classroom. (Georgogiannis, 2009).*

Zografou, (2003) argues that teachers should have the following characteristics in order to acquire an intercultural competence:

- Capability of self-perception
- Ability for an in-depth review of stereotypical images of others
- Ability of analyzing perspective
- Intercultural ability of collision
- Mood and ability for dialogic control of the current requirements of values
- Ability to develop skills to implement multicultural knowledge in programs, practices, habits and classroom teachings
- Ability to develop educational targets, curriculum, learning skills

- Critical attitude both to an individual system of values and to cultural patterns that dominate society

Conclaves et al. (2006), use the term *intercultural competence* according to which intercultural competencies not necessarily developed through special lessons or from the experience. It may be the result of many opportunities in life, all of which contribute to a new view of diversity the will to learn and to interact with people from different cultural environments. The curriculum can contribute to this through disciplined learning based on the principles of multiculturalism and the processing of information through different points of view (pp. 6-8).

Reception classes and private lessons help to integrate refugees and generally students with a different native language better and smoothly into Greek schools. For the first time these reforms appeared in the Greek educational system under the law 1404/83. Over the years the law has taken on various forms. The goal is the smoothly adaptation of repatriated and foreign students to schools. The law 2413 of the Official Gazette A 124/14-6/96 introduced interculturalism in the Greek educational system and repatriated students' schools were renamed *intercultural schools* (Papazoi, 2016). Since 1990, reception classes have evolved into parallel classes where children attended courses according to their age and level of language proficiency (Papazoi, 2016).

Method

Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 162 Greek teachers (139 women and 23 men) working in primary education schools in Western Greece. The age of the participants ranged from 23 to 60 with a mean of 37.4. The mean of years of experience was 11.9, 50% of them had graduated from university (Department of Primary Education) and 37% had a postgraduate or PhD degree. The remaining

percentage had graduated from the pedagogical academy (4.9%) or an equivalent institution (5.6%), had completed an official teacher training course (1.9%) or had a second degree from another department.

Instrument

An anonymous questionnaire was administered to the participants. The questionnaire included demographic questions (i.e., gender, age, years of service and level of education) and addressed the following: a) teachers' willingness to accept and teach the refugee students in their class, b) teachers' attitudes and predictions on social acceptance and behavior of refugees at school and c) the appropriate cognitive and teaching skills needed in order to teach refugee children (intercultural competence-intercultural readiness). The majority of questionnaires' items were drawn from available instruments in the literature measuring the contribution of educational departments to intercultural competence and readiness of pre-service-teachers (Koutiva, 2009) and teachers' predictions and outlooks on education of foreign students in the Greek school (Papazoi, 2016). The questionnaire contained 41 items but only 22 of them were used for this research. Responses were given on a Likert scale in three items and there was one closed question. The confidentiality of the responses was taken seriously.

Results

The data were analyzed with the statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), version 20. The level of significance set to all statistical analyses was $p < .05$.

In the question "*would you like to teach in classroom with culturally diverse students?*" the teachers seemed to be very willing to try this challenge. More specifically, the

72.8% (118) said “YES”, the 13, 6% (22) said “NO” and the 13% (21) were undecided while there was a 0.6% (3) that didn’t respond.

In questions of predictions of teachers, social acceptance and behavior of refugees at school, the teachers were very optimistic while the majority answered positively. That means that the 45,1% agreed that *native students will join the refugees and will benefit from their coexistence in the same school class* and the 35, 2% disagreed with the proposal that *native students will avoid joining the refugees and are likely to be conflicting with each other because of different language and culture*.

In order to investigate the intercultural competence, teachers completed a self-assessment test. The responses were given on a 4-point Likert scale (1: I don’t think I can do it well, 2: I would probably do it if I had to, but it would be hard for me, 3: I think I would do it well if I had time to prepare myself, 4: I am pretty sure it would be easy for me to do it). Generally, the higher percentages of their answers were in items 3 and 4. In question “*Can I help students to understand the viewpoint of other national and social groups?*” 46, 9% answered (3) while 40, 7% answered (4). In the question “*Can I provide teaching activities to help them develop strategies to tackle racial discrimination?*” 53, 7% checked answer (3) while 30, 9% checked answer (4). In the next question “*Can I produce activities that break up myths for populations from different cultural environments?*” 53, 7% chose answer (3) while 31, 5% chose answer (4). In the question “*Can I find solutions to problems arising from the existence of children from different cultural environments?*” the 49, 4% of teachers chose answer (3) and the 33, 3% chose the answer (4). Next, in the question “*Can I identify school practices that can harm children from different cultural environments?*” 45, 7% chose answer (3) while 36, 4% chose answer (4). In the following question “*Can I produce activities that stimulate the self-confidence of children from different cultural environments?*” 47, 5% chose answer (3) while 44, 5% chose answer (4). In question “*Can I analyze teaching material that will probably be related to prejudice and stereotypes?*” 51, 2% of the teachers chose answer (3) while 29, 6% chose answer (4).

In the next question “*Can I produce material suitable for multicultural classes?*” 57, 4% said (3) and 14, 8% said (4). In question “*Can I present diverse groups in my classroom to gain respect from others?*” 48, 8% answered (3) and 39, 5% answered (4). In the finally question “*Can I adapt my teaching methods to needs of students from diverse cultural groups?*” 56, 8% of teachers chose answer (3) while 17, 9% chose answer (4). From the above analyses, it is obvious that the high percentages of answer (3) exceeded the remaining answers which shows that teachers believe in their competence.

Measuring the readiness in managing intercultural issues, teachers gave their answers on a 6-point Likert scale (1: not good, 2: a little good, 3: moderate, 4: very good, 5: excellent, 6: undecided). The highest percentage belonged to answers 3 and 4 and 5. Therefore, as far as “*management of remediation class*” is concerned the 21% of teachers’ answered (3), the 21% of teachers answered (5) and the 43, 8% answered (4). Regarding “*management of reception class*” the 31, 5% chose (3) and the 33, 3% chose (4) and regarding “*mixed class management*” the 30, 2% of teachers chose answer (3) and 40, 1% chose answer (4). As far “*relationships with parents*” are concerned, 29, 0% said (5) and 49, 4% said (4), in “*organizing intercultural events*” 27, 8% answered (3) and 33, 3% answered (4) and in “*curriculum adaption*” 32, 1% of teachers chose answer (4) and 35, 8% of them answered (3). Finally, as far as “*identity topics*” and “*models of education*” are concerned, 36, 4% of teachers said (3) and almost the 34% of them said (4), while in “*bilingual education*” 41, 4% said (3) and 14, 8% said (4).

In order to measure the relation between teachers’ intercultural competence and teachers’ intercultural readiness, the statistical test of Bivariate Pearson’s Correlation was used. The results showed that there is a significant moderate positive association between them (Pearson correlation $r = 0.498$, $p = 0.000 < 0.01$). So, that means that the more competence on intercultural issues teachers have, the readier they feel about it.

Table 1. Correlation between teacher's readiness and competence on intercultural issues

		Competence	Readiness
Competence	Pearson Correlation	1	,498**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	161	159
Readiness	Pearson Correlation		1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N		160

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table below reports the results from a Regression analysis which was carried out in order to investigate the effect of training in intercultural education on competence. The results showed that there is a statistically significant effect of training in intercultural education on competence (b= -1, 8, p<.01).

Table 2. Coefficients^a

Effect of training in intercultural education on competence

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	S.E.	Beta		
1	(Constant)	32,099	,567		56,647	,000
	Have you been trained in intercultural education?	-1,890	,617	-,237	-3,064	,003

a. Dependent Variable: Competence

The next table of Regression analysis shows the results from the effect of specialization on the teaching approach of Greek as a second language on readiness. The results reported that there is a statistically significant effect of specialization on the teaching approach of Greek as a second language on readiness (b=-3, 9, p<.05).

Table 3. Coefficients^a

Effect of specialization on the teaching approach of Greek as a second language on readiness

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	S.E.	Beta		
(Constant)	35,905	1,491		24,073	,000
1 Have you acquired a specialization in the teaching of Greek as a second language?	-3,977	1,600	-,194	-2,485	,014

a. Dependent Variable: Readiness

Table 4 presents the effect of specialization on the teaching approach of Greek as a second language on competence. The Regression analysis showed that there is a statistically significant effect of specialization on the Greek as a second language on competence ($b = -3,02$, $p < .05$).

Table 4. Coefficients^a

Effect of specialization on the teaching approach of Greek as a second language on competence

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	33,619	1,223		27,493	,000
1 Have you acquire a specialization in the teaching of Greek as a second language?	-3,026	1,311	-,180	-2,308	,022

a. Dependent Variable: Competence

As shown in the table 5, teachers in each level of education appreciate that students will benefit from their cooperation with refugees and that they will not come into conflict with them. There is also a significant difference between the Academy and

the other educational institutions. Finally, ANOVA statistical analyses estimated that the level of teachers' study affect their predictions about social acceptance and behavior of refugees' at school ($p=.015$).

An additional statistical Regression analysis investigated if gender and studies affect teacher's willingness to teach in a classroom with culturally diverse students. The results about gender showed that there is no statistical significant effect ($b=0,17$, $p>0,05$) and about studies, the relation was found to be weak (Somers'd = $-0,179$, $p<0,05$).

Table 5. Report

Means of teachers' studies and predictions about social acceptance and behavior of refugees at

Level of Education		Native students will join the refugees and will benefit from their coexistence in the same school class.	Native students will avoid joining the refugees and are likely to be conflicting with each other because of different languages and cultures.
Academia	Mean	3,13	2,50
	N	8	8
	Std. Deviation	1,126	1,069
University with equation	Mean	3,78	2,22
	N	9	9
	Std. Deviation	,972	,833
University degree	Mean	3,93	2,39
	N	60	61
	Std. Deviation	,710	1,115
2 university degrees	Mean	4,00	3,00
	N	1	1
	Std. Deviation	.	.
Teacher training (Didaskaleio)	Mean	4,00	2,00
	N	3	3
	Std. Deviation	1,000	1,000
Postgraduate-PhD	Mean	4,17	2,54
	N	52	52
	Std. Deviation	,678	,896
Total	Mean	3,97	2,44
	N	133	134
	Std. Deviation	,778	1,000

Discussion

The aim of this research was to investigate the views of teachers as far as refugee acceptance is concerned, but also to assess whether teachers' intercultural competence and readiness were sufficient. As shown by the results, teachers are willing to teach in an intercultural school something that favors the positive acceptance of refugees by teachers. Also the results showed that they are generally very optimistic about the socialization of the refugees, as the majority responded that the natives would cooperate with them and there would be no quarrels between them. Then, with regard to teachers' levels of intercultural competence and readiness, they are quite high and this is linked to their many years of experience. Of course, this contradicts an earlier research showing that experienced teachers were lagging behind in such matters (Bougioukli, 2014). Also, the relevance between intercultural competence and intercultural readiness has proved to be positive, since in the self-assessment of intercultural competence the majority said it would do well if it had time to prepare and as far as readiness for management of intercultural issues is concerned, the majority said it did well. The high percentages of intercultural readiness of teachers shown by this research are inconsistent with the results of an earlier survey where educational readiness of teachers in the Primary Education of Achaia in Greece ranged from 68-91% (Georgogiannis, 2009).

Moreover, the analyses showed that the training in intercultural education and in teaching approach of Greek as a second language have a positive impact on teachers' intercultural competence and readiness, which proves the effectiveness of relevant seminars and trainings on intercultural issues in shaping the identity of the modern teacher (Mpakas, Pantazi & Sakellaropoulou, 2014, 2014; Nikolaou & Samsari, 2013; Spinthourakis et. al., 2009).

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that the positive views of teachers on the social and intercultural implications after the arrival of refugees in

Greek schools are linked to the prominent levels of intercultural competence and readiness. It also shows that teacher training is a crucial factor which contributes to a different perception and acceptance of diversity. However, because the sample was small and did not cover many areas of Greece where intercultural schools operate and in which many refugees were welcomed during the year of 2015-16, it is unknown what really happens in these schools. For this reason, future research in teachers who have taught in refugee schools is needed in order to investigate the everyday reality at these schools, the interaction of refugees with their native classmates and ultimately the intercultural competence of teachers. It is therefore important not only to know the teachers' views but also to be acquainted with the real correspondence to their teaching in the context of an intercultural school, among refugee students.

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