



## **Parents' Readiness for the School Integration of Refugee Students. The Case of Greek Inclusive Education.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the present study, an attempt is made to investigate the readiness of parents for the inclusion of refugee students in the kindergarten class. For the needs of the research, a questionnaire was created with questions from previous tools. The research sample consists of 20 parents of kindergarten students in the Prefecture of Kavala. A self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection, which was sent electronically along with the instructions, objectives and assurance of the anonymity of the survey. Limitations of the study include a small sample size and the potential response bias of the self-administered questionnaires. The importance of the research lies in the need to investigate the factors, attitudes and perceptions of parents that make the integration of refugee students difficult, so that proposals can be made to the central leadership to take the appropriate initiatives with the aim of the smooth integration of refugee students into the inclusive school community.

**Keywords:** school integration, readiness, intercultural education, refugees, kindergarten, Greece.

### **1. Introduction**

A characteristic of today's society is multiculturalism, creating the need for linguistic, ethnic and cultural homogeneity. For the coexistence of several cultures, the need arises for changes in the ideological orientation but also in the institutions of the society (Mokias 2019).

Greece have been received a large number of immigrations flows and a from the end of the 20th century until today, this has as a consequence a diversity and multiculturalism in the societies of the whole of Europe, a fact that also affects the educational systems (Maniatis, 2012).

Multicultural societies are called to deal with the organization of relations between locals and foreigners in such a way that their meeting does not create conflicts, but their creative interaction. The educational system plays an important role in creating conditions for the acceptance and recognition of pluralism and otherness (Govaris, 2011).

### **2. Theoretical Framework:**

#### **2.1. Intercultural Education**

Intercultural education refers to educational policies developed by the state and reshaped through their implementation by the school and the classroom. According to Gundara (2000), intercultural education "puts before state structures the question of formulating policies at the national level to recognize the intercultural character of societies".

Interculturalism is defined "as a process of reflective perception and experience of cultural pluralism, recognition of otherness and cooperation between individuals of different cultures" (Palaiologou, N. & Evangelou, 2011). Education contributes to changing the views of those involved in the educational process in order to shape fairer and more diverse learning environments (Nieto & Bode, 2008). In order to achieve the change of subjects' attitudes, interaction with minority cultural groups must take place (Papadopoulou, 2011).

According to Law 2413 passed in 1996 (FEK 17-6-96) in article 34 it is defined: "The purpose of intercultural education is the organization and operation of primary and secondary education to provide education to young people with educational, social, cultural and educational peculiarities". The goal of intercultural education is to transform the school so that all students regardless of race, gender, social class or cultural origin feel equal opportunities to learn in school and have the possibility of educational mobility (Brant, 2013; Banks, 2016; [file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/FEK-1996-Tefxos%20A-00124-downloaded%20-13\\_04\\_2023%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/FEK-1996-Tefxos%20A-00124-downloaded%20-13_04_2023%20(1).pdf)).

## **2.2. Intercultural education in kindergarten**

Multicultural education involves changes in the overall school or educational environment, not limited to curriculum changes (Banks, 2016; Brant, 2013). Interculturality is not a smooth process, tensions may arise in interpersonal contacts. Therefore, an important purpose of intercultural education is to eliminate conflicts (Neuner, 2012).

The purpose of intercultural education in kindergarten is firstly, the understanding of the uniqueness and similarity with all the children of the world and secondarily the understanding of the differences between them. In kindergarten, an important goal is the development of respect for the diversity of religion, culture or the capabilities of each person. Because the goals of multicultural education can never be fully achieved, a continuous effort must be made to increase educational equity for all students (Banks, 2016).

## **2.3. Refugee**

The term refugee according to the 1951 convention article 1 A (2) is any person who: "as a result of events occurring before January 1, 1951 and a justified fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, social class or political opinion is outside his country of which he has the citizenship and is unable or, because of this fear, does not wish to enjoy the protection of that country, or if he does not have its citizenship and is, as a result of such events, outside the country of his previous habitual residence, he is unable or, because of the for fear of this, he does not wish to return to it" (UNHCR, 11).

## **2.4. School readiness**

School readiness includes, apart from the personal readiness of the student, the readiness of the family and the school unit, which must support the process of introducing the child to school life (Harrington et al., 2010). The concept of school readiness has been explored in the international literature from the point of view of emotional, cognitive and biological readiness. There are also studies that support that, students who join a school context but have not achieved the relevant school readiness leave or do not continue their studies. In addition, there are studies according to which factors such as parents' socioeconomic and educational background play an important role in children's school readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Duncan et al., 2007; Mc Wayne et al., 2004).

## **2.5. Family and school cooperation for the integration of refugees.**

In the effort to combat prejudices, the pedagogical method develops concepts, such as that of diversity in which stereotypes and discrimination are challenged and promotes respect towards the origin of children and parents (Derman - Sparks, 2010). That is why cooperation between the school and parents is considered important, even though it is not always easy, due to the confrontations between teachers and parents that come from the different way of perceiving cooperation (Tafa&Manolitsis, 2003).

Keeping parents informed about what is happening at school works to the benefit of the child and the teacher. Many parents do not realize how quickly the child begins to understand the concept of race and gender, believing that they do not understand such issues, resulting in developing negative attitudes towards others (Derman - Sparks, 2010).

The cooperation between kindergarten and family is a very important part of preschool education in order to achieve its goals and to integrate children smoothly into school. However, parents' involvement in their child's education is quite limited (Antonopoulou, Koutrouba&Babalıs, 2011).

Parents' perceptions of the integration of refugee students are determined by their experiences and cultural background. An important factor for co-education is the level of education, with evidence indicating that parents with higher education have more positive beliefs about co-education (Tafa&Manolitsis, 2003).

## **2.6. Purpose**

The purpose of this paper is to study to what extent parents are ready to accept the inclusion of refugee students in the Greek education system and more specifically in the level of primary education, the kindergarten. The school plays an important role in the acceptance of diversity, as it is a key agent of socialization of the individual.

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## **3. Methodology**

For the research purposes, a questionnaire was created with questions from previous tools developed to investigate the readiness of teachers, parents and students in Greece (Plastira, 2018; Alexopoulou, 2018). For the needs of this research, 7 statements were developed for the demographic data and 13 statements for the views and attitudes of parents regarding the inclusion of refugee students in kindergarten. Responses to each statement are graded on a 5-point Likert scale of agreement 1-Not at all, 2-A little 3-Moderately, 4-Very much, 5-Very much. According to Mugenda (2003) descriptive research is a type of research design that aims to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon under study. It is used to gather information about the current state of a population. It is particularly useful for describing phenomena that are difficult to observe or measure, such as

attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data, which was sent electronically along with the instructions, objectives and assurance of the anonymity of the survey. The research sample consists of twenty parents, men and women, whose children are of pre-school age and attend kindergartens in the Prefecture of Kavala.

#### 4. Findings

Statements	Not at all		A little		Moderate		A lot		Too much	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
I agree to have refugees join the kindergarten class.	6	30	5	25	3	15	3	15	3	15
I would feel a threat to my child's proper education if there were enough refugee children in the class.	3	15	2	10	4	20	9	45	2	10
I feel ready to face the new situation in schools.	7	35	4	20	5	25	2	10	2	10
I believe that refugees should study in different classes.	2	10	4	20	4	20	8	40	2	10
I believe that refugee students should be included in the general classroom.	3	15	5	25	4	20	4	20	4	20
I agree for my child to participate in group activities with refugee students.	3	15	6	30	6	30	4	20	1	5
I want my child to participate in team games and play in the team that includes refugee students.	4	20	4	20	5	25	3	15	4	20
I believe that refugee students have the right to participate in education together with Greek students.	2	10	4	20	8	40	3	15	3	15
I am troubled by their different culture and religion.	6	30	6	30	6	30	2	10	0	0
I believe that my child's progress will stagnate because the teacher will be more concerned with the adaptation of refugee students.	5	25	7	35	3	15	3	15	2	10
I would rather change my child's school because of the refugee students in the class and transfer him to one that doesn't have one.	6	30	7	35	6	30	3	15	0	0
I consider contact with refugees important for my child because he will come into contact with another people and learn new things.	8	40	5	25	6	30	1	5	0	0
I consider the participation of refugees in the classroom important because my child learns to accept diversity from an early age and does not develop stereotypes.	7	35	6	30	4	20	2	10	1	5

**Table 1:** Statements about parents' readiness

The questionnaires were answered by 20 people, of which 12 are women and 8 are men, aged M.O. 34.15 years old. All participants are parents of preschool children with M.O. 4.3 years old and the majority of them have boys (65% boys and 35% girls). As a reference to the educational level of the parents, most of them stated that they are graduates of higher education, 55% and the remaining 45% of secondary education. Regarding the parents' work sector, the largest percentage 50% work in the private sector, i.e. 10 out of 20, in the public sector 20% and 30% are unemployed, i.e. 6 out of 20. The results of the survey, as seen from table 1 shown that, according to the statements as to how much they agree with the inclusion of refugees in the kindergarten class and whether they would feel a threat to the proper education of their child if there were enough refugee children in the class, the majority of the participants answered that they do not agree with the inclusion of refugees in the kindergarten classes and believe that, the proper education of their children would be affected. As a reference to the statements about the parents' readiness to deal with the new situation, the inclusion of refugee students in the general or special class, the respondents consider that they do not have the relative readiness to deal with the modern situation, they also consider it important that the refugee children join special classes and not general education classes. The percentages of parents' agreement with the statements about the group participation of refugee students with general class students are lower. Regarding the participation of refugees in the Greek education system, they seem neither to disagree nor to particularly agree as the majority expressed moderate agreement with the

statement. In addition, the different culture of the refugees and the way in which the progress of their own children will be affected does not seem to play a particular role for the parents of the Greek students. Nevertheless, if a refugee student joined their child's class, they would try to change the department. Finally, the majority of the participants believe that their child's contact with refugees is not important and will not gain anything from it, as well as that, with their contact with refugee students, they will not learn to accept diversity more easily.

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## 5. Limitations

Limitations of the study include a small sample size and the potential response bias of self-administered questionnaires. Also, due to the small sample size, the results cannot be generalized to the general population. A study with the present questionnaire on a larger sample would be a good suggestion for future research as well as to further evaluate the validity and reliability of the specific instrument.

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## 6. Conclusion

The policies implemented for the integration of refugee students in the Greek education system should take into account similar researches as the field of inclusive education in the part of multiculturalism seems to lack behind. The Greek Ministry of Education should probably invest more in alleviating the difficulties and strengthening the readiness of Greek parents of general education so that the inclusion of refugee students can be achieved in the smoothest way.

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