

Chapter # 15

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS IN ATHENS A Pilot Study

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ABSTRACT

Greece stands as the 'gateway to Europe', embracing waves of refugees and immigrants from diverse corners of the globe over the past three decades. Consequently, the educational landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, as students representing a kaleidoscope of backgrounds attend school in Greece. However, teachers are often left grappling with the challenge of adapting to this vibrant mosaic of diversity without support. This pilot study aimed to investigate the attitudes of twenty four teachers that attempt to navigate this multicultural milieu in three elementary schools in a highly concentrated multicultural area of downtown Athens. A survey was employed to assess how teachers' awareness of the challenges that multicultural and multilingual students face influence their ability to use adept teaching strategies. The results indicate that the more teachers are aware of these challenges, the more teaching strategies they employ. The findings also show that they feel unsupported in their efforts to bridge the cultural chasms between themselves and their students of varied backgrounds. Based on these findings this pilot study explores how teachers could be effectively supported by means of teacher training seminars targeting key areas of multicultural education.

Keywords: multicultural teaching, multilingual students, cultural diversity, teacher training.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization trends are creating an increasingly multicultural world; therefore, multicultural education should be a crucial concern in order to ensure students' social integration and inclusion. Greece has been on the forefront of accepting immigrants, due to the refugee crisis and the location and position in which Greece sits in the Mediterranean Sea. Greece is known to be a receiving country for refugees, as it is the first country into Europe that most refugees arrive at and claim asylum (European Website on Integration, 2015). According to the available evidence about half of immigrants and refugees in Greece reside in Athens, the capital, and make up about 17% of the population (Baldwin-Edwards, 2005) with a tendency for the numbers to keep increasing. Between 1991-2001 an estimated 630, 000 immigrants moved permanently to Greece (ReferNet Greece, 2022). In 2019, Greece hosted over 186, 000 refugees and asylum-seekers including over 5, 000 unaccompanied children (UNHCR, 2020). Children of these refugees and immigrants have been entering the school system over the past twenty years, especially in downtown Athens. Yet, the public school system has remained relatively unchanged, and the teachers do not seem to have much awareness of the importance of integrating multicultural and multilingual values into education (Zotou, 2017).

Given the high numbers of diverse students, it is imperative that the Greek school system find ways to integrate these students effectively. Despite the diversity seen in the population of Athens little has been done to address the training of teachers to accommodate such diverse classrooms. Teachers need to develop strategies for working with multilingual and multicultural students and their parents in a way that provides dignity and fosters a multicultural environment that will eventually promote inclusion and integration of these students. More research is necessary to investigate how teachers deal with diversity in the classroom, what their attitudes towards multicultural education are and what kind of support and professional development opportunities they need so that they can cater to their students' needs effectively.

2. BACKGROUND

Greece first began to develop a legal framework for intercultural education in the 1960s. Intercultural education aims to create an environment where power is not held by one group, but instead students of all cultures can thrive together in school. In 1960, a Greek policy first stated intent for the inclusion of foreign students. This policy, however, was fully based on the assimilation model, which forces children to adopt all lingual and cultural aspects of the host culture, and to abandon their previous language or cultural practices. This approach is not acceptable today and encroaches on the rights of individuals and families. Although in 1996 a law was introduced declaring equal opportunities for Greek and foreign students, this law did not address the various cultural backgrounds students come from, and the barriers that students face in accessing these 'equal opportunities' (Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023; Zotou, 2017). Although the laws at this point expressed the desire for inclusion of cultural and linguistic differences, the education system is still based on a monocultural approach that does not give any time or value to other cultures or languages (Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023).

In the Greek classrooms there is a highly diverse student population, in terms of ethnicity, language and culture. Yet, the educational system that teachers serve does not seem to be multilingual and multicultural enough. Even the terms are used interchangeably, despite not being synonymous. In this context, 'multilingual' refers to students who are learning the language, while 'multicultural' is a broader term that can be used to describe the way of life of second-generation diverse students who may already speak the language (Lid, 2018). Several studies regarding teachers and diverse classrooms in Greece focus on the lingual aspect of diversity and on refugee populations (e.g., Fotiadou, Prentza, Maligkoudi, Michalopoulou, & Mattheoudakis, 2022; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023; Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2011; Karananou, Rousoulioti, & Kontoulis, 2022; Zotou, 2017). Even though lingual diversity and refugee populations are key areas of research, they do not often emphasize the importance of breaking down cultural barriers and including cultural differences into the curriculum to approach education from a truly multicultural lens. Teachers in multicultural classrooms should integrate lingual and cultural aspects into the classroom (Yoon, 2023) to engage multilingual students and students who may have different values and expectations due to culture. The focus on refugees usually does not include non-refugee immigrants and children who are second generation immigrants and come from families who are culturally ethnic. Teachers must build awareness of the difficulties these students have in the school system due to the contrast between home and school culture. Different cultural cues and values such as concepts of honor and shame, can create a divide in the communication between school and home.

Most studies show that the majority of teachers in Greece express positivity towards teaching diverse populations of students (Fotiadou, et al., 2022; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023; Gkaintartzi & Tsokolidou, 2011; Karanikola, Katsiouli, & Palaiologlou, 2022; Zotou, 2017), but this is not the case practically in the classroom, possibly due to the lack of training and professional development. Fotiadou et al. (2022) showed by means of self-report questionnaires that most teachers in Northern Greece claim to support bilingualism but are left to their own devices to adjust the curriculum. In the same study teachers reported that they were unaware of the capabilities of students in their first language, indicating that they have never heard their students speak their first language, not even on the playground (Fotiadou et al., 2022). There is also a small percentage of teachers that are negative towards bilingualism and would prefer that students never speak their first language; hence they convince parents to speak only Greek at home (Fotiadou et al., 2022; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023). In fact, Karananou et al. (2022) argue that teachers have high awareness of multilingual difficulties but feel challenged when it comes to strategies that foster multicultural environment. Thus, they resort to a form of assimilation, where the goal is to replace the home language of the students with Greek. This assimilation, though, prevents the great advantage that multicultural education can have towards developing the worldview of students (Karananou et al., 2022). In addition, research has shown that any literacy increases overall literacy, including literacy in a different language (Naqvi, McKeough, Thorne, & Pfitscher, 2013). Students who learn to read and have a strong vocabulary in a different language are likely to develop better reading skills and vocabulary in the target language, as well (Naqvi et al., 2013).

Despite claiming to be intercultural in policy, the Greek school curriculum cannot be labeled as intercultural in practice, as many schools are not inclined to create an intercultural education atmosphere in the school. Many teachers express positivity towards the inclusion of intercultural curriculum, but some declare that students should follow the cultural norms of the majority Greek culture, which indicates that adequate training for staff is needed to work with multilingual and multicultural students (Zotou, 2017). Even teachers hired to work in zones of educational priority (ZEP) have reported that they do not feel adequately trained to teach in a multicultural way, despite being hired to work in a school of only refugee and immigrant students (Karanikola et al., 2022). A recent study showed that adolescent immigrant youth are not often able to maintain both an equal Greek identity and an ethnic identity due to the assimilative nature of Greek society (Mastrotheodoros, Kornienko, Umaña-Taylor, & Motti-Stefanidi, 2021). This study found that not only is this dual identity vital for the personal well-being of the second-generation individual, but it would also hold many benefits for the majority Greek culture to have individuals with dual cultural identities. Overall, there seems to be discrepancy between policies, attitudes and teachers' abilities to foster intercultural education and promote diverse students' growth towards a truly multicultural school.

2.1. Multicultural Classrooms in Countries Other than Greece

Looking at how countries other than Greece have attempted to implement a truly multicultural school underlines the critical role of teachers in these efforts. For instance, the Finnish educational system is often featured as a model of innovative and holistic teaching approach. A study in a diverse area of Finland found that most of the teachers were monocultural and around half the teachers showed low levels of awareness of diversity, which inhibited their abilities to teach diverse students (Acquah, Tandon, & Lempinen, 2016). This may explain why ethnic minority students in diverse schools have difficulties obtaining academic success. The authors argued that cultural competence, defined as awareness of

multicultural issues, is a crucial factor for teaching multicultural classrooms successfully; thus, emphasizing the importance of seminars and other resources to provide support and diversity training to teachers (Acquah et al., 2016).

Competence in teaching multilingual students is connected to awareness of the issues these students face. Another study in Finland reported that teachers who were more aware about the challenges of learning a second language and the benefits of maintaining the home language, were more likely to encourage the use of the home language (Alisaari, Heikkola, Commins, & Acquah, 2019). In accordance with findings by Greek researchers (i.e., Fotiadou et al. 2022; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023), they also found that although teachers expressed positive mindsets towards multilingualism, they did not understand it as an asset in the classroom and many of them encouraged families to also use Finnish at home (Alisaari et al., 2019), in favor of a monocultural approach to education. The discrepancy in these studies between the positive mindsets towards multilingualism and practice in the classroom may be due to the research methods that were employed; that is, self-report measures may sometimes include bias and can be inaccurate. Teachers may have much lower awareness on diversity issues than they declare (Thomassen & Munthe, 2021).

Although most teachers report having a positive outlook towards multicultural and multilingual students, they have difficulties implementing Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) in class. This may be due to a variety of reasons. A large-scale correlation study in Belgium reported a connection between the ethnic background of the teacher and multicultural education (Agirdag, Merry, & Van Houtte, 2016). Specifically, they found that multicultural materials and concepts were more likely to be introduced in the classroom from teachers of different ethnic backgrounds. A case study that included videotaped classroom lessons on four different German teachers working in a remarkably diverse school, found that teachers' beliefs about diverse cultures and race impacted the level of CRT (Civittillo, Juang, Badra, & Schachner, 2019). This study also notes that implementing CRT can be a learned skill, and not connected to the ethnic background of the teacher. Professional development for multicultural education (PDME) was found to be correlated to teacher's self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms (TSMC; Choi & Lee, 2020). Not only did PDME affect TSMC, but the self-efficacy of teachers affected the perceptions teachers had of the school climate, making it a more positive experience for everyone (Choi & Lee, 2020).

The value of professional development on CRT is recognized by teachers across the globe and should be an essential component of teacher training in Greece and beyond. A key aspect of CRT is fostering engagement with families, particularly multilingual families. To effectively support these communities, professional development must equip teachers with the skills necessary for meaningful interactions with families. The ultimate goal should be to empower families to take leadership roles in meetings and events. However, research indicates that reaching this level of engagement requires extensive and sustained professional development (Schultz, Bonney, Dorner, & Song, 2023). Teachers play a crucial role in multicultural education, as their awareness and instructional strategies significantly shape a multicultural learning environment. When implemented effectively, CRT not only enhances classroom dynamics but also benefits students in measurable ways. Studies show that CRT training increases students' enthusiasm for learning (Azis, Maharani, & Indralin, 2024), improves test scores, and helps close the academic achievement gap between ethnic majority and minority students (Thomas & Sebastian, 2023). Additionally, CRT fosters a stronger sense of identity and more positive attitudes toward students' ethnic and racial backgrounds (Byrd, 2016), reinforcing its role as a powerful tool for creating inclusive and equitable learning spaces.

3. THE PRESENT STUDY

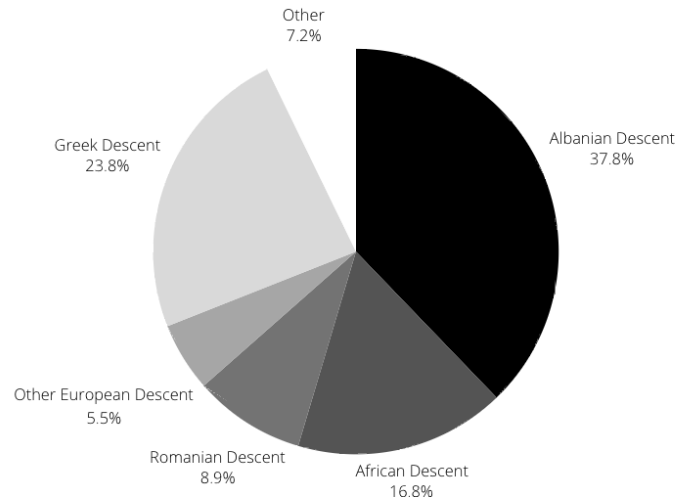
The present pilot study aimed to investigate teachers' awareness about multilingual and multicultural challenges of the students and to examine the connection between this awareness and the strategies that they employ to support these students, as highlighted by previous research (Acquah et al., 2016). Despite efforts to identify the barriers to multicultural education in Greece, there is a pressing need for further research with teachers working in schools with highly diverse student populations, such as in Athens. Most previous studies on teachers' experiences with diversity have been conducted in Northern Greece or the islands, often focusing on the challenges faced by refugee students. In contrast, this study focuses on a highly diverse neighborhood in central Athens, where the largest percentage of ethnic minorities in Greece reside. The hypothesis of this study is that the more aware teachers are of the challenges faced by multilingual and multicultural students, the more likely they are to develop and implement effective strategies to meet these students' needs. However, given the reported lack of teacher training in Greece, this study also seeks to explore how teachers can be better supported through professional development, not only to increase their multicultural and multilingual awareness, but also to help them acquire the practical skills needed to apply this knowledge in the classroom.

4. METHOD

4.1. Participants

This study included 24 teachers (4 male and 20 female), all of whom currently work in one of three public elementary schools in downtown Athens that participated in this research. All participants hold a teaching degree and teach grades 1- 6. The age range of the teachers was between 31-64 years ($M = 46$, $SD = 10.29$) and a range of 5-37 years ($M = 20.52$, $SD = 10.60$) of teaching experience. The specific schools were selected because they are in Kypseli, which is a neighborhood of Athens with a high concentration of immigrants (Karananou et al., 2022). For many years, the schools in this neighborhood have had a high concentration of diverse students. This was confirmed in the survey's demographic results (see Appendix II), as teachers reported a high ethnic diversity of students in their classrooms. Indicatively, an average of 23.8% of students in participants' classrooms were fully Greek; while over 75% of the students in these classes had at least one parent of another nationality (see Figure 1).

Figure 1.
Ethnic distribution of students in participants' classes.



4.2. Materials

This study adapted a questionnaire that was developed by Acquah et al. (2016) for a school in a multicultural neighborhood in Finland. It encompasses two parts: the first addresses teachers' level of awareness regarding lingual and cultural teaching, and the second addresses the strategies teachers use in the classroom (see Appendix I). There are 14 questions in the Awareness Questionnaire, seven of which are close ended questions on a six-point Likert scale with the following scores: 1 = extremely low, 2 = low, 3 = moderately low, 4 = moderately high, 5 = high, 6 = extremely high. One example of a close ended question in this selection is "Please indicate your level of understanding as to how culture influences learning." Seven additional questions are open ended, such as: "How many students from backgrounds different from your own did you have in your high school class while growing up?". The Awareness Questionnaire aimed to discover the teachers' personal experience with diversity and whether this made a difference in their awareness of diversity issues in their classrooms.

The second part of the survey, "Strategies for Teaching", has eight close-ended questions, also recorded on the same six-point Likert scale as mentioned above, as well as three open ended questions. An example of a close ended question in this section is: "Please indicate the frequency with which you use strategies for teaching academic content to multilingual learners?". The open-ended questions are included with the purpose of discovering in which areas teachers self-report needed support, such as "What three areas of professional development you would like to engage in to better support your work with multilingual learners?". The purpose of the second questionnaire was to understand in what areas of professional development teachers have concerns and need support to teach multicultural classrooms.

4.3. Procedure

The researcher visited the three public primary schools upon institutional review board approval for ethics and with permission granted by the school principals. The questionnaire

was distributed in a printed format. To ensure anonymity separate envelopes were provided, an envelope for consent forms, another one with the questionnaire and another one with debriefing forms. They were left on a table in the staff room so that volunteers could complete them at their convenience. The consent forms were all placed in one envelope when finished, and each questionnaire was returned in an individual sealed envelope to ensure anonymity within the school. The researcher returned to the school in due time and collected the envelopes.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Quantitative analysis

Spearman's rank correlation was computed to assess the relationship between the level of awareness teachers reported about diversity issues, and the total knowledge and skills in teaching strategies. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables, $r(23) = .49$, $p = .015$.

Regarding the scores, the participants showed the highest awareness score for "How language influences learning" ($M = 4.92$, $SD = .88$) as well as "How culture influences learning" ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.21$). The lowest awareness score was for "Language variation and dialects" ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 1.04$).

Regarding strategies used in teaching multilingual students, participants reported the highest score in knowledge and skills in "Strategies for teaching academic content to multilingual learners" ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.22$). The lowest score was in "Strategies for using students' native language and culture to enhance acquisition of academic Greek and grade level content" ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.44$) (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Highest and Lowest Scores of Awareness & Strategies Quantitative Questionnaires.

AWARENESS QUESTIONNAIRE	MEAN (SD)
HOW LANGUAGE INFLUENCES LEARNING (HIGHEST SCORE)	4.92 (.88)
LANGUAGE VARIATION AND DIALECTS (LOWEST SCORE)	3.96 (1.0)
GROUP MEAN	4.45 (.62)
STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING QUESTIONNAIRE	MEAN (SD)
STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ACADEMIC CONTENT TO MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS (HIGHEST SCORE)	4.00 (1.2)
STRATEGIES FOR USING STUDENTS' NATIVE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE TO ENHANCE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC GREEK AND GRADE LEVEL CONTENT (LOWEST SCORE)	3.46 (1.4)
GROUP MEAN	3.72 (1.1)

5.2. Qualitative Analysis

The open-ended questions of the questionnaires were analyzed qualitatively based on the key themes that emerged from the participants' responses (see Table 2). Indicatively, the participants mentioned that incorporating the native language and cultural background of students in the lesson, offering emotional support and communicating with parents are the most important things to do to support multilingual learners. Whereas their principal areas of concern are barriers in the communication with the parents, lack of resources - including time -, and teaching Greek as a foreign language. They stated that they would like professional development in the form of seminars and resources in the areas of teaching Greek as a foreign language but also multicultural education and instructions on how to incorporate these aspects into their lesson plans.

Regarding participants' experiences with diversity, 30% (8/ 24) had a student from another ethnicity in their elementary school. 50% (12/ 24) had at least one student in their middle school from a different ethnicity, and 50% (12/ 24) had at least one student of a different ethnicity in their high school. Only 12.5% (3 / 24) had a teacher of a different background in school. Regarding racism, all participants reported feeling comfortable to discuss the topic with others. As for witnessing racism, however, 30% (8/ 24) claimed to have never witnessed racism. Of the 70% (16/ 24) who reported having witnessed racism, 21% (5/ 24) explained that they witnessed it on the bus.

Table 2.
Main Themes in the Qualitative Responses for the Strategies for Teaching Questionnaire.

The Most Important Things Teachers Can Do:	1) incorporate the native language of students into lessons	(37.5%) N = 9
	2) communicate with parents	(25%) N = 6
	3) emotional support for multilingual students	(20.8%) N = 5
	4) incorporate the background culture of students into lessons	(16.7%) N = 4
Barriers Teachers Face:	1) barriers with the parents of the students	(37.5%) N = 9
	2) the lack of resources from the government for multilingual students	(29.2%) N = 7
	3) the lack of time teachers have to properly teach multilingual students	(25%) N = 6
	4) teaching Greek as a foreign language	(20.8%) N = 5
Types of Professional Development Teachers Request:	1) seminars	(37.5%) N = 9
	2) resources from the government	(25%) N = 6
	3) learning how to teach Greek	(20.8%) N = 5
	4) education on different cultures	(20.8%) N = 5

6. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research should focus on expanding the sample size of teacher participants to allow for a reliable and generalizable set of findings. This could be done also by recruiting participants from other multicultural areas of Athens. Perhaps interviews with teachers would allow more elaboration on awareness issues and examples of strategies that teachers employ in class. It would also be interesting to compare the findings from the areas with a high concentration of diverse population to findings with teachers who work at schools with exceptionally low percentages of multilingual and multicultural students.

The current as well as most of previous research with teachers in Greece is to a great extent based on self-report measures. However, self-report measures could potentially include implicit biases and lead to overestimation of positive attitudes (Karananou et al., 2022; Thomassen & Munthe, 2021). Consequently, there should be efforts to explore ways to directly record the level of awareness and strategies used in order to reduce potential biases. A possibility to build off current research would be to film teachers during lessons and quantify the results to record the strategies used in the classroom (Civitillo et al., 2019). Alternatively, following the survey there could be an intervention with teachers in the form of professional development seminars based on teachers' expressed need for practical training in multicultural issues. It would also be useful to evaluate the effect of this training on awareness and strategies after implementing suggestions from the seminars. Finally, future research should evaluate the impact of teachers' multicultural and multilingual training on students. It would be valuable to include students' perspective and specifically how they benefit from teachers who are culturally sensitive and effectively apply the principles of multilingual and multicultural education.

7. DISCUSSION

In this pilot study there was effort to investigate the attitudes of teachers who work in multicultural and multilingual schools at the center of Athens, where there is the highest concentration of immigrants and refugees. Through quantitative and qualitative measures, we investigated awareness of the challenges faced by multilingual and multicultural students and of strategies that should be used to support them. Highest understanding was reported for the effect of language on learning, followed by the effect of culture on learning, indicating that teachers have a moderately high understanding of how these two factors affect the learning process at school. Participants reported having the highest level of knowledge and skill in strategies for teaching academic content to diverse students, which illustrates that they feel they possess adequate strategies to teach the academic material to multilingual and multicultural students. In addition, the findings show a positive correlation between the level of awareness to diversity issues affecting learning, as reported by the teachers, and the strategies for teaching vastly multicultural classrooms. That is, the more awareness participants reported of the language and cultural barriers students face, the more strategies and skills they reported having for teaching multilingual and multicultural students in the classroom.

Overall, participants reported an elevated level of awareness, but this should be interpreted cautiously, as this was a self-report study. Although it is possible that teachers are well educated on multicultural issues due to the news, various media outlets, and experience, it seems unlikely that the awareness of teachers is as high as they report, since, according to their reported experience with diversity, about half of them were raised in areas with little to

no cultural diversity. Previous research also showed that although teachers may express positivity towards multilingual and multicultural classrooms, their responses to questions regarding their beliefs and strategies in the classroom show the opposite; thus, they did not implicitly believe in the advantage of a multilingual classroom (Karananou et al., 2022). This is consistent with findings indicating that self-reported scores may be overly high, hence overestimating positive attitudes (Karananou et al., 2022; Thomassen & Munthe, 2021).

The qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions indicates some interesting direction to determine teachers' needs for training and support. The issue of language was central to the teacher's perceptions. Interactions with the parents of students were reported as a main area of concern, mainly due to the language barrier. Yet, teachers reported that interactions with parents are one of the most important things they can do to support multilingual students. Teaching Greek as a second language was an issue of concern, whereas the inclusion of the student's original language into the classroom was mentioned as one of the most important things a teacher can do, consistently with the high levels of awareness expressed in the quantitative part in this matter. Another key issue in teachers' responses was the need for resources, training, and further professional development. Specifically, they expressed a need for resources and seminars about teaching Greek as a foreign language and education on cultural issues.

The importance of professional development programs for teachers has been highlighted by previous research (Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023; Zotou, 2017). In fact, it has been found to be vital not only for increasing the self-efficacy of teachers in multicultural classrooms but also for improving their perception of the overall environment in schools, which affects students in every facet: behavioral, social, and emotional (Choi & Lee, 2020). Although there is a legal framework in Greece regarding multi-cultural education, education programs for teachers have not been successful in this area, and teachers are still seeking professional development opportunities in the area of multicultural education as seen in this as well as in previous studies (Dimitrakopoulos, 2004; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023; Parthenis, 2010; Zotou, 2017).

Based on the current findings, there could be suggestions for teachers' professional development in multicultural education and diversity coping, considering recent developments in this area. Specifically, the development of Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching (CLRT) has been used for a focused training that helps teachers gain skills to engage multicultural and multilingual learners in the classroom (Yoon, 2023). CLRT focuses on five areas: 1) Knowledge of learner's first language, 2) allowing student to use both languages for learning, 3) integrating language learning with classroom content, 4) using multimodality, and 5) drawing on collaboration. Consequently, CLRT provides practical strategies towards understanding multicultural individuals and the barriers they face. Offering development seminars as an intervention to teachers who struggle with multicultural and multilingual classes may help them develop cultural sensitivity as well as appropriate teaching practices. Intervention studies have shown that teacher training seminars in applying culturally responsive teaching (CRT) resulted in the promotion of participants' self-reflection on their own cultural biases as well as the cultural standpoints of their students. They increased knowledge about CRT practices and confidence in implementing these practices in diverse classes (Pevac-Zimmer, Juang, & Schachner, 2024). Regarding the content of such seminars, explicit education into the historic, economic, and educational inequalities of the cultural groups teachers work with as well as assignments on diverse school cultures help increase teachers' cultural responsiveness and relevant strategies (Tanase & Kayaalp, 2024).

A key issue raised in the present findings is the language barrier that interferes with communication in the class and prevents engagement with the students and their families.

A practical skill to have in a multicultural classroom is based on CLRT and refers to language knowledge. Previous studies in Greece showed that some teachers encourage families to avoid speaking their language at home (Fotiadou et al., 2022; Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023); however, these practices are inconsistent with multicultural education. Effort should be made to practically show appreciation of students' native language. Some knowledge of the sentence structure of students' native language could help the teacher both understand students' mistakes and how to effectively explain concepts (Yoon, 2023). Basic knowledge of a few words in students' language may help the teacher connect and build trust with the students and the students' families. In addition, the use of students' first language interchangeably with the target language (translanguaging) can be an appropriate student-centered pedagogical approach to teach diverse classrooms (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). In this respect, translanguaging can be employed to enhance communication in class and facilitate content learning.

It is also important for language and curriculum objectives to intertwine to increase the effectiveness of the lesson (Yoon, 2023). Teachers should be trained to present several opportunities for students to learn aspects of the target language, such as vocabulary, which can be presented in context across different subjects taught at the school. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2018) has presented ways students can build global competence throughout their fields of learning. These strategies can be tailored to match cultures present within a class or the school at large. Each subject of learning – for example, Literature, Science, Physical Education – can incorporate aspects of diverse cultures, which can help expand the worldview of students (OECD, 2018).

A relevant key issue that arose in this study was teachers' engagement with families, which was viewed as a major concern. However, engaging families in classroom activities is an important aspect of building trust and enhancing classroom life (Tye, 2023), as was also acknowledged by the participants of this study, as one of the most important things to do. Family engagement in school is vital to ensure that students stay in school and experience an increasing sense of belonging within the student body (Tye, 2023). Research has shown that extensive professional development is highly important for teachers to understand their role in this process and to have more successful interactions with multilingual parents (Schultz et al., 2023). Consequently, the teachers should be educated to view themselves as participants, rather than hosts, allowing parents more initiative and a significant role in creating a truly multicultural environment. Parents could increase ownership by taking opportunities to share with the class about their cultures and language and choose photographs or materials for classroom decoration that represent their culture (Banks, 1993; Baker, 2015). When teachers take time to understand the style and forms of communication of their students' parents, this enables them to not only understand the students better, but also to use similar expressions in the teaching environment to facilitate communication (Siliunas, Wan, & Edejer, 2024). Professional development seminars that address ways to engage families in classroom activities would be critical to enable efficient teacher-parent interactions to the benefit of the students.

Another critical issue to address is the relationship between teacher and students and students amongst themselves, and the creation of a safe, inviting space, which is key for a multilingual and multicultural education. It is important for teachers to aim to achieve a sense of oneness (Qin & Beauchemin, 2022). All students must feel connected, and their full identity valued with the teacher and one another. Creating a safe and inviting space is vitally important for a classroom learning environment (Venkatesamy, Sing, & Smart, 2020). In a diverse area it is important to cultivate to students a sense of belonging. To this end, the teachers should be educated on how to create classes that embrace the multicultural identities

of students and avoid students' feeling that they must assimilate (Mastrotheodoros et al., 2021). This could be achieved by including, for instance, classroom materials, such as literature or prompts representing students' diverse culture and languages. However, teachers' competence in promoting students' overall social and emotional growth is crucial to improve relationships between students as well as academic outcomes. Thus, they would benefit from training seminars in applying Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs and interventions that encourage the healthy social, emotional, and academic development of students of all ages and backgrounds with long-term effects (Kim-Ju, Knifsend, & Gonzales, 2024; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). Importantly, there is recent encouraging evidence that SEL benefits students from diverse backgrounds (Lee, Shapiro, & Kim, 2023).

International research suggests that teacher training in general - including effective teaching methodologies - positively influences student engagement and academic achievement (Hafeez, 2021). However, teacher training in multilingual and multicultural education plays a crucial role in shaping student outcomes. The implementation of multicultural education fosters cultural sensitivity, encourages students to examine different perspectives, and promotes self-reflection on biases. This, in turn, supports open communication, collaboration, and compassion among peers. However, the success of multicultural education heavily depends on teachers' ability to implement it effectively, highlighting the necessity of proper training (Latif Naz, Afzal, & Khan, 2023). Multicultural education enhances student engagement and academic achievement by recognizing and valuing diverse backgrounds, fostering positive relationships, and cultivating a sense of belonging and well-being (Caingcoy, 2023). Studies conducted with university students further indicate that multicultural education strengthens communication skills, cultural awareness, and overall well-being. However, inadequate teacher training can hinder its effectiveness (Taihe & Tahir, 2024). While existing research underscores the significant benefits of multicultural education for students, further studies are needed to explore the direct impact of teacher training on student learning experiences, well-being, and long-term academic success. Ultimately, though, the success of multicultural education largely depends on teachers' ability to implement its principles effectively.

The findings of the current pilot study suggest that teachers are aware of the various challenges that multilingual and multicultural students face at schools of Athens with high concentration of diverse population. Teachers also reported having knowledge of strategies for working with diverse students. These two aspects were positively correlated indicating that the higher the awareness, the better the knowledge of these strategies, which implies that awareness raising would also improve the knowledge of strategies that teachers employ. Despite the reported understanding of the challenges that students face and the strategies that could be used, teachers expressed the need to be further supported and trained in multicultural education through seminars and resources. The seminars could be focused on practical ways to incorporate students' language both in class and as a way to engage in meaningful interaction with students' families. C(L)RT training would help address teacher's concerns about the implementation of multicultural education and improve academic and developmental outcomes for students. These and more issues should be addressed in future research as the influx of immigrants and refugees is likely to increase in the years to come, the call for the Greek as well as all schools to be truly inclusive and multicultural will be imminent, and the need for teacher training in multicultural education will become pressing.

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APPENDIX I

Teacher survey:

Tick the appropriate box **Are you?** ☐ Male ☐ Female

Ethnicity: Age:

Please indicate your level of understanding and skill using the scale:

1 = extremely low; 2 = moderately low; 3 = low; 4 = high; 5 = moderately high; 6 = extremely high

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How people learn a second language? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. How language influences learning? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. The nature of academic Finnish and the challenges it poses for multilingual learners? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. How culture influences learning? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 5. Language variation and dialects? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. The differences between proficiency in oral language and in written language | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

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- 7 How many students from backgrounds different from your own did you have in your elementary class while growing up?
.....
- 8 How many students from backgrounds different from your own did you have in your secondary school class while growing up?
.....
- 9 How many students from backgrounds different from your own did you have in your high school class while growing up?
.....
- 10 How many teachers from backgrounds different from your own did you have in school?
.....
- 11 If you had, please describe the subjects they taught (math, science, sports, etc):
.....
- 12 Have you had experience with people from backgrounds different from your own in authority besides school (e.g. church, work, volunteer groups, etc.)? If so, please describe:
.....
.....
- 13 Have you ever discussed racism or classism? If so, with whom are you comfortable discussing it? (Friends, family, academic classroom, anyone):
.....
- 14 Have you ever witnessed acts of racism in your life? If so, please describe:
.....
.....
.....

Teacher survey:

Tick the appropriate box **Are you?** Male Female

Tick the appropriate box **Are you?** ☐ Male ☐ Female

Ethnicity: Age:

Please indicate your level of understanding and skill using the scale:

1 = extremely low; 2 = moderately low; 3 = low; 4 = high; 5 = moderately high; 6 = extremely high

- | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strategies for learning about the cultural backgrounds of multilingual learners? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 2. Strategies for teaching academic content to multilingual learners? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 3. Assessing multilingual learners' academic abilities in a classroom setting? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 4. Being able to modify classroom instruction for multilingual learners? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

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- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Being able to access and link multilingual learners' prior knowledge and experience with new ideas and skills as part of instruction? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 6. Strategies for using students' native language and culture to enhance acquisition of academic English and grade level content? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

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- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. The nature and purposes of different types of programs for multilingual learners? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. Strategies for reaching out to and working effectively with multilingual learners' parents/guardians? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. What do you think are the three most important things teachers can do to support multilingual learners in their classrooms? _____ | | | | | | |
| 10. What are three areas of concern you have in terms of working with multilingual learners effectively? _____ | | | | | | |
| 11. What three areas of professional development you would like to engage in to better support your work with multilingual learners? _____ | | | | | | |

[Source: Acquah et al. 2016]

APPENDIX II

Demographics Questions

Gender: Woman Man Other

Ethnicity:

Age:

Do you have a teaching certificate? Yes / No

Years of experience:

Years of experience in Kypseli:

How many students are in your class?

Did you grow up in:

1. Thessaloniki / Athens
2. A smaller city
3. A village

How many students in your class have:

1. Fully Greek heritage
2. Half Greek heritage
3. Fully other heritage

How many total nationalities are represented in your class?

More specifically, how many students are from:

1. Africa _____
2. Middle East (Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, etc) _____
3. Other Asian country: _____
4. Roma background _____
5. Albania _____
6. Ukraine _____
7. Romania _____
8. South America _____
9. Other European country: _____
10. Other non-European country _____