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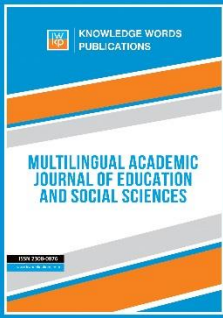
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Children with a Refugee and Migrant Background in the Greek Formal Education: A Study of Language Support Classes

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Abstract

The present study intends to investigate second/foreign language teaching in formal educational settings. In particular, it probes into the teachers' and students' profiles, the teachers' goals and challenges, the teaching practices, the educational materials used and the classroom climate in various formal educational settings throughout Greece that offer language education to refugee and migrant children. The data were collected through teacher interviews and classroom observations in the context of the Postgraduate Programme 'Language Education for Refugees and Migrants' at the Hellenic Open University and analysed through the content analysis method. According to the results of the study, it was shown that there is great students' linguistic and cultural diversity making these classrooms really heterogeneous. Simultaneously, it was revealed that most teachers, though they did their best to create a supportive educational environment providing not only knowledge but also psychological support, used a variety of teaching methods and practices mainly focusing on form. The results of the study are indicative of the need for teachers' training to get special knowledge and appropriate skills to teach this socially vulnerable population, while further research is required to validate the findings of this study.

Keywords: Second/Foreign Language Teaching, Language Education for Immigrant and Refugee Children, Teaching Practices and Materials, Intercultural Education

Introduction

Migration flows into southern European countries, among them Greece, have increased considerably over the past three decades, turning these countries from migrant senders to migrant receivers. Following that, new language learners have emerged, forming about 10% of the total student population in Greece (Gkaintartzi, Kiliari and Tsokalidou, 2015), who differ not only in age, gender, socio-cultural background but in first language, language proficiency, aptitude, prior and current access to education classrooms have turned into heterogeneous places and teacher's work have been made even more demanding (Beacco, Krumm and Little, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). In this context, the need for teachers' adoption of an intercultural education is more than necessary promoting the principles of the equality of civilisations, respect for the different traditions, lifestyles, and cultures, tolerance, empathy and the elimination of

prejudices and stereotypes (NCCA, 2006). According to NCCA (2006), immigrant students should become familiar with some elements of the culture of the host community without abandoning their own habits and traditions, while mainstream students should get some knowledge about the culture, the traditions, and lifestyles of other cultures. However, as Bodycott (2006) indicated, a number of second/foreign language teachers did not have intercultural education, so they were not able to take advantage of their students' cultural diversity. Another interesting research finding is that second/foreign language teachers that lack intercultural competence usually tend to use more teacher-centered approaches than those who are interculturally knowledgeable (Simopoulos, 2014). Simultaneously, students' successful integration into an educational system involves the development of literacy-related language skills. The relevant literature indicates that the acquisition of such skills is a lengthy process, as students have to make meaning of context-reduced language, which is lexically and syntactically complex, in tasks requiring complex cognitive processes, like problem-solving, inferencing, comparing and contrasting etc. (Cummins, 1981, 2008). It is also shown that students with an immigration background perform at a lower level than native students in several school subjects (Marx and Stanat, 2011; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2006). This finding calls for immediate remedial measures on the part of the countries with significant numbers of migrant student population.

Regarding the measures taken in Greece to facilitate migrant and refugee integration into the educational system, the Reception Classes (RCs) established in the 1980s, which operated in the morning zone of primary and junior high schools and aimed to develop students' language skills in Modern Greek to help them integrate into mainstream classrooms. Tzeveleku et al. (2013) investigating 765 students from 66 RCs found that the students attending the RCs had an extended mean length of residence in the country, as many had either been born in Greece or settled in the country at an early age; their performance, writing and grammar skills were significantly less developed than their listening skills, which the researchers attributed to the longer time it takes for literacy skills to be acquired. Furthermore, the law 2416/1996 set the foundations for establishing "intercultural schools", which were to follow the program of mainstream schools, with adaptations according to the needs and characteristics of their student population (Palaiologou, 2004). Nevertheless, it was shown that they ended up functioning "more as ghettos for migrant pupils rather than real intercultural learning places that integrate both migrant and native pupils" (Palaiologou and Faas, 2012, p. 567).

Despite relevant legislative actions that were supposed to promote the implementation of intercultural education, no significant changes were made in the way the Greek educational system encountered diversity (Mattheoudakis, Chatzidaki and Maligkoudi, 2017). Immigrant children's bilingualism is not promoted at school, as mother tongue courses are not provided by the Greek state, despite the relevant law that established these courses as part of their school curriculum (Gkaintartzi and Tsokalidou, 2011; Mattheoudakis et al. 2017). Though teachers hold positive views on a theoretical level, they fail to adopt practices that promote student's language diversity (Gkaintartzi and Tsokalidou, 2011; Gkaintartzi, Kiliari and Tsokalidou, 2015; Skourtou, 2005; Stamou and Dinas, 2009) and attitudes towards monolingualism are revealed (Griva & Stamou, 2014).

The recent refugee crisis called for the development of additional educational provisions to better suit the characteristics of the asylum-seeking population, i.e. their constant movement

from one country to another and their particular educational needs, since refugee students often have disrupted educational trajectories (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). To this end, afternoon Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFRE) were established during the school year 2016-17 in many Greek public schools situated near camps, which were operated as a preparatory stage for students' subsequent integration in the Greek educational system or any other country they might be relocated. Modern Greek, English, IT and mathematics were the subjects taught there, while the Institute for Education Policy (IEP) undertook the task of designing the relevant curricula and selecting appropriate material for this population (<http://iep.edu.gr/el/component/k2/content/50-ekpaidefsi-prosfygon>). However, the first two years of RFRE operation have been marked by serious dysfunctions, such as teachers' continuous change during the school year, students' unstable rate of attendance, problems with children's age and many administrative issues (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017). The lack of teachers' specialized knowledge and relevant experience has been repeatedly highlighted (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017; Ziomas, Cappella and Konstantinidou, 2017).

Relevant research on refugee education, both in the global and the Greek context, revealed many inconsistencies and omissions highlighting mainly teachers' inexperience and students' diversity. Namely, Aydin and Kaya (2017) exploring teachers' views on the needs of Syrian refugee students in Turkish schools and Bianco and Cobo (2019) researching teachers who work with refugee students in Jordan identified inadequate resources and inappropriate curriculum planning as well as the need for teachers' specialization in this field. Angelopoulou and Manesis (2017), who explored teachers' views on the educational practices used in order to fulfil bilingual students' needs within the intercultural educational context, showed that teachers have received low initial and in-service education regarding intercultural pedagogy, which leads them to adopt more stereotypical attitudes and practices regarding intercultural pedagogy. Marouli (2017) investigating the perceptions and educational needs of teachers involved in formal refugee education highlighted teachers' need to be trained in terms of intercultural education. Vopi (2018) aiming to investigate teachers' challenges working with refugees in formal educational settings in Thessaly revealed that they did face various challenges and difficulties in their classrooms which are mainly related to their lack of training, guidance and previous experience, the lack of a common language of communication, as well as the student diversity and pre-settlement experiences. The above findings were also corroborated by a more recent study (Papapostolou, Manoli and Mouti, 2020) probing into the challenges and needs of teachers' working in the reception classes; it was shown that teachers faced several challenges regarding practical, sociocultural, religious, ethical and emotional issues highlighting the need for teacher training to help them cope with diversity issues in their classrooms. The urgent need to train RFRE teachers and RECs before and during their service was also highlighted by Mogli et al (2020).

In this context, the aim of the present study was to explore teachers' and students' profiles, teaching practices and materials, and classroom climate, as there is limited relevant research on this field. Though many studies examined teachers' perceptions of intercultural education and linguistic and cultural diversity (e.g., Gkaintartzi and Tsokalidou, 2011; Griva and Stamou, 2014; Magos and Simopoulos, 2009; Mattheoudakis et al., 2007; Ramos, 2001; Stamou and Dinas, 2009; Skourtou, 2005; Zotou, 2017) and the difficulties migrant and refugee children face in their attempt to adapt at school (Aydin and Kaya, 2017; Dimakos and Tasiopoulou, 2003; Giavrimis et

al., 2003;Palaiologou 2004, 2007), there is little research on this field, especially after 2015, when there was an increased influx of refugees in Greece. More specifically, the study focuses on formal language support structures addressed to students with a migrant or refugee background. The research questions of the study are the following:

- What are the teachers' and students' profiles?
- What are the teaching practices and educational materials used?
- What is the classroom climate in these educational settings?

Method

Research Design

This study belongs to exploratory research, forming the basis for further research in a field where little previous research was conducted. To this end, a research design of multiple case studies was chosen. The research data came from ten (10) formal educational settings providing language classes to refugee and migrant children. They were collected in the context of the postgraduate programme of the Hellenic Open University (HOU) 'Language Education for Refugees and Migrants'.

Educational Settings

The 10 educational settings were situated in various places in Greece. All were formal settings, organized by the Ministry of Education and operated in public schools (five in the form of RFRE, four in the form of a RC and one Intercultural School). Eight were part of elementary schools and two of them were in junior high schools. Greek was taught in eight of the observed educational settings (particularly, three RFRE, one Intercultural School and four RCs), while English in the other two cases both in the context of RFRE.

The duration and frequency of the language courses varied as well; overall, the Greek language lessons were offered from three to five times per week, usually for 45 minutes each time. In some cases, the teaching hours were provided according to the students' needs and not according to a predefined schedule (there were groups that attended Greek lessons for three hours on a daily basis, while some others attended one hour daily or two to three times weekly). Regarding English language courses, lessons were provided four times per week for 45 minutes each time. In the case of the RCs, the lessons were provided during the school hours taking students from their mainstream classroom, while in the RFRE they were held from 14.00 to 18.00 p.m.

Research Instruments

The study belongs to qualitative research, as the data were collected through both interviews and observations aiming to depict the dynamic nature of events and seek trends and patterns over time (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Namely, interviews were conducted with the teachers emphasizing interviewees' different voices, while classroom observations were carried out in the formal educational settings. Simultaneously, a combination of research data was sought to triangulate research findings (Cohen et al., 2007). Data collection was conducted by research assistants, who were students of the HOU postgraduate programme 'Language Education for Refugees and Migrants'. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the same research instrument was not possible to be used to collect the data in all cases, as, for example, a different

observation sheet was designed by each research assistant and used in each educational setting, which could be considered one of the limitations of the present study; it should be mentioned, though, that the different versions of the research tools were designed based on predetermined aims.

Teachers' Interviews

10 semi-structured interviews (McDonough and McDonough, 1997) were conducted with the teachers, aiming at investigating teachers' instructional practices, materials, language skills emphasized, and classroom climate. Moreover, some questions about the teachers' and students' profiles were included in the interviews. Each interview lasted from 10 to 30 minutes approximately and was conducted in Greek. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis of the research data. It should be mentioned that a careful piloting of each interview guide was carried out, while the research assistants conducting the interviews had some relevant experience from previous assignments as well as training from their tutors to enhance the reliability of interviews (Silverman, 1993).

Classroom Observations

Direct, semi-structured classroom observations were conducted at these language support classes focusing on events and behaviors, as they were happening in a classroom, which enabled researchers to understand the context of various programmes (Cohen et al., 2007). Though the researcher assistants were present, they did not participate or intervene in the whole teaching procedure. During the observation process, field notes were taken on different observation sheets, developed separately in advance for each educational setting but focused on the same predetermined observation objectives. It should also be mentioned that the duration of each classroom observation varied, though the goal was to observe these language lessons at least twice or three times (4-5 teaching hours).

Data Analysis

The content analysis method was used to analyse the data deriving both from the interview and observation procedures (Cohen et al., 2007). More specifically, the researchers, after the data collection, focused on samples of texts, defined the categories and emergent themes to be used for analysis -allowing for the aims of the study-, reviewed the texts to code and put them into categories, and then counted the occurrence of codes and categories (Ezzy, 2002). A peer-review process was followed, similar to the one presented by Aydinand Kaya (2017, p. 460-461), during which the main researchers/authors, independently read and analysed the interview transcripts and observation sheets, checking for evidence of the themes. Some of the themes and categories that emerged were the following: teachers' profile, teachers' goals, students' profile, teaching methods, materials, relationships/classroom climate.

Results

Teachers' Profile

Teachers' age ranged from 28 to 47 years old, while it should be noted that most of them were quite young between 28 and 39. All of them held a bachelor's degree from departments having a pedagogical orientation (e.g., departments of Primary Education, English Language and

Literature, and Greek language and Literature), while one of them held two bachelor's degrees. Moreover, some of them held a Master's degree in Humanities (e.g., Bilingual Translation, Intercultural Education, Special Education), while one teacher was attending postgraduate studies in Special Education and Counseling, when the interview was conducted. Regarding their language teaching experience, most of them were experienced but only the English teachers had had training in second/foreign language teaching. When it comes to language teaching to refugees and migrants, it was found that teachers had limited experience in language teaching to this socially vulnerable group ranging from 1 to 2 years. According to a teacher's words:

'Overall, I have 15 years of teaching experience both in the private and public education...but to be honest, I had no previous experience in the refugee education, which was something new for me; that's why, in the very beginning I was rather hesitant but I really liked the fact that I was going to teach to young students that have gone through a lot of nasty experiences'.

Last but not least, it should be highlighted that some of the teachers stated that they had received no particular training in language teaching to refugees and migrants prior to their involvement in it, while one of them added that she has voluntarily attended two seminars about Intercultural Education. One of the teachers commented on the uncomfortable situation she was put through when she was assigned to teach Greek as a second language without any training:

"I had never taught bilingual students before, and at first I was very anxious, I studied a lot to prepare myself properly. I did not want to look weak and inexperienced to my students, so I tried to be positive and smile when I was with them. In fact, I was unhappy and disappointed with myself".

Teachers' Goals

When teachers were asked about their goals, most of them answered that they aimed at developing students' communicative competence. In particular, they stated that the emphasis was on helping them enrich vocabulary and communicate in their everyday lives, which would further motivate them to participate in the learning process, without strictly focusing on language accuracy, grammar and error correction. However, fewer teachers mentioned that they emphasized grammar, while a couple of them referred to the reading, listening and writing skills; especially, the latter was practiced by using simple lexical patterns. Based on a teacher's answer:

'I mainly emphasize communication, reading and speaking skills, while I usually focus less on writing, but we do form simple and short sentences using lexical chunks and patterns, such as I like, I can; I also focus on vocabulary, but I have not managed to move on with grammar'.

Moreover, some teachers mentioned that their goal was to help their students integrate and adjust in the Greek society and school emphasizing conformation to the rules of socially accepted behavior and providing emotional support, since there were some instances of aggressive behavior. According to a teacher's words:

'Well, the main goals of this program were initially to help these children join a school environment, respect the rules of the place and learn the language by using simple expressions for day-to-day communication in the social environment. It also aimed to help children learn the limits of their behavior in the school environment, particularly, towards classmates and teachers, accept and respect diversity, as at first some of them had an aggressive behavior towards their classmates. Another aim was to provide them with encouragement and emotional support, since

these children have experienced the horror of war and immigration and the uprooting of their homeland”.

Students' Profile

89 students attended the 10 educational settings at the time of the study. Their age ranged from 6 to 14 years; it should be highlighted that the age difference within the same class did not exceed four years in most cases. However, one needs to be tentative about the birth date of children seeking asylum, as the declared age is often not backed up by the relevant documentation, since age is a key factor in determining the success or failure of their asylum application. Moreover, great diversity in the students' countries of origin was observed. Namely, the students came from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Pakistan, Romania, Georgia, Albania, Egypt, and some other African countries. As a natural corollary of the diversity in origin, the students spoke a variety of languages: Arabic, Farsi (and its dialect, Dari), Kurdish and Urdu were the most common languages. Simultaneously, some of the students spoke Bulgarian, Albanian, Russian and other languages, while some had very basic knowledge of English. Regarding their educational background, students greatly differed in terms of the years they had attended school before joining the educational settings included in the study. According to teachers' interviews, some students had never attended school before, while others had had several years of education. However, even in these latter cases, a number of students, mainly in the RFRE classes, had been out of school for up to one year. Furthermore, students with very different levels of literacy in their mother tongue attended the same class. Several teachers considered this literacy differentiation one of the great difficulties they faced in their daily practice.

At the same time, teachers associated the issue of disrupted education with classroom behaviour, as some children were not familiar with school routines and rules. As one of the teachers stated:

“The students have difficulties in complying with the rules, they were often crossing the lines. In the beginning, [...] many of them didn't know how to behave in the classroom, they stood up every time they spoke without being told to speak etc”.

Considerable differences were also reported with regard to the duration of residence in Greece when the study was conducted. The majority of students had spent just a few months in the country, especially those attending RFRE classes, while others had been in the country for more than 3 years. Finally, the intercultural school class included students born in Greece. Another interesting finding coming from teachers' interviews and verified by the classroom observations was the different criteria through which the students' groups were formed, as probably there was no official guidelines on this issue. Namely, in some cases age and/or L2 level was the criterion according to which students' grouping was based. However, there were cases where the different classes/groups were formed based on the students' L1. This choice was attributed to the lack of interpreters, so that students could help each other, as more advanced students would act as mediators for those at a lower proficiency level.

Teaching Materials

Based on both the teacher interviews and classroom observations, the material used for teaching English in both settings were those recommended by IEP for use in RFRE. In particular, in the case of the elementary and high school RFRE the main teaching material for English was that used for

beginners of the first grade in Junior High School ('Magic Book 2' and 'Think Teen' respectively) (Alexiou and Mattheoudaki, 2017; Karagianni, Kouli and Nikolaki, n.d.). However, according to teachers' words, these course books and syllabi were not designed for the specific learners' needs, as they were developed and used in the mainstream classes, and that is why, they often resorted to preparing ad hoc learning material.

Regarding Greek, in the Intercultural primary school, the official coursebook designed for mainstream classes was used. In the Primary and Junior High School RCs and in four RFRE classes the coursebooks recommended by IEP for use in language support structures was deployed, i.e. 'Geiasas' (Vassou et al., 2007a), 'Patimasies' (n.d.) and 'To mikro mou lexiko' (Vassou et al., 2007b). These materials have been developed over the last decades in the context of measures taken to improve the education provided to students with a migrant background attending Greek public schools and indigenous populations that learn Modern Greek as an additional language (e.g., Muslim minority of Thrace, Roma). It has to be noted, though, that in addition to this material, IEP has included in its list of recommendations other materials, which were not used by the teachers in the present study. There was also one case of a RFRE class where the teacher said that she/he used only her/his own educational material according to the students' needs distributing photocopies during each lesson.

Almost in all the educational settings investigated, the teachers said that in addition to the educational material suggested by the Ministry of Education they did use their own tailor-made material for the specific students, photocopies mainly for grammar and vocabulary, pictures, videos, or music from the internet.

Teaching Methods and Techniques

As already mentioned, not all teachers had training in second language teaching, which had a decisive impact on the teaching methods they utilised. Namely, it was observed that the English language teachers, who had had relevant training while attending university, emphasised the use of language as a means of communication and organised activities focusing on meaning rather than form. They preferred student-centered activities, although they confessed that this was difficult to achieve, since their students' proficiency level was very low and no support language could be used. Nevertheless, when a level of basic communication was established, they gradually introduced interaction-based activities, during which the students were required to achieve a well-defined communicative goal. It has to be noted, though, that, according to the teachers' words, the students were initially reluctant to participate in such activities, which the teachers attributed to their unfamiliarity with student-centered teaching practices.

However, most of the Modern Greek language teachers, who had not received relevant training, approached the task of language teaching with an emphasis on forms, grammatical accuracy and error correction. During interviews, they stressed the importance of grammar, while it was observed that they used an abundance of drills, presenting language at a sentence level. The second teacher, particularly, in the interview excerpts that follow did not seem to be aware of the cognitive load that the use of a second language creates and advocated the use of multitasking in everyday practice.

"I usually start with a warm-up activity that may include a short lecture on the subject to be taught, especially when it comes to grammar rules"

“Multitasking is also a very useful approach to teaching, [...] multitasking is very useful in many occasions, such as their future work environment, their family, and interpersonal skills”. However, a Greek teacher’s practices diverged from the rest. Namely, in the observed lessons, she brought realia in the class and organised role-playing activities, relevant to what the students were expected to be involved in outside the classroom. Thus, she seemed aware of the students’ need to be actively engaged in meaning making tasks.

Relationships/Classroom Climate

Regarding the climate of the various educational settings, based on the interview findings, which were verified by the observation process in most cases, it was revealed that the teachers aimed at establishing a friendly and supportive learning environment. It was observed that teachers knew their students well, respected their diversity, encouraged them to participate and cooperate with their peers in the learning procedure, discussed with them and participated in activities inside and outside classroom offering, simultaneously, emotional support. One teacher mentioned: “I am trying to help them in many ways and getting involved in various activities outside the school, inside or outside the camp, which contributed to our bonding”.

Overall, teachers were enthusiastic and caring showing great sensitivity to students’ personal stories, although this is a process which is build up gradually. One teacher, discussing the relations with her students, confessed that initially she was a rather introverted and distant person. She tried to change it gradually, while her shift brought a students’ change too. However, this teacher believed that the rest educators were rather biased against them having negative attitudes to the extra lessons of the Greek language.

Concerning students, it was observed that in most cases they were enthusiastic and more than friendly towards their teachers. According to a teacher’s words: “Many of them were very friendly, a little bit too much sometimes, as they will touch you, they will hang you, they will kiss you; the children usually have a difficulty in not crossing the lines”. Furthermore, in most classrooms students seemed to pay attention to their teacher, eagerly follow her/his instructions, answer his/her questions and ask questions, when they did not understand something, even by using mimetic gestures or movements. No sign of learners’ anxiety was observed in the classrooms, as they seemed to feel comfortable expressing their opinions. Additionally, during the observational process, it was noticed that some proficient students even helped the teacher, acting as translators when it came to explaining something to the less proficient peers, as communication was rather limited and difficult. In most cases, students were also in good terms with most of their peers and felt comfortable cooperating and interacting with them. In some cases, it was observed that they were all sitting around a table like a group with the teacher sitting among the students, who were freely talking to the teacher, without worrying about the possible mistakes made, which indicated that they were feeling safe and confident to express themselves.

Despite the rather positive classroom environment that was both observed and reported in the teachers’ interviews, in most cases some incidents of children’s aggressive behavior occurred, as the teachers remarked. Phenomena of racist behavior and conflicts often came up among students with different cultural background. Some of the students were aggressive to their classmates at the beginning of the classes but their relationships were gradually improved and no student was reported to be marginalized.

Discussion

The present study probed into the teachers' and students' profiles, the teachers' goals, the teaching practices, the educational materials used and the classroom climate in various formal educational settings throughout Greece that offer language education to refugee and migrant children. The findings of the study indicated that students differed not only in age, gender, socio-cultural background but in first language, language proficiency and aptitude, prior and current access to education making classrooms really heterogeneous places and teachers' work even more demanding (Beacco et al. 2017; Dryden-Peterson 2015; Krumm and Pultzar 2008). In terms of literacy, particularly, it was found that learners with interrupted or limited formal education and low literacy skills in their first language had their own special needs, faced great challenges, and needed special attention on behalf of teachers. Simultaneously, it was revealed that the presence of social workers and/or psychologists specializing in this population's needs was necessary in the classes hosting refugee/migrant students to assist teachers in their work, as some instances of aggressive behavior and emotional numbness were reported by teachers. As Frater-Mathieson (2004) suggested, supportive measures were essential for refugee children to deal with trauma.

Another finding of the study was that all teachers had the qualifications needed to work in Education, some even held a Master's degree in Humanities, and did their best to create a supportive and pleasant learning environment offering not only knowledge but also psychological and emotional support. However, it seemed that they lacked intercultural education, experience, and training in teaching language to refugees and migrants, which was concurrent with previous research (Authors, 2020; Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Bodycott, 2006, Vopi, 2018). Given the fact that students with a refugee background have a limited or no knowledge of the Greek language and that most of them have disrupted or limited school experience for many years (Dryden-Peterson, 2015), teachers need to receive training and get special knowledge of providing education to this vulnerable population (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017; Gay & Howard, 2010). What is more, teachers had no training in intercultural education. According to the findings of the study, this impacted on the type of learning environment teachers created, as they opted for grammar-centered lesson plans and more traditional teaching practices (Simopoulos, 2014). Thus, teacher-centered instruction and focus on written language and metalinguistic awareness at the word or sentence level were among the distinctive features of teaching. Simultaneously, their inexperience was reflected on the supplementary educational material they developed for their classes, which was basically focused on specific language forms, mainly in the form of traditional drills. However, one of the teachers rose to the challenge and approached language teaching differently from the rest emphasizing the functional use of language. Overall, these findings of the study are in accordance with pertinent research highlighting the rather insufficient number of teachers with special knowledge and appropriate skills to teach this socially vulnerable population (Scientific Committee in Support of Refugee Children, 2017; Ziomas et al., 2017).

Another finding relevant to the teachers' lack of training is that most of them, when discussing their teaching goals, made no reference to the academic language skills. They mainly emphasized the communicative skills necessary for students' everyday life and their successful social integration. The development of literacy-related skills and content-based language were rarely mentioned, even in cases of classes hosting students who had acquired a basic level of

communicative competence. Undoubtedly, these skills are essential for academic success, while previous research showed that students attending RCs were in need of improving them (Tzeveleki et al., 2013).

All in all, the support language classes investigated operated on the basis of teachers' experiences and practices accumulated over decades of efforts to cater for the needs of vulnerable student populations. The organization, the suggested curricula and the material used were the result of a longitudinal effort to assist students learning Modern Greek as a second language integrate into the educational system. Likewise, the English language curriculum in RFRE has been based on the new curriculum for foreign language education provided to all students attending Greek schools. However, the implementation of the designed measures on the State's part faced significant challenges, as recorded in the present study. In addition to the above mentioned teachers' lack of relevant training, the delay in the establishment of the remedial structures over the course of the school year and in the supply of the teaching material along with the lack of a coherent policy for screening and grouping students were among the challenges faced by teachers.

Overall, further investigation and in depth analysis of teachers' views and practices in such educational settings needs to be undertaken to validate the findings of the study, as there is lack of relevant research, especially after the 2015, where the refugee crisis reached a peak. It would also be interesting to examine the teaching practices, materials, and approaches used in educational settings providing non-formal language education to children/young learners with a refugee or migrant background in the Greek context and compare them with those implemented in the formal educational context. To conclude, attending formal education and living a "regular" reality in a peaceful environment is very important for this vulnerable children population. The words of the 10-year-old Younes from Iraq (as mentioned in <https://www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-eu-greece-help-2800-migrant-and-refugee-children-go-back-school-2018>), worth all the efforts to this direction:

"The Greek language course is my favourite, and I don't find it difficult to learn. I have Greek friends at school. When the bell rings and we go outside for a break, we play with the ball in the school yard all together. I like going to school so much! I dream of becoming a doctor when I grow up".

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