



SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS ON BARRIERS FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE INTERCULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS AND POTENTIAL GENERATIVE AI BENEFITS

Emmanouela V. Seiradakisⁱ

Hellenic Open University,
Greece

Technical University of Crete,
Greece

Abstract:

Greek schools have been progressively challenged by the diversification of student demographics during the past decade. The European refugee crisis after 2015 has triggered immense needs to create inclusive intercultural school environments for disabled students whose first language and cultural backgrounds differ from the dominant Greek middle-class students in mainstream schools. School leaders play a vital role in creating inclusive schools that respect race, culture, ability, class, family background, and linguistic diversity. Social justice leadership constitutes an integral part of inclusive intercultural education, yet works exploring school leaders' struggles in engaging in this type of leadership in Greece are scarce. This work gives voice to women educational leaders in Greece and investigates the barriers they encounter in providing appropriate education to migrant students with disabilities. Moreover, it explores school leaders' perceptions of how generative AI applications can potentially be used to minimize these barriers.

Keywords: social justice leadership, inclusive education, intercultural education, barriers, generative AI

1. Introduction

Greek schools have been progressively challenged by the diversification of student demographics during the past decade (Tzoraki, 2019). The European refugee crisis after 2015, which remains persistent, has triggered immense needs to create inclusive school environments for students whose first language and cultural backgrounds differ from the dominant Greek middle-class in state schools. Findings from previous works within the migrant education field worldwide, show that school readiness and cultural

ⁱ Correspondence: email eseiradaki@tuc.gr

responsiveness significantly influence migrant students' academic progress and well-being (Evan et al., 2020; McIntyre & Hall, 2020).

The school environment is important for migrant students who often struggle to adjust and settle into a new and unfamiliar educational system whilst simultaneously learning a new language, socializing, comprehending the host culture and school curriculum, and coming across overt and covert discrimination. Migrant students with disabilities encounter even more barriers in adjusting, as schools in Europe and elsewhere seem unprepared to provide them with an inclusive learning environment that takes into consideration their multifaceted needs (Jørgensen, et al., 2021). Although we have a comprehensive picture of these students' struggles, research works focusing on school leaders who are largely responsible for whether these children will be offered an inclusive intercultural learning environment are scarce. Moreover, research on the potential of generative AI to minimize the barriers educational leaders encounter in fulfilling the needs of migrant students with disabilities is non-existent. The purpose of this work is to fill these research gaps and give voice to women educational leaders in Greece. Exploring school leaders' difficulties in providing appropriate education to migrant students with disabilities and researching how generative AI apps such as ChatGPT and Bard can potentially be used to minimize these difficulties, can offer practical implications both for legislators and teachers in Greece and elsewhere. More specifically, the leading questions of this exploratory study were:

- 1) What challenges are faced by school leaders in Greece as they address the needs of migrant students with disabilities?
- 2) How can generative AI help overcome these challenges?

2. Social justice as the foundation for inclusive and intercultural education

Inclusion in education goes beyond taking into consideration the needs of students with disabilities. The term includes multiple forms of diversity and social identities such as sexual orientation, race, gender, nationality, ethnicity religion, language, and social class (Sturm, 2019). Social justice constitutes the link between these constructs and forms the foundation on which educators can design and implement inclusive and intercultural pedagogies across educational grades and subjects. Social justice constitutes a multifaceted concept with multiple dimensions of justice and has been extensively used in educational research to highlight the political, social, economic, historical, and other forms of injustices marginalized students, educators, and parents have experienced throughout time. Within the traditional distributive framework, social justice encompasses democracy, fairness, and entitlement (Nozick, 1974). Nevertheless, this view of social justice has been criticized as simplistic since it solely focuses on economic and material inequality. During the past twenty years, social justice scholarship has moved beyond the inequalities stemming from social class and economic capital and further investigates inequality issues in relation to identity, culture, and diversity. Within the recognition paradigm inequality and injustice are intertwined with the social and

political structures of society. These structures perpetuate inequality and marginalize individuals with non-dominant social identities in multiple contexts. In the case of the recognition social justice paradigm, injustice stems from society's inability to acknowledge and respect the diversity of our multiple social identities (Lovell, 2007).

In education, the recognition paradigm essentially demands teachers facilitate students' awareness regarding their own social identities as well as others' identities. The recognition paradigm also implies educators and students can recognize privilege and oppression. Teachers are the driving forces for change and purposefully implement strategies in order to break existing cycles of injustices and oppression related to class, ability, gender, religion sexuality, and other facets of our multiple social identities. Thus, the onset of social justice pedagogies is in fact to frame oppression in its multiple overt and covert forms and subsequently question and challenge it (Bell, 2016). Social justice teaching should begin during the early years of education and continue to higher education. Teachers across educational grades and subjects are responsible for creating anti-bias curriculums and courses that directly question ableism, racism, sexism, classism, and all the -isms that hinder justice, dignity, and equity. The three Ds, namely diversity, dignity, and difference should form the bedplate on which all curricula and courses should be based on (Hawkins, 2014).

2.1 Social justice leadership

Social justice leadership in school settings refers to how headteachers and principals realize inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities, students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and other minority students (Bell, 2016). According to Theoharis (2007), social justice leadership in schools centers around "*race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation*", as well as other "*marginalizing conditions*" and "*advocacy, leadership, practice, and vision*" (: 223). Theoharis reasons that attempting to eliminate exclusion and marginalization requires commitment and devotion to implementing concrete inclusive schooling policies and further argues that inclusion is itself about social justice.

Leadership for social justice and inclusion of all students however involves daily battles, pressure, and emotional struggles. School leaders and in particular women leaders, encounter multiple barriers in implementing leadership that take into account all teachers' and students' needs. Their mental health and well-being are commonly jeopardized as they often have gendered family obligations on top of their school duties (Islam et al., 2023). Despite the obstacles, findings suggest women school leaders not only are able to cope with their immense obligations both at home and at school but actually are more effective in triggering changes in their schools and creating inclusive environments for minority students (Coronel et al., 2010; Shakeshaft et al., 2014). Social justice scholarship has repeatedly documented the numerous dilemmas and barriers encountered by leaders who strive to implement inclusive practices in their schools. Cost, students' needs and behaviors, personnel deficiencies, tensions with the central administration, and tensions with teachers, parents, and the local community are in fact

common barriers for creating inclusive schools across contexts. In all of these scenarios, school leaders are challenged by multiple problems that may disturb their intentions to create a school for all (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Gilmour et al., 2023).

2.2. Generative AI and social justice leadership in schools

Generative AI has the ability to create content, including text, audio, images, videos, and even 3D models (Dwivedi et al., 2023). ChatGPT and Bard are two of the most popular generative AI chatbots that generate conversational discourse similar to humans (Chiu et al., 2023). Applications like ChatGPT and Bard could in the future, take the roles of teachers, therapists, lawyers, and even doctors (Sallam, 2023). In education, generative AI applications, have already altered the manner students study, teachers teach, and how schools and other educational institutions design and implement practices and policies (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the potential benefits of generative AI to social justice educational leadership remain underresearched. Thus, the current study aims to explore how generative AI could contribute to helping school leaders create inclusive-heterogenous learning settings that correspond to the diversity of student profiles, including migrant students with disabilities, and simultaneously, construct learning environments in which cultural, linguistic, and ability diversity can be voiced, acknowledged and accepted by all stakeholders.

3. Method

3.1 Research design, tools, and participants

The core research tool employed for this study was individual semi-structured interviews with questions on: i) participants' experiences and barriers in implementing an inclusive and intercultural learning environment for migrant students with disabilities in their schools, and ii) potential benefits of generative AI that could contribute to overcoming or minimizing these barriers. Participants in the study were female school leaders from different parts of Greece. The women discussed their professional lives and the competing strains placed on them which prohibit them from providing inclusive intercultural environments for migrant students with disabilities in Greece. They further reflected on the potential uses of generative AI apps for achieving this difficult goal in the future. The study adopted a qualitative approach (Grbich, 2007) as it could provide a deep understanding of these women's experiences on their educational leadership journey. Interview questions aimed to extract as much information as possible related to the barriers they face in adopting social justice leadership in their schools. Purposive sampling was considered to be the most suitable approach since the educational leaders participating should have extensive experience with migrant students with disabilities in Greek schools and also possess knowledge related to generative AI. The sample consisted of eleven female school leaders in state kindergartens, primary schools, and middle schools. Participants were from three different prefectures of Greece and all the

interviews were conducted online. Each interview lasted from forty to sixty minutes. Participants were informed regarding the aim of the study and provided written consent.

3.2 Data analysis

Interviews were audio recorded and thematic analysis was employed as a data reduction method. Colour coding was used for interview data (Grbich, 2007). Subsequently, thematic content analysis using Nvivo 12 was conducted to frame the emergent themes. Initially, coding focused on individual participants' data. In the second stage of coding, broader cross-case themes were developed, which were oriented toward the two research questions.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Barriers

Emergent themes related to barriers in creating inclusive intercultural learning environments included five themes which are presented below.

4.1.1 Lack of psychologists and social workers

Participants saw their role as recognizing and most importantly taking action to deal with social injustices in their schools. They clearly believed it is the leader's personal responsibility to intervene in any school issue related to social justice. They described multiple instances they had to intervene during their careers in cases they felt migrant students with disabilities were treated in an unfair manner. Participants discussed several issues of systemic inequalities related to the highly centralized and underdeveloped Greek state education system (Traianou, 2023), that results in unequal treatment of marginalized students such as migrant students with disabilities. These issues included deficiencies in personnel and resources, but also to overt and covert ableism, racism, and classism from dominant middle-class parents even teachers who seemed unprepared for culturally and linguistically classes as well as teachers and therapists who seemed indifferent to the diverse needs of migrant students with disabilities. P6 described her struggles in dealing with conflict and tensions triggered by the absence of psychologists in her school:

"We really don't know what to do, how to handle complex situations with students who have needs both in terms of Greek language but also in terms of ability. We have crowded classrooms, no teaching assistants, and parents who keep putting pressure on us regarding the progress of their children, the effect of having migrant students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms, and so on. These are extremely sensitive issues, complex issues, we need psychologists to train parents, train teachers, train me."

P3 also talked about the vital importance of having teachers, psychologists, social workers, and assistants with trauma-informed practices and skills:

“Many of these children have gone through difficult times, their parents also have experienced war, loss, death, poverty. We need specialized stuff to be able to really offer them what they need. Inclusion costs money. Inclusion means I have a psychologist with the appropriate background who will be able to educate me, my teachers, the other therapists and stuff, everyone, on how to include a child with a disability who escaped war and poverty. Inclusion also means we have stable social workers in schools who will solve problems, like housing, heating, and so on, fast.”

Participants' perceptions on the significance of having trained psychologists and social workers in schools, echo the words of scholars within the education field, who suggest that the effects of systemic educational inequalities on minority students may emerge as a cumulative wounding affecting not only current students but future generations as well (Heart & Chase, 2016).

In Greece, the largest percentage of schools do not have psychologists and social workers, and the few schools that provide these services only have them once a week. The integration of trauma-informed approaches in schools however, involves a complex and long process that starts from acknowledging the effect of trauma, identifying symptoms, and integrating trauma-informed approaches and practices, in order to prevent retraumatization, especially at the intersections of migrancy and disability (Sullivan et al., 2016).

4.1.2 Special education teacher shortages

The lack of special education teachers was identified as one of the main barriers to creating inclusive and intercultural schools. Multiple phrases and words were employed to describe the absence of specialized teaching personnel for students with disabilities, including: “non-existent”, “scarce numbers compared to our needs”, “late arrivals”, “constant changes”. P1 said:

“How exactly can you have an inclusive school, when your special education teachers arrive three months after the school year has started or never arrive at all? Especially in islands and rural areas, there is an immense shortage. We have students with autism, intellectual disabilities, students with low vision, and no teachers around.”

P3 also described a gloomy picture of her school:

“My school is at a small island, an expensive island and so contract teachers tend to avoid it, but in Greece, almost all support teachers are contract teachers, so not only do they tend to arrive late, but sometimes they do not show up at all...I don't blame them, their wage is literally peanuts, they cannot find a place to rent, and the tickets to get here are half of their wage. The government knows the problem, they see the stats but no action has been taken yet”.

P9 described how inadequate resources negatively affected a migrant student with autism who ended up moving from the island where her school is located:

“He was a very sweet boy, but he needed support. He needed support for Greek, he needed support in the classroom for his emotional dysregulation, psychologists, speech therapists, and so on. I was really embarrassed to look at these parents and tell them, If I were you, I would move to Athens. That year we had been waiting for the parallel support teacher for two months. Then she showed up and in ten days she left with pregnancy leave. The teacher of the class was trying so hard to help him, I was looking for materials for him, for ways to help him when he had tantrums, but I am not an expert and his teacher was also not an expert and she had another fifteen students to deal with. This is inclusion only on papers. It’s a buzzword everyone uses but no one knows what it really means.”

Participants’ accounts further revealed that teaching personnel shortages, especially in rural areas force them to use the few special education teachers as general education teachers in mainstream schools:

“When the mainstream teacher is for example absent and they cannot send you another teacher, what are you going to do? This is a primary school I can’t just tell parents to take their kids at home, they work, and they have obligations. We are constantly accused of using special education teachers for mainstream teaching but no one offers a solution on what should be done.” (P1)

“When suddenly you have a mainstream teacher asking for maternity leave or a teacher who is absent for medical reasons, then essentially the system obliges you to use the special education teacher, and then you have the parent of the students who has been assessed and by law are entitled. to additional support shouting at you.” (P9)

Participants’ accounts further revealed that it is a common practice in Greece to put students with disabilities on reduced timetables when special education teachers have not been hired or for some reason are absent from schools:

“It’s not right, I have never done it, but I understand the principals who do it because there are cases you cannot guarantee students’ safety. When there is one teacher for 20 seven-year-olds and there are students with disabilities and sometimes aggressive behaviours, you take a risk. If something happens, the teacher is liable, I am also liable.” (P2)

“The headteacher in kindergarten is always under fire. You have parents threatening you, you have administrators demanding to have full schedules for all students, you have mainstream teachers complaining they cannot do their job properly and you are in the middle trying to find solutions... When support teachers are absent for a few days, I merge my class with the class from which the teacher is absent, so we are two teachers with 30-

or 40 preschoolers, some of which have diagnosis for autism or intellectual disability.”
(P10)

4.1.3 Unprepared or incompetent teachers

Two principals from large urban primary schools further talked about special education teachers who seemed unwilling to collaborate with their general education counterparts or seemed indifferent to students with disabilities:

“The Greek crisis essentially created a pool of unemployed teachers who couldn’t find a teaching job in state schools. Teachers really suffered between 2010-2019. During this decade, special education began to emerge in Greece as an alternative option to enter the profession. Suddenly tens of thousands did seminars and postgraduate degrees in special education. Some of them didn’t really understand what special education is, others did understand and didn’t like it but they were desperate to get a job. So right now, we have cases where special education teachers come to school and they don’t really want to work with students with autism or other disabilities. This creates a lot of problems with the general education teachers and so on.” (P4)

“I do not want to be judgmental, maybe I would have done the same thing if I were in my thirties and I could see special education is the only way to actually step at a school, but it is really killing me when I see students struggling, mothers worrying and teachers who do not implement evidence-based pedagogies for example for students with autism, who do not care about students’ social skills, who become a bit aggressive when mothers or I ask about students with disabilities who struggle.” (P6)

Participants’ accounts suggest that a major barrier to implementing social justice leadership and fostering an inclusive environment for migrant students with disabilities, is that Greece still lacks accountability schemes and school autonomy (Benos & Karagiannis, 2016; OECD, 2011). More than thirty years ago, Brieschke stated *“One of the burdens of the principalship is the identification of educational mistakes among teachers and the development of mechanisms for addressing these mistakes”* (1986: 249). In Greece these mechanisms essentially still are non-existent. Unprepared or incompetent teachers both in general and special education simply continue to be unprepared or incompetent. Remediation via professional development courses or remediation plans is essentially still on paper and hasn’t been implemented. The neoliberal government Nea Dimokratia launched legislation regarding accountability and evaluation of newly appointed teachers yet it has been blocked by teachers’ unions (Traianou, 2023). The sole strategy the Greek state system implements for incompetent teachers is transferring teachers to another school, allocating them to a different role within the primary or secondary education district, assigning them less challenging work, and moving them to nonteaching positions, which are also common administrative strategies in different educational contexts such as the US (Chait, 2010).

P9 talked about how the centralized Greek state education system essentially deprives principals and head teachers of authority. Her account is in line with the few works that have been conducted within the Greek educational context and suggests that school leaders in Greece essentially have no power or autonomy (Saiti, 2015):

“Principals and headteachers in Greece do not have the power to do anything, there is no school autonomy. Only when a situation is really serious for example if the actual safety of the students is at stake, or when parents threaten to take legal action, then the principal can inform the primary education district and they will transfer him or her at another school and if it is a really difficult case, they will transfer them at the headquarters to do administrative work. That’s it. But these cases are not just incompetent or unprepared teachers, we are talking about individuals with serious mental health issues or with aggressive and inappropriate behaviours. When it comes to incompetency or teachers who just don’t care, there’s nothing you can do. I am trying to help them, I’m trying to understand their problems, because they have many problems, most of them work two-three jobs to survive here so they are exhausted which is understandable, but that’s it.”

Other participants seemed reluctant to characterize teachers as incompetent, despite the fact that throughout the years they also encountered cases they thought they should have intervened:

“I don’t like to interfere and I don’t want to tell teachers how to do their jobs, especially special education teachers. Throughout the years I have had teachers who wouldn’t show up for example, teachers who would bring me fake doctors’ papers strategically, teachers who refused to collaborate with disabled students’ parents, who were just sitting next to the student with disabilities and did nothing, just watched the mainstream teacher teaching, I have had everything, but I cannot do something, except informally tell them some things and hope they will not come to my school again...I do feel guilty for my students with disabilities, but I don’t have the power to implement drastic measures, the system is centralized and everything is regulated by the Ministry of Education in Athens.”
(P11)

Participants’ accounts are in line with previous works in different contexts that also found school leaders are unwilling to interfere and remove ineffective teachers and report various barriers as restraints (Coleman, et al., 2005; Range et al., 2012; Shaked, 2019). Within the Greek context, findings from works exploring conflict and accountability in state schools, suggest that similarly to the participants of the current work, Greek school leaders tend to prefer compromising or avoidance strategies and constantly try to be pleasant and sympathetic among all teachers and other staff even in cases they are aware that teachers for example neglect their duties or create problems with students and colleagues (Saiti, 2015).

4.1.4 Constant teacher instability

Constant instability of teaching personnel in Greek state schools was mentioned by the majority of participants as a serious obstacle to building inclusive environments for migrant students with disabilities:

"We change teachers constantly, even mainstream teachers. There are teachers here with permanent positions who haven't shown up for the past six-seven years. So, when the mainstream teachers who come here do not really know the students, the school, the community and there is an extreme shortage of special education teachers who usually are contract teachers, we cannot really talk about inclusion. I mean, except for me and another three teachers who live here, all the others come here for six-seven months...Changing teachers, especially in the early years is hard for all children, but especially for children with autism or intellectual disability, it is traumatic. They connect with their teachers, they make progress and then, the next year the teacher vanishes. Often the teacher vanishes during the year." (P9)

"Students with disabilities and especially children who are not familiar with this country, need stability. They are scared, they feel insecure. They need time to trust someone, they need time to engage in their relationship with their teacher. You can't just change their teacher. I had a mother in here crying her eyes out. One year her son had the best support teacher, he made progress with her, and he adored her. The next year he was looking for her, and another teacher came, they never connected. This is not inclusion. You can't just change the teachers of a child with autism constantly and claim you have inclusive schools." (P11)

Participants' accounts reflect the consequences of educational policies during the past forty years which despite Greek politicians' rhetoric and promise still jeopardize not only the inclusion of the so-called minority students but the overall quality of education offered by the state sector. The Greek state education system still has peculiar and unique mobility allowances for permanent state teachers. Teachers all around Greece can transfer every year to a different school. This constant change of educators disturbs and lowers the quality of education offered as it practically diminishes school stability, generates a non-existent or even a hostile school climate, and harms students' development (Saiti, 2012). Several laws and presidential decrees (for example Law 1566/1985 article 16, Greek Law 3848/2010, and the Presidential Decrees 50/1996, 100/1997, and 39/1998), essentially dictate all permanent teachers are able to transfer from one school to another if there is an available teaching position.

Saiti (2015) who is one of the few researchers that have investigated teacher climate and stability in Greece, found that Greek teachers with tenure, stay at the same school for less than four years. Saiti further found that there is a wide lack of cohesion in schools that prevents effective leadership, creates tensions and conflicts, and most importantly undermines the education offered to Greek students. Her findings suggest that schools

that tend to have stable teachers have a warm school climate with constructive collegial relations among teachers, who are willing to help when for example a problem arises due to a teacher's urgent absence. By contrast, schools with constant changes in the teaching personnel are characterized by turbulent relations among teachers and leaders. Data from works worldwide also suggest that teacher–teacher collaboration is linked to job satisfaction, higher instructional quality, and improved collective effectiveness (Goddard et al., 2007). In fact, findings from post-covid works suggest teachers tend to ask for help and support from colleagues in stressful and overwhelming conditions (Blair et al., 2022). Trust and collaboration among teachers are even more important in special education. In fact, stable collegial relations and collaboration are related to better career prospects for special education teachers (Gilmour et al., 2022), who commonly feel undermined as their duties and responsibilities are blurred (Garwood et al., 2023). Stability in mainstream schools with mainstream teachers providing support and empowerment to special educators, can increase feelings of devotion and facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities from diverse cultural backgrounds (Garwood et al., 2023).

4.1.5 Lack of administrative staff

In Greece, administrative duty and control lie with the school or, more specifically in the office of the principal or the headteacher, since the vast majority of state schools lack other forms of administrative staff (Ntalossis & Zarotis, 2019). Despite the countless reforms during the past fifty years, which all aimed to provide state schools with flexibility and autonomy, the Greek system still is the same centralized, underfunded, and underdeveloped system it has always been (Traianou, 2023). The budget spent per student at the local level is made by the central government, therefore, the Ministry of Education in Athens, regulates a school's budget at a tiny island in the middle of the Aegean Sea. The centralized nature of the Greek state system triggers bureaucracy, and delays and allows for the adequate provision of the bare minimum of special education services. On top of these obstacles, school leaders essentially bear alone the endless bureaucracy of the Greek public sector as the following extract illustrates:

“We do not have a secretary or administrative staff, not even in big urban schools. I do everything, the vice principal also does administrative work, and if we need something we will ask the teachers to do it. But they are here to teach and they have specific teaching and working hours. And I cannot tell a substitute teacher for example who makes nine hundred euros, pays five hundred in rent that they have to do extra work at home after school, they all work somewhere else to make ends meet. This is not a solution.” (P2)

P8, a headteacher of an urban mainstream kindergarten in northern Greece, describes her daily struggles in coping with the immense bureaucracy for special education services for her migrant students with an official diagnosis, whilst having a full-time teaching schedule:

"I am the headteacher at kindergarten, essentially in Greece this means I am the kid for all the errands, I have a full-time teaching schedule, no breaks, and all the administrative work and bureaucracy of the Greek state sector. I literally do not have time to drink a glass of water. I do not know how many emails and reports I write every day...I'm trying to do my best for the students who come from different cultures and the students with disabilities, but I cannot do much because I am in the class teaching all the time. I don't have time to explain to parents who don't speak Greek the reasons why their child doesn't have a support teacher despite the fact the official agency of the ministry says it should. I don't have the time to teach them how the state system works, to focus on them, to encourage them to advocate for the rights of their child."

Similarly, P7 reflected on the parental involvement barriers of migrant parents which are triggered by the lack of administrative and teaching staff in rural schools:

"In big cities, they have many teachers, they all help, they also have parents with similar backgrounds who also help as translators for example. In my school I translate everything using Google Translate, I spend hours to make sure what I am writing is correct, I ask my neighbours who are Albanians to check it out and I still feel like I am not doing enough to include these parents."

P3 reflected on the endless and complex legislation regarding special education services in mainstream schools and the amount of time needed to comprehend and most importantly keep up to date with constant changes:

"Every two-three years, we have the so-called reforms, every minister wants to change everything and create inclusive schools, In the end, the only thing that actually changes is bureaucracy. All principals in Greece are also lawyers, reading laws and regulations that overlap and no one knows what really should be done. Legislation in Greece is chaotic and constantly changes... Right now, there is an issue with parallel support teachers. They used to send more, now they butchered the numbers and they send one teacher for four, five students for example, meanwhile, parents are complaining because the ministry's official agency for special education services has given them full-time support."

4.2 The use of generative AI as a facilitator for creating inclusive intercultural learning environments

Emergent themes related to how generative AI could facilitate the creation of inclusive intercultural learning environments included three themes which are present below.

4.2.1 Generative AI as a personal assistant of school leaders

All participants believed school leaders must comprehend and keep up to date with the rapid development of new generative AI technologies, as they have the potential to change school leadership and revolutionize education systems. They thought leaders and

teachers will most probably be required in the near future, to gain a deep understanding of the drawbacks and the benefits of these technologies on school management, teaching, parental involvement, student outcomes, and most importantly on creating inclusive environments for students with disabilities. Four participants believed that generative AI could potentially function as school leaders' personal assistants. They referred to how generative AI applications could be used to decrease the negative effects of teacher shortage and burnout and the enormous administrative burden in schools. The account of P2, illustrates how based on her view, generative AI can potentially contribute to overcoming some of the flows of the Greek state education system:

"In the future, for sure, AI is going to be used in schools extensively, I am worried once again we are going to be left behind because surely the specialized versions for schools and education services with all the data basis in one platform are not going to be free, but I imagine that generative AI like ChatGPT will be able to handle all the data, the workflow process, everything unified with all the information needed for schools, teachers, parents and students and especially when it comes to students with disabilities and diverse cultural backgrounds this is going to be an enormous help for principals and headteachers."

All participants believe that in the near future, generative AI will play an important role in school leadership. P2 talked about the ability of ChatGPT and other similar applications to process massive amounts of student data and analyse multifaceted student information which can potentially optimize leaders' efforts in creating inclusive intercultural schools:

"For big schools, having the ability to use an app for handling students' data for sure will save time and effort. For students who require additional support due to disabilities and different cultural backgrounds, the impact can be huge. We can have a unified base with all the information regarding their needs, a connection with the agencies that create their IEPs, direct access to other services related to vulnerable populations like low-income migrants."

P4 believed generative AI has the potential to provide valuable secretarial work to Greek school leaders who as mentioned earlier have no other administrative staff in schools:

"I use ChatGPT all the time, especially when I need to write things in English for Erasmus programs and other reports and emails in English. It corrects and rephrases everything, it improves vocabulary, syntax, and sentence structure. I don't have anxiety that people who will be reading what I am writing will make fun of me... For paperwork that is related to disabilities and special education, it is of great help to me, because sometimes I am not sure of the terminology...I imagine in the near future we will be using it for all the reports and requests for our students with disabilities."

P9 described how ChatGPT has been her personal secretary since it was first launched in November 2022:

"My son is an engineering student, I was at home struggling to write reports in English and I used to give him things to proofread, so he was basically fed up with me and he taught me how to use it. It really is a life-saver for me. Now I use it for everything, I write something in English or Greek, then I copy paste it there and it corrects it."

P5 reflected on how ChatGPT has become the content creator for her school's social media and website:

"I have tons of programs at the school, especially programs for students with disabilities, migrant students but essentially, I do all the work in relation to writing all these endless documents for these programs and our website and our social media. It used to take me half an hour to write something for our Facebook page for example, now I'm writing it fast, then I use ChatGPT, it makes it even better."

4.2.2 Generative AI as a special and intercultural education teaching assistant

Participants believed generative AI could function as a valuable teaching assistant. They thought that in the near future, generative AI will rapidly develop and its use will become widespread in primary and secondary education. Regarding inclusive intercultural education, they stated that generative AI can provide even more benefits due to its potential to customize and personalize teaching and learning procedures and materials as well as analyze and process vast amounts of data:

"It can do tons of stuff that can potentially save time for teachers and principals. It can generate customized lesson plans, feedback, activities, and content for the specific needs of a specific student with a specific disability or a specific linguistic background. And I am pretty sure all these apps are going to get better and better in the near future." (P8)

"It is very useful for lesson planning, for asking questions related to disabilities and evidence-based practices and methods. I believe it will become even better. In our schools, this could be really helpful for mainstream teachers with no special education background. Immediate and around-the-clock help for differentiating instruction." (P5)

P8 thought generative AI could prove helpful for principals and headteachers who in many cases end up substituting the state's inability to provide special education teaching stuff:

"I have used it many times for questions related to our students and their conditions. From crisis management in the classroom and in the school...I have used it to ask things I wanted for autism for example in the early years, since I am the headteacher, but I am also a teacher

with ASD students who are supposed to have parallel support teachers who however tend to not show up in my school due to the fact we are an island.” (P8)

4.2.3 Generative AI as a parental involvement facilitator

Participants believed generative AI has vast potential for optimizing communication in with parents in numerous ways. Regarding parents of students with disabilities, especially parents from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, participants cited multiple potential uses:

“Especially for migrant parents who do not have a high level of Greek language, they do not know how the system works, I imagine in three-four years, these apps could function as a link between the school and them.” (P3)

“ChatGPT has the potential to summarize things, to translate documents, to simplify documents so for parents with a low literacy background, it would be really convenient to have the reports of their children simplified and translated, with visuals that could facilitate their comprehension of their children’s needs, their children’s IEPs.” (P9)

P6 referred to how school leaders and teachers could in the future use generative AI as an interpreter with migrant parents who commonly feel lost and overwhelmed navigating the Greek education system:

“I imagine in the future, they will create specialized versions for schools, and migrant applications similar to ChatGPT may potentially play the role of a digital interpreter and interlocutor. It could be used to translate lengthy reports with complex terminology, especially regarding their children’s disabilities which they often don’t understand, it could be used as an interpreter in parent-teacher conferences, in IEP meetings, and so on”.

P7 described her experiences with migrant parents of students with disabilities and expressed her belief that in the future generative AI could help her include these parents’ needs for information and transparency regarding their children’s education:

“I have met a lot of parents, mothers agonizing for their children, feeling confused because they do not understand medical terms or words, we use for special education services. These applications could for example rephrase reports or visualize things that seem complex to these parents and overwhelm them.”

Other participants believe generative AI could be used for providing prompt answers to parents’ questions, related to their children’s education and disabilities, decreasing the load on school leaders and teachers:

“Inclusive schools mean you include parents who don’t know Greek, who don’t know the system and the bureaucratic procedures related to special education services. We have been struggling to explain to these parents the different types of special education services they can ask for their children, to explain the numerous steps, and the paperwork needed. As a principal in a large urban primary school, I do not have the time to sit down and explain multiple times the same things and I do feel guilty but it’s the reality. So I guess, if I had some sort of help, obviously they would come to school more prepared, with less anxiety and the whole process would be much easier for all of us.” (P8)

5. Conclusion

Participants of the current work seem to have a noteworthy commitment to social justice issues and tirelessly devote time and effort to creating inclusive intercultural environments for migrant students with disabilities. These women leaders firmly believed that social justice should be the main objective of state education and implemented multiple practices within their schools to help their teachers create inclusive environments for migrant students with disabilities. They invested time and effort in order to safeguard both mainstream and special educators utilized data, implemented effective teaching practices, and carefully monitored their classrooms. These women believe it is their obligation to create more inclusive environments for their students and maximize student achievement by competently exploiting the scarce resources available. Their recognition of the multiple overt and covert barriers prompted each of these women to engage in leadership that challenges the current Greek education status quo and questions taken-for-granted norms on special education and inclusion. Notwithstanding the amplified prominence of social justice in international scholarship as a framework for school leadership, there is little evidence about what social justice leadership means in the Greek context of intercultural and inclusive education from the perspective of leaders. Participants’ accounts contributed to our knowledge and awareness of social justice in school leadership in Greek schools. Moreover, their reflections on how generative AI could facilitate their engagement in social justice leadership and help them build schools that foster, respect, and include diversity in terms of ability, cultural and linguistic background further shed light on the potential of generative AI use for inclusive and intercultural education in Greece and abroad.

5.1 Implications

This study has significant implications for the preparation and practice of current and future school leaders. Solely concentrating on social justice and inclusion at the theoretical level without offering the required training in special education to school leaders triggers harmful effects, due to the risk of ignoring disability issues. Empirical findings (Gates et al., 2019) have shown that to create inclusive environments for students with disabilities and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, school leaders must have deep knowledge regarding not only what must be done but procedural knowledge

on how to accomplish it. They need to be aware of specific instructional methods and services that fulfil disabled students' diverse needs. In other words, school leaders must also function as instructional leaders. To achieve this goal, they need training that will focus on providing them with a solid knowledge of evidence-based models, approaches, and practices for general and inclusive intercultural education. Training courses for headteachers and principals could focus specifically on creating suitable conditions to support mainstream and special education teachers who teach or may teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds with disabilities. Current findings further suggest that leaders in rural areas and Greek islands need additional provision with coaching and induction courses to cope with the increased demands of managing schools in remote areas with extreme personnel shortages.

To be able to fight for all students' rights, school leaders also need extensive high-quality training on special education law. Thus, extensive training on special education law, and legislative requirements related to students with disabilities must be incorporated into the preservice training of both teachers and leaders, not only special education professionals. Headteachers and principals should be well informed of students' and parents' rights as well as the tasks of school personnel to properly serve students with disabilities (Pazey et al., 2012).

School leaders' training programs could develop new curricula integrating generative AI courses with case studies that would allow trainees to examine the unique contexts of different schools and geographical locations and allow them to suggest efforts to respond to context using conventional, critical, and culturally responsive leadership approaches. The programs could include courses on AI literacy, language acquisition, culturally responsive special education services, and the needs of migrant students with disabilities (Cheatham & Hart Barnett, 2017). These practices provide the opportunity for future headteachers and principals to gain knowledge from diverse standpoints, reflect on diverse educational primacies, be receptive, reactive, and empathetic to the needs and wants of teachers, and gain a deeper knowledge of the barriers that hinder inclusion.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

About the Author(s)

Dr. Emmanouela V. Seiradakis studied in the UK (B.A, M.A, PGDip) and Greece (PhD). She has been teaching in tertiary education for more than ten years. Her research interests include special and intercultural education and educational technologies.

References

- Ali Awsat Younus Khalid, O., & Cansoy, R. (2023). Educating refugee students in Türkiye: an inquiry into obstacles faced by school principals. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1-27.
- Arar, K., Örucü, D., & Gümü, S. (2022). Educational leadership and policy studies in refugee education: a systematic review of existing research. *Educational Review*, 1-25.
- Bell, L. A. (2016). *Theoretical foundations for social justice education*. In *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (pp. 3-26). Routledge.
- Benos, N., & Karagiannis, S. (2016). Do education quality and spillovers matter? Evidence on human capital and productivity in Greece. *Economic Modelling*, 54, 563-573.
- Blair, E. E., Sandilos, L. E., Ellis, E., & Neugebauer, S. R. (2023). Teachers survive together: Teacher collegial relationships and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *School Psychology*. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/spq0000596>
- Chait, R. (2010). *Removing chronically ineffective teachers: Barriers and opportunities*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress.
- Cheatham, G. A., & Hart Barnett, J. E. (2017). Overcoming common misunderstandings about students with disabilities who are English language learners. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 53(1), 58-63.
- Chiu, T. K., Moorhouse, B. L., Chai, C. S., & Ismailov, M. (2023). Teacher support and student motivation to learn with Artificial Intelligence (AI) based chatbot. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-17.
- Coleman, J., Schroth, S. T., Molinaro, L., & Green, M. (2005). Tenure: An important due process right or a hindrance to change in the schools?. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 18, 219-231.
- Coronel, J. M., Moreno, E., & Carrasco, M. J. (2010). Beyond obstacles and problems: women principals in Spain leading change in their schools. *International journal of leadership in education*, 13(2), 141-162.
- Davis, S. J., Lettis, M. B., Mahfouz, J., & Vaughn, M. (2022). Deconstructing racist structures in K-12 education through SEL starts with the principal. *Theory Into Practice*, 61(2), 145-155.
- DeMatthews, D. E., Serafini, A., & Watson, T. N. (2021). Leading inclusive schools: Principal perceptions, practices, and challenges to meaningful change. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 57(1), 3-48.
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Pandey, N., Currie, W., & Micu, A. (2023). Leveraging ChatGPT and other generative artificial intelligence (AI)-based applications in the hospitality and tourism industry: practices, challenges and research agenda. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*. Retrieved from <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/IJCHM-05-2023-0686/full/html>

- Evans, K., Perez-Aponte, J., & McRoy, R. (2020). Without a paddle: Barriers to school enrollment procedures for immigrant students and families. *Education and Urban Society*, 52(9), 1283-1304.
- Garwood, J. D. (2023). Special educator burnout and fidelity in implementing behavior support plans: A call to action. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 31(2), 84-96.
- Gates, S. M., Baird, M. D., Doss, C. J., Hamilton, L. S., Opper, I. M., Master, B. K., ... & Zabar, M. A. (2019). Preparing School Leaders for Success: Evaluation of New Leaders' Aspiring Principals Program, 2012-2017: Appendixes. RAND Corporation. PO Box 2138, Santa Monica, CA 90407-2138.
- Gilmour, A. F., & Sandilos, L. E. (2023). The crucial role of administrators in shaping working conditions for teachers of students with EBD. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 31(2), 109-119.
- Gilmour, A. F., Neugebauer, S. R., & Sandilos, L. E. (2022). Moderators of the Association Between Teaching Students with Disabilities and General Education Teacher Turnover. *Exceptional Children*, 88(4), 401-420. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00144029221081239>
- Goddard, Y. L., Goddard, R. D., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). A theoretical and empirical investigation of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement in public elementary schools. *Teachers college record*, 109(4), 877-896.
- Grbich, C. (2013). Qualitative data analysis. SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529799606>
- Hawkins, K. (2014). Teaching for social justice, social responsibility and social inclusion: a respectful pedagogy for twenty-first century early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22(5), 723-738.
- Hawley, W., & James, R. (2010). UCEA REVIEW.
- Heart, M. Y. H. B., & Chase, J. (2016). Historical trauma among indigenous peoples of the Americas: Concepts, research, and clinical considerations. *Wounds of History*, 270-287.
- Islam, M. A., Hack-Polay, D., Rahman, M., Jantan, A. H., Dal Mas, F., & Kordowicz, M. (2023). Gender and leadership in public higher education in South Asia: examining the individual, socio-cultural and organizational barriers to female inclusion. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-19.
- Jørgensen, C. R., Dobson, G., & Perry, T. (2021). Migrant children with special educational needs in European schools—a review of current issues and approaches. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(3), 438-453.
- Lovell, T. (Ed.). (2007). *(Mis)recognition, social inequality and social justice: Nancy Fraser and Pierre Bourdieu*. Routledge.
- McIntyre, J., & Hall, C. (2020). Barriers to the inclusion of refugee and asylum-seeking children in schools in England. *Educational Review*, 72(5), 583-600.
- Nozick, R. (1974). *Anarchy, state, and utopia*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Ntalossis, D., & Zarotis, G. F. (2019). The Current Organization and Administration Situation of the Secondary Education Units in the North Aegean Region. *South Asian Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(4) <http://dx.doi.org/10.36346/sarjhss.2019.v01i04.010>
- OECD. (2011). *Education policy advice for Greece, strong performers and successful reformers in education*. Retrieved from https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-policy-advice-for-greece_9789264119581-en
- Pazey, B. L., Cole, H. A., & Garcia, S. B. (2012). Toward a framework for an inclusive model of social justice leadership preparation: Equity-oriented leadership for students with disabilities. In *Global leadership for social justice: Taking it from the field to practice. Advances in Educational Administration* (Vol. 14, pp. 193-216). Retrieved from [https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/doi/10.1108/S1479-3660\(2012\)14](https://www.emerald.com/insight/publication/doi/10.1108/S1479-3660(2012)14)
- Range, B. G., Duncan, H. E., Scherz, S. D., & Haines, C. A. (2012). *School leaders' perceptions about incompetent teachers: Implications for supervision and evaluation*. *NASSP Bulletin*, 96(4), 302-322.
- Saiti, A. (2012). Leadership and quality management: An analysis of three key features of the Greek education system. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 20(2), 110-138.
- Sallam, M. (2023). ChatGPT utility in healthcare education, research, and practice: systematic review on the promising perspectives and valid concerns. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 11, No. 6, p. 887). MDPI.
- Shaked, H. (2019). Ensuring teachers' job suitability: A missing component of instructional leadership. *Journal of School Leadership*, 29(5), 427-447.
- Shakeshaft, C., Brown, G., Irby, B., Grogan, M., & Ballenger, J. (2014). *Increasing gender equity in educational leadership*. In *Handbook for achieving gender equity through education* (pp. 133-160). Routledge.
- Sturm, T. (2019). Constructing and addressing differences in inclusive schooling—comparing cases from Germany, Norway and the United States. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(6), 656-669.
- Sullivan, A. L., & Simonson, G. R. (2016). A systematic review of school-based social-emotional interventions for refugee and war-traumatized youth. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(2), 503-530.
- Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational administration quarterly*, 43(2), 221-258.
- Traianou, A. (2023). The intricacies of conditionality: education policy review in Greece 2015–2018. *Journal of Education Policy*, 38(2), 342-362.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Alternative Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).