



## TEACHING GREEK AS L2 IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: INVESTIGATING TEACHERS' INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Marina Mogli<sup>i</sup>,

Kostas Magos

University of Thessaly,  
Greece

### Abstract:

For immigrants/refugees, it is important to learn the language of their host country and to familiarize themselves with its culture. This is closely related to the intercultural competence not only of the immigrant/refugee students but also of their instructors. The present study attempts to examine the attitudes of instructors who teach Greek in non-formal educational settings regarding the importance of intercultural competence and the approaches they use. The findings show that, although the instructors have very positive attitudes toward intercultural competence, multiculturalism and multilingualism, in practice they do not really adopt intercultural practices.

**Keywords:** intercultural competence, attitudes, instructors, Greek as L2, adult immigrants/refugees

### 1. Introduction

The influx of immigrants and refugees in many European countries, including Greece, for the past few years, has meant that they have to learn the language and the culture of the host country so as to survive and be able to integrate (Esser, 2006; Kim, 1988; Kim, 2017; Magos & Margaroni, 2018; Ortega, 2009). But learning a second language is not only a matter of need, it is also a matter of shaping the person's identity (Holliday, Hyde & Kullman, 2010; Norton, 2013). However, due to various reasons, the most important of which is having to work in order to support themselves and their families, the immigrants/refugees do not have access to formal education and as a consequence, turn to informal or non-formal education in order to learn the language of the host country (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004; Krupar, Horvatek & Soo-yong, 2017; Morrice, 2016; Muñoz-Comet & Miyar-Busto, 2018; Non Formal Pathways, 2017). In addition, according to Koyama (2013), formal education does not necessarily guarantee social mobility and

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [mar.mogli@yahoo.com](mailto:mar.mogli@yahoo.com), [mogli.marina@ac.eap.gr](mailto:mogli.marina@ac.eap.gr)

better prospects for immigrants/refugees in their host societies. On the contrary, as they have to become financially independent as soon as possible, formal education can limit their initial opportunities to find work.

Combs and Ahmed (1974) define non-formal education as any educational activity that takes place outside the formal educational system. It can be organized, although this kind of organization can be loose and it might be defined by a curriculum, if necessary (Non Formal Pathways, 2017). Although it does not offer a formal diploma to those attending, non-formal education can significantly enrich their knowledge, as it is often based on the participants' already existing skills and abilities (Coombs, Prosser & Ahmed, 1973). A lot of research has shown that non-formal education has many advantages in the case of immigrants/refugees (Krupar et al., 2017; Morrice, 2016; Non Formal Pathways, 2017; Wiktorin, 2017). It can relate to their real, everyday needs and it brings immediate results. In addition, it intensifies motivation and promotes the inclusion of vulnerable groups. It can create a sense of belonging to the host society and promotes interaction both inside but also outside the classroom (Non Formal Pathways, 2017).

In their effort to become a member of the host society, immigrants and refugees have to become acquainted with the host culture as well. According to Arasaratnam (2016), the term "*intercultural competence*" describes a person's effective and appropriate engagement with cultural differences and it can reside within a person (and can, for instance, include cognitive, affective, and behavioral capabilities) and is also a product of a context and can be created by other people and factors relating to a particular situation. Intercultural competence is important for intercultural communication and intercultural adaptation (Kim, 1988; Kim, 2001; Kim & Gudykunst, 1988) and it does not concern only the immigrants/refugees who are learning a second language and are having classes, but also the instructors who teach them (Stadler-Norman, 2011). Intercultural communicative competence, underpinned by the notion of critical cultural awareness (Byram 1997), has extended the role of culture in successfully preparing language learners for intercultural communication.

"*Intercultural awareness*" is useful in intercultural exchanges from both sides, that of the immigrant/refugee and the members of the host society. It can be defined as a conscious ability to understand the role of culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference in intercultural communication. It is an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context-specific way during communication (Baker, 2011). Intercultural awareness is not only relevant when learning but also when teaching a second language. Research carried out in Greece to find whether teachers' current professional profiles meet the specifications formulated in the theoretical literature regarding the "*intercultural competence teacher*" has shown that instructors who teach Greek as a second language are not interculturally aware in their approach of groups like immigrants and refugees (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009; Pantazi, 2008; Simopoulos, 2014). Research in Greece (Simopoulos, 2014) but also other countries like New Zealand (Oranje & Smith, 2017) and Slovenia (Bešter & Medvešek, 2016) has also shown that, in theory, the instructors might believe in the tenets of intercultural education and might consider

that their teaching practices are in accordance with it, but that is not the case, their attitudes and their teaching practice have proven to be incompatible. They have very positive attitudes towards intercultural education but do not apply it when teaching refugees (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009; Simopoulos, 2014). The immigrant/refugee students are not involved in the development of the syllabus, the instructors' expectations regarding their students are low and they do not encourage their students' efforts to learn the second language (Panagiotopoulou, Rosen & García, 2016). According to research by Sifakis and Fay (2011), teachers could benefit from becoming aware of the cultural diversity of Greek society and move from "*culture-specific knowledge about the target context to culture-general awareness and multiple culture-specific awareness*" (Sifakis & Fay, 2011, p. 293).

The aim of the study was to investigate the attitudes of the instructors who teach Greek as a second language in non-formal educational settings. There have been many studies which have shown that teachers' practices do not match their stated instructional beliefs (e.g., Borg, 2018). However, since in these specific educational settings the teachers were all volunteers and they had a lot of freedom to choose materials, teaching approaches and methodological choices, it was expected that this would not have been the case and further research was needed to determine the profile of people who teach in such settings.

## 2. Aims, sample and methodology of the research

The data collection took place from February to September 2019. It was carried out in non-formal educational settings where volunteers teach Greek as a second language to immigrants and refugees. The establishments where Greek was being taught were located in three Greek cities, Athens, Thessaloniki and Volos. Most of them were in the first two cities (Athens and Thessaloniki), as a large number of immigrants and refugees reside there. All the instructors were volunteers and they are generally characterized by a desire for solidarity with immigrants/refugees and the belief that education should be free and a means of empowerment of vulnerable groups.

The research carried out aimed to investigate the following:

- What were the attitudes of instructors regarding multilingualism in the classes?
- What were their attitudes regarding multiculturalism?
- What were their attitudes regarding the acquisition of intercultural competence by their immigrant/refugee students?
- What intercultural approaches did the instructors employ in their teaching?

The sample of the study consisted of nineteen (19) instructors of Greek in non-formal educational settings, fifteen (15) of whom were women and four (4) men. Their ages ranged from twenty (20) to sixty-eight (68) years old. All of them were Greek, except for three (3) instructors, who were second-generation immigrant children who had grown up in Greece. The duration of their volunteering varied, it started a couple of

months before the interview, with one person having volunteered for 13 years, some instructors for 10 years and many from about 1 to 3 years.

The instructors were asked to participate in the research when the researcher visited the places where they volunteered. Some of them were personal acquaintances of the researcher, but most were selected on the basis of their willingness to participate and their availability for an interview. Most of them had university degrees related to education (mostly a degree in Greek language and literature), one of them was still studying for a degree in primary school education but there were also a few that did not have any formal qualifications related to education and had no teaching background. The majority of instructors did not have any specific training in teaching Greek as a second language to immigrants/refugees and received very little training before starting teaching, basically attending lessons from other instructors. For the majority of the instructors, the reason for volunteering was ideological and they were driven by a realization of the needs of immigrants/refugees, as they considered those populations are often excluded from formal education due to their lack of legal documentation. They also recognized other needs for their students to interact, be accepted and be empowered so as to demand their rights. In addition, they viewed language learning as a vehicle for social change. Some of them mentioned personal reasons also, acquaintance with someone who was already volunteering and a need to use their free time in a constructive way. The instructors with a family history in immigration or immigrant parents mentioned personal experiences of discrimination against immigrants/refugees and a realization of the importance of learning the language.

For the needs of the study, qualitative research was considered the most appropriate (Androulakis, Mastorodimou & van Boeschoten, 2016). As the subject under study is an aspect of modern reality through the lens of immigration and multiculturalism and specifically second language learning and teaching, a qualitative approach can shed more light on its complex and symbolic character, which is comprised of multiple levels of meaning (Tsiolis, 2014).

The research tools chosen for the study were individual semi-structured interviews with the instructors who were teaching Greek as a second language in non-formal educational settings and non-participatory observation of their classes, as well as keeping a research journal with field notes. According to Carling, Bivand Erdal and Ezzati (2014), the researcher can be an outsider, an insider or a third position. It is assumed that the researcher in the specific study had a third position, as she was also a volunteer instructor of Greek in a non-formal educational setting and knew the field quite well. She also had some basic knowledge of the language of some of the participants (Hindi/Urdu), which quickly created a friendly atmosphere between her and the participants.

Most of the interviews took place in the settings after the class had finished, with the exception of a few interviews which took place at a time or place convenient for the interviewees. They were recorded, transcribed and analysed using manual inspection through thematic analysis. Previous research on second language teaching and

intercultural competence, especially regarding Greece, informed the selection of codes (e.g. Magos & Simopoulos, 2009; Simopoulos, 2014). The participants' attitudes were examined on the basis of two dimensions, multilingualism and multiculturalism.

**Table 1**

1. Multilingualism	a. attitudes towards linguistic diversity
	b. use of students' language in the L2 classroom
2. Multiculturalism	a. attitudes towards multiculturalism
	b. acquisition of multicultural competence
	c. incorporating culture in the L2 classroom
	d. incorporating Greek culture in the L2 classroom

The research aimed to examine the attitudes of instructors who all volunteered to teach Greek as a second language to migrants and refugees and the extent to which they utilized the students' first languages in their lessons. It also aimed to investigate whether they were interculturally competent and made an effort to incorporate the culture of their students into their classes. It was also investigated whether they used the dominant (Greek) culture in their class in order to enhance the students' intercultural competence and facilitate their understanding of the culture of their host country. In doing so, it was considered important to investigate what kind of intercultural approaches the instructors employed in their teaching.

### 3. Results

The instructors commented on their attitudes toward multilingualism and multiculturalism. Overall, their attitudes towards both were particularly positive, however, their classes were basically monolingual and monocultural and they did not try to incorporate the students' different languages and cultures in their classes.

All participants considered multilingualism particularly important, had especially positive attitudes regarding the variety of languages spoken by their students and considered it especially "positive", "interesting" and usable, both in teaching and also in an emotional level.

*"The variety of languages is nice, you learn things, you evolve" (I9S4) [see note at the end of the article for explanation of coding system to protect the anonymity of the interviewees].*

*"The variety [of languages] I think is tremendously interesting. Ok, it might make it a bit difficult when I am in a beginners' group and you have to think about a lot of things, mainly on a phonological level in the beginning so that you get them, how you can get everyone on the same level, but it's fun also" (I10S9).*

Many instructors expressed particularly positive attitudes and considered the variety of the students' mother tongues present in the classroom helpful for everyone involved. Some stressed the fact that it is important because it carries the individual's cultural capital and facilitates intercultural exchange between all those taking part in the lessons.

*"It's wonderful, it's wonderful, we all learn from everyone" (I7S3)*

*"I consider it very positive, a very positive factor for the development of their skills, their language [skills] and the fact of intercultural exchange, that all students in the class basically get information about how every language functions" (I14S5)*

*"I even think it helps" (I11S6)*

*"...of course it's positive because it is basically the mirror of the cultural capital every one of us carries" (I1S1).*

It is evident that the instructors recognized the value of multilingualism and they considered it important both out of personal interest, as they had particularly positive attitudes towards the variety of languages, but also useful for their course. They think it helped in their class both to facilitate the learning of the second language, but also to showcase multiculturalism and highlight the cultural capital the students brought to class.

Regarding the use of the students' mother tongues in the classroom, some instructors stated that they use them during class and some knew some words from their students' native languages.

*"In some cases when I wonder, that is "How do you say this?", I might ask, but not systematically. Or they tell me "Oh, we say it like this! We say it like this!". That's always welcome from my side" (I12S6).*

However, there were some instructors who stated that they do not utilize the students' native languages in the classroom, either because they thought there is no need for something like that

*"I did it, but there is no need, you don't need to do this so that they feel sweet, warm, because they feel very warm the minute they come to the school and communicate" (I3S2),*

or, because they feel that this is the correct approach according to the principles of linguistics.

*"I think it would help, even though contemporary linguistics says not to use other languages" (I10S4).*

All the instructors commented that knowledge of the students' languages would help them when teaching. Two instructors who had tried to learn the students' mother tongues said that this knowledge helped them understand why students make certain mistakes and where to put emphasis on when explaining certain grammatical phenomena.

Despite their positive views on multilingualism, it seems that they are not translated into action, as many instructors thought of them as valuable in theory, but in practice they did not employ them in their lesson.

In general, a lot of instructors said that they treat their immigrant/refugee students with respect and they respect their culture also. They treat them

*"with respect, acceptance, with a desire to understand this different culture" (I1S1).*

*"the melting has started, because they [live here], Greece is a melting pot" (I4S5).*

Respecting the immigrants'/refugees' culture, however, did not mean that the school has to adjust to racist, nationalistic or sexist attitudes.

*"It depends, let's say it might be part of their culture not to be in the same classroom as men or vice versa, we don't take it in an obligatory way, that no, you will do it. From there on, there might be ethnic tensions, we don't consider those issues taboo that we won't touch upon. For example, during the Kosovo crisis we had Albanian and Serbian students in the same class, we didn't get into the process of putting them on separate groups, although they asked for it, they asked to be separated. There were tensions, which, with the help of the teacher, work was done and they [the tensions] stopped existing. From the point of view of particularities, we are not neutral, we don't say, oh, we will respect everything, we believe that the school is a place where all these things can be negotiated" (I14S5)*

*"what is definitely not tolerated is racist, nationalistic ideas, or sexist [ideas], the lesson will stop there and we will talk about the issue and if he/she doesn't understand, there is no place for him/her there, if we see, that is, that someone insists and does this thing" (I14S5).*

A particular point raised by some instructors is the respect they feel they need to show to their students' religious identity. Not only that, but also anything that has to do with sensitive topics, like sexuality. However, that does not mean there are no discussions taking place in the classroom about different issues.

*"The part of religion we try to respect enough, so that we don't offend our students, whether they are Christian or Muslim, in both cases, we don't touch upon that, we don't offend their religious convictions, their beliefs, we take them into account if we know them, for example, in my class I often use things, examples, let's say, if we have a common reference in the Bible, something that if a student reads the Bible a lot, she will understand, as I have some knowledge about this, I will mention it" (I14S5)*

*"we generally don't touch very hot topics like religion, sex, obviously, those basically. That doesn't mean that there have never been discussions, there have been both about homosexuality and about issues of religious fanaticism, for example when two years ago there was the attack in Charlie [Hebdo] in Paris we had two classes both about terrorism and religious fanaticism and freedom of speech and freedom of the press, that is we had analyzed it very much" (I16S5).*

It can be seen from the participants' comments that they make a conscious effort to respect their students' culture but at the same time, they try to initiate discussions on different topics so that their students are exposed to different views and develop more tolerant attitudes. Overall, the existence of different cultures in the classroom was considered a very positive thing by most instructors and they claimed that they utilized it during their lessons

*"Maybe it's something new this... multiculturalism, the fact that we become a big group with such different origins and we are all women and we say our own stuff and we have a good time" (I12S6)*

*"Yes, I like it. I consider it richness, I consider it a benefit for me also this thing with the contact that different cultures have" (I10S9).*

It was also considered something very positive because it led to the development of the instructor's multicultural competence:

*"I think that we should all see it very positively as a chance to also learn something from these individuals, that is especially when we don't have the chance to travel to these regions, to learn what we can from them" (I2S1).*

Overall, the multicultural atmosphere in the classroom was treated positively on the part of the instructors and they considered it enriched both the teaching and the learning experience for everyone participating.

One of the most important benefits the instructors mentioned in their interviews and one that they considered they were able to acquire while teaching Greek as a second language to immigrants/refugees is related to the realization of multiculturalism in today's environment and the acquisition of multicultural competence. The instructors



improved their knowledge about the countries, languages and cultures of their immigrant/refugee students.

*“And without this being an aim of the lesson, I also learn through this, this happens as well, I will also learn something from them” (I2S1)*

*“I realized there is a world we have kept aside, that is the West, and the West and what the West did. During my first trip we went to Uzbekistan at a time when the West was experiencing the middle ages and it was really a shock with all that for me. From there on we talk about it a lot, we have been there also, we have been to Persia, we have been to Syria, we have been to all these places, definitely” (I15S6).*

First-hand experience was considered much more valuable than only reading about other cultures.

*“I have learnt a lot of things about the students’ cultures, that’s very important for me, and so I have quite often understood things that I wouldn’t be able to grasp only by reading about these countries, about these cultures” (I12S5).*

At the same time, they realized that individuality is also an important aspect of the immigrant/refugee student population and that they should not generalize, judging a person only by their religion or country of origin.

*“Of course, mistakes are also made, by mistakes I mean the opposite side, that is to think that somebody would be offended and they are not, due to the other stereotype, oh, he is an Arab, he is conservative and this is not the case” (I16S5).*

The instructors reconsidered the concept of culture, they ended up viewing it as something relative and they came to realize the need for respecting diversity.

*“What I realized is the diversity of culture, that reality is not one culture only, that cultural differences are huge, depending on the countries, and that it is wonderful for a person to come into contact with these cultures and to understand that his/her culture is not the right one, the correct one, that everything is simply a matter of diversity, which we have to accept” (I1S1).*

As a result of volunteering to teach Greek to immigrants and refugees, the instructors became much more sensitive and aware of the concept of culture and they even re-evaluated some of their previous beliefs. It seems that teaching Greek was a transformative experience on a personal level which increased and intensified the instructors’ intercultural competence.

Knowledge of the students' culture was also considered useful during the lesson. The instructors recognized that knowing their students' culture is important so that they can create a friendly atmosphere in the class. This was especially helpful in the case of instructors who had just started teaching immigrants and refugees, such as this participant who commented:

*"It would help to have some knowledge like you have, geography, cultures, so that I can hold on to something, to know about Mina's, Maria's culture, and to start a discussion from there, so that they feel more familiarity, that their past, their own, I somehow know, so that they don't feel so alien, this would help me, to know things about their culture, customs, anything, so that I can start a discussion" (I2S1)*

*"yes, and if I knew more things this would help more and I take into account the characteristics of each culture also in a non-verbal level, what you (this refers to the researcher who had helped the participant when she first started volunteering) had told me, that is, the way you dress, the way you move, always with respect to the other person's culture" (I2S1).*

More experienced instructors mentioned that when they first started teaching immigrants/refugees they were not fully aware of their students' culture but that they take it more into account now.

*"Ok, I take it into account, and I also take into account my stance. To tell you the truth, I didn't take it into account the first year, that is let's say I had those 44 students, when I gave them an exercise and I went around the classroom during the first one or two years I would touch everyone, I mean I patted them on the shoulder to see what you are doing, great, well done, they never told me anything but I don't know, let's say, how many men from Georgia or the guys from Pakistan, I don't know how they took it. I had a very low sensitivity [to cultural issues and possibility of offending the students] they all came smiling, they regularly attended etc., I don't know, now I am a bit more careful" (I16S5)*

An instructor, using quite strong language reflecting on the need of intercultural competence, mentioned that she should have tried to get to know her students' cultures better:

*"In the particular program I didn't take it into account and I think it was wrong, that is, I should have prepared, I mean I should have looked at my student population and I should have searched for their cultural elements, this didn't happen and I think it was a mistake that it wasn't done" (I1S1).*

It was also mentioned that there needs to be respect for diversity and the personality of the adult students according to the principles of adult education, without, however, this meaning that the instructor could not express his/her personal opinions.

*"It needs a lot of persistence, many times some of our ideas or the way we live come into conflict with theirs and you can't, they never follow your finger [meaning you can't order them around], I just point things out, you did it like this, look there is this way also, we do it like this for this reason. I don't want to enforce anything, they are also adults, they are not kids, so you need to have, to do surgical moves in the class also, you don't want to offend them or embarrass them, but as a Westerner, as secular, as a pro-European, I always, in a lesser or bigger degree, I also pass what I feel" (I7S3).*

Intercultural competence, therefore, was considered very important by the majority of instructors and the chance to acquire it first-hand was greatly appreciated. Its crucial role in the second language lesson was also stressed by many interviewees. Incorporating a cultural dimension when teaching Greek as L2 was considered very important and very helpful by the majority of the instructors participating in the study. Many of them expressed a personal interest in other cultures and said they actively encouraged discussions during the class regarding the countries of origin of the migrant/refugee students.

*"Mostly positive, I try to utilize it everywhere... surely it's one of the first things we do, that is to record customs and traditions from their countries, to describe their countries, from the first texts, from the first things [we do], generally that I work on both in oral and written speech, we start by each one describing their own experiences" (I10S9).*

The instructors mainly initiated discussions about the students' cultures and traditions, but there were also intercultural and experiential activities organized to facilitate interaction between the immigrants'/refugees' culture and the local culture.

*"Except for this, there are the theatrical plays, where yes, we want them to translate poetry from their countries, to teach us their dances, to learn ours respectively, whenever there is, there is always this interaction, that is two years ago we had dramatized poetry from Leivaditis [a Greek poet], always, always, there needs to be [interaction]" (I6S2).*

This cultural dimension was considered very interesting by the instructors and it was stressed that they thought it led to the development of intercultural awareness.

*"I am interested in where they are from and that, yes, I am interested and I combine them and I give them examples at the same time and so they can understand it better and remember it as well" (I9S4)*

*"I am also personally interested in this, to be honest. I am interested in meeting people from different places, to learn about their countries, we always have discussions like these, it's never lesson-lesson. We always have this contact also, their tradition. Every chance we get we will talk about their countries" (I12S6).*

Incorporating the students' culture in the L2 lesson was also considered important to foster understanding between instructors and students and to keep the students interested in the lesson so that they keep attending it. However, some instructors pointed out that it can be a challenge to do so and they have to be very careful in order not to offend anybody.

*"It runs through the whole process of teaching, that is the part that I always think how every person functions according to his/her culture and his/her cultural level and his/her origins. You can't respect the other person [if you don't know their culture] and you can't listen to him/her properly, you can't approach him/her, these are primary moves so that you can say that later you have established a relationship, you can't establish relationships like this [without understanding the students' culture and incorporating it in class], these things are prerequisites, they are a part of the process" (I3S2)*

*"...it's obvious, it's obvious, because if you don't take them into account, you have lost them in a week, you need to be very careful, and the issue is that you can't take into account only one culture, there are many, and you have to be careful, I have 12-13 different nationalities, there yes, it's that also, it's a minefield, you need to be very careful, to make them bond with you and bond to each other and this if you offend them or make them feel bad about cultural issues, there you have lost them" (I7S3).*

Some instructors commented that they considered the incorporation of the students' culture very important but not the only thing they should be doing during the lesson.

*"And the social realities the girls, that is their customs maybe either in the social structure where they grew up or the..., things I don't know, so they speak themselves also speak about their environment, I also get things from that, trying to harmonize in a way our reality with theirs. Accepting of course their reality, habits, customs. And our reality is this. It's your own choice, in a way, to accept it, not to accept it, to compromise, to reconcile" (I12S6)*

*"I would have failed if I hadn't done it [incorporate students' culture into the lesson], because there is no other way if you ask me, because I don't want at this moment to inculcate Western civilization, and I don't want to turn an Indian person into a rebetis [a musician involved in the scene of the Greek musical genre of rebetiko]. I want them to define themselves, that is to find the truth inside them. Some of them might have a more*

*religious attitude, we try to be maybe more secular, but I think that is something they themselves want, they need it and they like it when you give this tool to them" (I6S2)*

The instructors who participated in the study tried to strike a balance between different cultural approaches and the recognition of the individual choice of adopting elements of the host country's culture. At the same time, they claimed that the lesson cannot be based on the students' expectations only.

*"I take it into account, yes, let's say now in my class that I have women and girls with headscarves I included when we did clothes, I put the headscarf that here they call it a headscarf. To be honest, I had never done it before, that is we learnt the word for scarf but this, the concept of headscarf, I had never taught it to beginners, I guess the older ones who have been here for 20 years they knew it. Ok, this year I taught it and I thought about it for the first time, that is, it can't be, let's say, for them to wear it and not know what it's called, so I generally included it. I consider it important but I am not saying that a lesson can be exclusively designed based on what a student would expect to learn, what he/she wants" (I16S5)*

*"Yes, but you see I don't insist on some stereotypes. Ok, I will accept everything but we will approach it another way, that is we will accept each other's character and their perception" (I10S9).*

Finally, there was only one instructor from those interviewed that saw no reason to incorporate the immigrants'/refugees' culture into the lesson, because;

*"there is no need, they have lived in Greece for many years" (I4S5).*

The majority of instructors, therefore, claimed that they gave their students' culture a prominent role, and considered its incorporation important for the second language classroom. At the same time, incorporating elements of Greek culture into the class was considered very important by many of them. Their aims regarding their classes included familiarization with Greek culture, history and civilization, not exclusively a focus on the grammatical, syntactical or textual aspects of the language.

*"Regarding the students they also learn in class things about Greek society, Greek culture, because a lot of things function differently than in their countries, so, in order for them to learn about the culture of the country they have come into, some things like beyond the grammar and vocabulary and stuff" (I2S1).*

Many of them made a conscious effort to include Greek history, geography and culture in the class:

*"Apart from learning the language I am interested in their socialization, to get some knowledge about the social environment and culture in general. That is, the class I give is not only about grammar, processing texts and written speech. We speak about issues of history, of civilization, of culture. And I see that the girls want this" (I11S6)*

*"We don't only do language, we do a little history and a little geography and everything that has to do with culture, there are instances when we can talk about Greece, let's say the day before yesterday, it was the 25<sup>th</sup> March [a big national holiday], we will say a few things, we will talk about what this 25<sup>th</sup> March is" (I12S6)*

*"...national issues, 28<sup>th</sup> October [a big national holiday] and things like that, some event that will happen, cultural or social, we will talk about it, we will analyze it" (I11S6).*

Some instructors tried to compare Greek traditions with those from the students' countries:

*"We try to give them what we can about Greek [culture], I ask about their habits and customs, what they do on 1<sup>st</sup> May, what we do on 1<sup>st</sup> May, what they do at Christmas, what we do at Christmas" (I18S8).*

Except for class discussions, which were the most usual way instructors used to teach Greek culture, some instructors used texts from Greek literature or Greek fairy tales and stories from Greek mythology and compared them with corresponding ones from the students' countries. Some instructors suggested books on Greek culture for the students to read.

*"We suggest books for them to study, five books, but that depends on their disposition and their educational level" (I11S6).*

One instructor also mentioned that she suggested cultural events for the students to attend and she even attended some of the events together with the students:

*"I achieve the goals by suggesting different things to the girls, cultural events that take place, we have even been together to some of them and with suggesting books that are about Greek culture...and I have the sense that they feel more comfortable in the Greek context" (I11S6).*

The instructors generally made an active effort to incorporate the host culture into their classes and often compare it with the students' culture to find common points of reference and their attitudes toward multiculturalism and multilingualism were very positive. They considered them an asset in their teaching and valuable for everyone involved, both instructors, who also acquired intercultural competence through the

process, and students. They recognized the need to show the students respect and treat them as individuals, apart from carriers of their culture. Although they claimed they utilized the students' cultures, they did not feel that they needed to incorporate the students' languages in the lesson. Incorporating elements of Greek culture into the class was considered very important and many of them made a conscious effort to include Greek culture in the class, considering that the lessons were not exclusively aimed at teaching the Greek language, but also the Greek culture.

Except for the interviews, there was non-participant observation of the classes of the instructors that took part in the study and micro-level descriptions of classroom behavior by the researcher. During the interviews, the instructors had expressed really positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and multilingualism. The result of the observation of the lessons by the instructors that were interviewed for the needs of the study showed a different picture than the interviews, however. Although the research participants had particularly positive attitudes towards multilingualism, no multilingual practices were observed and they did not seem to use their students' languages in the class. Most of them, with few exceptions, showed a lack of intercultural competence. There was no mention of the students' cultures or languages and there were even some cases of the instructor disregarding the culture of the students altogether. For example, there were instances where the instructors asked some Asian students to get up and write on the board, even though some of them asked not to, something which shows a lack and even disregard for the students' culture, as saving face in Asia is an important aspect of the local culture. In a particular case, when students protested, the instructor just encouraged them to go to the board, while it was clear to the researcher that they did not want to.

#### **4. Discussion**

The majority of the Greek as a second language instructors who participated in the study had really positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and multilingualism. However, they did not show signs of having developed an intercultural competence. Other research has reached similar conclusions (Leeman & Van Koeven, 2019; Magos & Simopoulos, 2009), where it was highlighted that there is a discrepancy between the instructors' attitudes and their teaching practices. The participants particularly stressed in their interviews that contact with immigrant and refugee populations resulted in their sensitization regarding the issue of immigrants/refugees and a change of their attitude regarding their relationship with people from other countries. Nevertheless, this did not result in them becoming interculturally sensitive instructors. They did not seem to realize the usefulness of transforming their teaching practices and the choice of methodological approaches through the lens of interculturality and multilingualism. Although they valued it greatly, they did not seem to utilize the linguistic and cultural capital of their students and the multicultural atmosphere of their classes. As a result, they did not seem to recognize that the instructor's intercultural competence should influence the

organization and realization of the lesson. It is to be expected, partly, that volunteer teachers can hardly do this spontaneously without specifically designed learning opportunities, coaching, and mentoring. However, many instructors had been teaching in public education establishments (mainly Junior and Senior High Schools) for many years, where the student population is also comprised of students of many nationalities. The need, therefore, to train these instructors to have a higher intercultural awareness emerges from the results of the study. This idea should be expanded on and maybe more concrete suggestions should be made.

Despite their especially positive attitudes towards multilingualism, the lessons were basically monolingual, with Greek having the main role in the lesson. The language of instruction was predominantly Greek, with the use of English as a language of mediation, mainly for the explanation of unknown words. This is understandable, up to a point, as the primary focus of any second language classroom is to have as much exposure to the second language as possible. However, the second language has to be regarded as important as any other language, and not superior and there can be space for the first language and translanguaging in the lesson as well. Researchers working in multilingual classrooms have used the term 'translanguaging' to describe multilingual oral interaction (García, 2009) and the use of different languages in written texts (Canagarajah, 2011). In the specific context where the research took place there seemed to be no multilingual interaction among the students and the language used throughout the classes, whether that was oral or written, was Greek. Regarding the development of intercultural competence, it seems that most instructors' efforts, although they surely had good intentions, resulted in presenting Greek culture as superior compared to the culture of the students' host countries. For example, one of the instructors really insisted that Homer was important and really famous, she said: "You surely know him" and when one of the students said she did not know him, she suggested looking him up when she went home, but then again said: "*There is no way you don't know him*". The researcher formed the impression during the observations that many instructors' starting point in teaching the Greek culture stemmed from a feeling of superiority toward the host culture.

With the exception of certain instructors who knew elements of the students' culture and native languages (like one instructor who used his knowledge of Urdu during class to translate and explain to his Pakistani students) or made the effort to ask the students how to say some words in their language, the majority of the instructors did not utilize the language or the experiences and identities of their immigrant/refugee students during their lesson. No instructor asked the students about aspects of their own language/culture to initiate comparisons or discussion about the different languages and cultures. Whenever the students' first language was mentioned in the class, this was initiated mainly by the students themselves. During the observations, one of the instructors even actively discouraged this when it happened.

The instructors are not in any way expected to know their students' mother tongues, however, they could try to ask students how they say certain expressions or compare grammatical/syntactical phenomena between Greek and their native languages.



They put a lot of emphasis on teaching the Greek language and its grammar/syntax and also teaching the Greek culture. It is natural for them to try to use Greek as much as possible so that their students' progress in the language, however, the main approach towards teaching a second language was the traditional approach that considers the involvement of the students' first language in class undesirable. Especially one instructor actively discouraged the students every time they mentioned something about their mother tongue during class.

The practices of instruction also showed a disregard or lack of knowledge of the students' cultural practices. Something that was observed in many of the lessons was the fact that many instructors asked the students to go and write on the board. This shows that the instructors had no knowledge of the students' culture, especially those from Asian countries, who do not like to be exposed in front of their classmates and it showed that the instructors had no knowledge of the Asian concept of "saving face". Lack of training can be an important reason for this lack of intercultural competence. In fact, during the interviews, the instructors identified a lack of training in teaching a second language. However, many of them were graduates who had studied Greek language and literature or primary education teachers and there would have been courses during their undergraduate studies regarding intercultural education, but these courses are rather limited and scarce, while teaching a first language and a second language requires very different skills and training. In addition, many of them teach in public schools and the student population in Greece nowadays, especially in big cities like Athens, is becoming more and more multicultural, so they would be quite likely to have bilingual children in their classrooms. Finally, many of them had been teaching Greek in non-formal educational settings for many years, which means that even this did not necessarily lead to a greater awareness of the role of the interculturally competent teacher in a second language classroom.

Teaching Greek as a second language would be more effective if the instructors took into account the identity, linguistic capital and migrant/refugee experience in the students' countries of origin but also in the host country. In addition, when choosing methodological approaches and techniques it would be useful to harmonize them with the tenets of intercultural education and consequently show respect for the culture of the students. In such a teaching and learning context, the students would feel more comfortable and positive attitudes and motivation towards learning the second language would be enhanced (Bodycott, 2006; Magos & Simopoulos, 2009; Simopoulos, 2014). Having positive attitudes towards multiculturalism and multilingualism does not automatically translate into incorporating elements of the students' cultures and languages into the second language classroom, so teachers of Greek as L2 should receive adequate training to become more interculturally aware and question their existing practices when teaching. Additionally, it would be useful if instructors reconsidered their approaches regarding the teaching of Greek culture, something which is undoubtedly useful as the students need to know about the host country's cultural attitudes.

In conclusion, it takes more than positive attitudes on the part of the second language instructor regarding multiculturalism and issues concerning the teaching and incorporation of culture (both that of the students but also of the host country) and the students' native languages in the classroom. Teachers should re-examine and enhance their intercultural competence, actively incorporate student culture and native languages in the class and teach the host culture in a more respectful way. The integration of elements of Greek culture in the second language classroom would be more suited if done through the lens of intercultural education, equality of cultures, cultural relativity and in the context of exchanging opinions.

### Note

All comments of the participants were in Greek and they were translated by the author of the article. To protect the study participants, no names were mentioned, only abbreviations were used, e.g. I1S1 (Instructor 1, Setting 1).

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### About the Authors

**Marina Mogli** is an Adjunct Lecturer at the University of Thessaly and the Hellenic Open University in Greece. She has taught English and Greek as a foreign language, academic English and linguistics in Greece and the UK for many years. Her scientific interests include linguistics, sociolinguistics, EFL, ESL and migrant/refugee education.

**Kostas Magos** is Associate Professor in the Department of Early Childhood Education at the University of Thessaly in Greece on the field of intercultural education. His scientific interests include the theory and practice of intercultural education, the education of immigrant, refugee, minority and Roma children and the use of action research, narrative inquiry and play techniques in school practices.

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