NAVIGATING LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR MIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH IN NON-FORMAL SETTINGS: TEACHERS' PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract:

The provision of Greek language education to diverse and multilingual groups has become increasingly important, especially in light of the recent refugee crisis. This study explores the teaching strategies used in non-formal educational settings for refugee and migrant children, with a particular focus on the role of their first language (L1) and the importance of intercultural education. It also seeks to identify the challenges teachers face in these non-formal environments. Nine (9) teachers who specialize in non-formal education and teach Greek to refugee and migrant children participated in the study. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that teachers use a variety of teaching methods, favoring communicative and student-centered approaches. Although the importance of multicultural education and translanguaging practices was recognized, they were not fully implemented. The study also examines the challenges educators face in their teaching in these settings. These include issues like irregular attendance, cultural and practical factors, mental health problems, language barriers, and varying levels of prior education.

Keywords: non-formal education, immigrants/refugees, intercultural education, multiliteracies-multimodalities, challenges

1. Introduction

Language education for migrant and refugee minors in non-formal settings represents a critical area of focus within contemporary educational research. With the surge in global migration, particularly the refugee crisis, there has been an increased need to provide effective and inclusive language instruction tailored to the unique needs of these vulnerable populations. Non-formal educational environments, which often lack the structured frameworks of formal schooling, present both opportunities and challenges for educators. This article aims to explore

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the practices and challenges associated with teaching language to migrant and refugee minors in such settings. By examining various pedagogical strategies, the role of students' first language (L1), and the significance of intercultural education, this study seeks to offer insights into the complexities faced by educators. Additionally, the research evaluates the obstacles teachers encounter, from limited resources to the need for specialized staff to support students with mental issues, highlighting the essential competencies required for success in non-formal educational contexts. Through a detailed analysis of these issues, the article contributes to the broader discourse on how best to support the linguistic and cultural integration of migrant and refugee children.

1.1 Refugee and migrant minors' education in Greece

Greece has transitioned from being primarily a country of emigration to becoming both a transit and destination country for migrants and refugees (Gkaintartzi *et al.*, 2014; Maligkoudi *et al.*, 2018; Palaiologou & Faas, 2012). The number of refugees arriving in Greece has increased in the past few years due to various conflicts in the region. At the end of 2019, Greece hosted over 186,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. This included over 5000 unaccompanied children. Most refugees were from Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iran (UNHCR Greece, n.d.).

Refugee children are an exceptionally vulnerable group, as they endure numerous traumatic experiences due to their refugee status, which drastically alters their lives. Some of these children have been separated from their families, have taken on the responsibility of caring for other family members in the event of their parents' deaths, have lost access to education, and generally face a lack of social stability (Boyden *et al.*, 2002). These traumatic experiences pose significant barriers to their learning and render them a highly sensitive group with specific needs (Mouti *et al.*, 2021; Szente *et al.*, 2006; McBrien, 2005). Refugee enrolment rates are consistently lower than those of non-refugees across all educational levels. As refugee children get older, their risk of falling behind increases significantly. Approximately 48 percent of refugee children are out of school. According to UNHCR data (UNHCR Refugee Statistics, n.d.), 68 percent of refugee children are enrolled in primary school, whereas this figure drops sharply to 37 percent for secondary school enrolment.

The Greek educational system has encountered significant difficulties in providing education to refugee and migrant minors. The Greek government designated the 2016-2017 academic year as a preparatory-transitional phase for these students (Palaiologou *et al.*, 2019; Simopoulos & Magos, 2020). Despite recognizing the importance of education for these children, challenges such as teacher turnover, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of qualified educators persist. Additionally, stereotypical attitudes within educational settings and xenophobic attitudes by some parents have led to higher dropout rates and social isolation among students (Chatzidaki & Tsokalidou, 2021; Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019). In response, the Greek Ministry of Education launched the Educational Priority Zones (ZEP) reception classes initiative in 2022, which focuses on language acquisition and additional support for students with moderate Greek proficiency. However, there are no mandatory requirements for teachers in ZEPs to have specialized training in teaching Greek as a second language (L2) (Magos & Simopoulos, 2020).

Non-formal education programs have also been pivotal in providing language instruction and aiding the integration of refugee children into mainstream schools (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019). During the peak of the refugee influx, these programs were the first to offer support, beginning with trauma care and subsequently implementing various educational initiatives (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019; Tzoraki, 2019). According to Papastathopoulos *et al.* (2021), non-formal education programs for refugees and migrants in Greece focus on inclusion and aim to bridge the gap between formal and non-formal education. However, research indicates that educators in these settings often have limited experience and predominantly use conventional language teaching methods that prioritize students' linguistic abilities (Kantzou *et al.*, 2017).

Therefore, there is a need to explore the instructional methods employed in these settings. There have been challenges, like insufficient implementation of intercultural education and teaching practices for diverse classrooms (Mogli & Magos, 2023; Mouti *et al.*, 2021; Papalexatou & Zorbas, 2021) or curricula which were not specifically targeted to refugee students (Mattheoudakis *et al.*, 2017; Mitits, 2018). This study aims to investigate teaching practices and challenges in non-formal education settings, particularly within NGOs, to facilitate the integration of refugee and migrant students into formal education.

1.2 Practices and challenges in refugee minors' education in Greece

1.2.1 Intercultural education

The benefits of intercultural education have been extensively documented in academic research. Studies have consistently shown that intercultural education fosters mutual respect, enhances cultural awareness, and promotes inclusive environments that are conducive to learning for students from diverse backgrounds (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2016; Magos & Simopoulos, 2009; Palaiologou & Faas, 2012). Additionally, intercultural education helps develop critical thinking skills by encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives and engage in meaningful dialogue about cultural differences (Arvanitis, 2021). Furthermore, it has been linked to improved academic outcomes and better social integration, particularly for students from marginalized or minority groups (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Research within Greek educational contexts has revealed a significant lack of preparedness in teacher training programs regarding the acquisition of intercultural competence and communication skills (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2011; Kipouropoulou, 2019; Mogli *et al.*, 2019; Palaiologou & Faas, 2012). Studies indicate that teachers often enter the classroom without sufficient training in these critical areas, which is essential for effectively teaching diverse student populations, including migrants and refugees (Ioannidou & Mitakidou, 2020).

1.2.2 Multiliteracies-Multimodalities

The concept of multiliteracies, which underscores the importance of multiple communication modes, integrates multimodality, linguistic and cultural diversity, information and communication technology (ICT), and a commitment to justice in education (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; The New London Group, 2000). Multimodality involves using various forms of communication, such as speech, writing, motion, and visuals, in language

teaching. Integrating multiliteracies and multimodality in pedagogy enhances students' critical thinking and interaction skills (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016), facilitates the expression of diverse perspectives, and the utilization of a wide range of linguistic forms. By transcending language barriers, multimodality can boost students' confidence and self-perception. Rizakou (2019) found that while multimodal elements were incorporated into non-formal education and NGO-run courses, they were often used more to capture attention than to foster meaningful semiotic interpretation. Magos and Simopoulos (2020) observed that the mechanical focus on grammar and vocabulary in teaching Greek to refugees and migrants stems from inadequate supervision and training for teachers. In contrast, Mouti *et al.* (2021) reported that a lot of the supplementary instructional material in non-formal settings is multimodal, effectively employing various semiotic modes to aid communication and understanding for refugee students confronting language barriers.

1.2.3 Translanguaging

Translanguaging, or 'engaging in bilingual or multilingual discourse practices, is an approach to bilingualism that is centered, not on languages as has been often the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable' (Poza, 2017, p. 101) and it is a linguistic practice that goes beyond just switching codes (García & Wei, 2014). It can play an important role in creating a social environment for multilingual language learners. Translanguaging views a person's linguistic repertoire not as confined to single or multiple languages but as a unified system where individuals utilize different language elements based on the context of communication. This approach aims to enrich the curriculum by acknowledging and valuing the diverse linguistic skills of multilingual students, thereby bridging communication gaps between teachers and students (García, 2009). According to Tsokalidou (2017), when teachers employ a co-learning strategy and encourage students to use their native languages, students exhibit a deeper understanding and can articulate the rationale behind their language choices. Research by Tsokalidou and Skourtou (2020) indicates that translanguaging can bolster the confidence and self-esteem of minority students, fostering respect and pride in their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Maligkoudi and Mammou (2022) suggest that translanguaging practices create an inclusive environment where students can draw on their prior knowledge, express themselves, and feel validated in their identities. Classrooms that adopt translanguaging become safe spaces where Greek and students' linguistic repertoires are embraced (Karafylli & Maligkoudi, 2023). Additionally, translanguaging pedagogy enhances learning by engaging students in teamwork through real-life language interactions, thus empowering their multilingual and multicultural identities (Mammou *et al.*, 2023). Stergiou and Simopoulos (2019) advocate that language training should be tailored to address students' specific linguistic needs, personal narratives, and interests. They recommend incorporating team-building activities and integrating students' native languages into everyday practices to enhance engagement and learning.

1.2.4 Teaching challenges in educating refugee students

While extensive research exists on the challenges educators face when teaching students from immigrant or refugee backgrounds in formal educational settings, there is limited focus on these issues within non-formal education contexts. Studies have highlighted several obstacles in formal education, such as language barriers, where teachers may not speak the students' native languages, and students may struggle with Greek or English (Antoniadou *et al.*, 2022). Emotional challenges, anxiety, and defensive behaviors are also prevalent among refugee children (Antoniadou *et al.*, 2022; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020). Additionally, there are varying levels of language proficiency among students, with some more familiar with Greek than others (Antoniadou *et al.*, 2022; Papapostolou *et al.*, 2020). Many refugee children have had little or no prior access to education, making instruction particularly challenging (Antoniadou *et al.*, 2022; Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019). Irregular attendance and the continuous arrival of new students further complicate teaching efforts (Papapostolou *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, dropout rates are high among refugee students who struggle to adapt to the educational system's norms and procedures (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019). Creating a supportive environment for educators is difficult due to limited resources and insufficient materials tailored to the needs of refugee students (Antoniadou *et al.*, 2022; Stathopoulou & Dassi, 2020). There is also a notable lack of official support for educational resources suitable for older refugee students, particularly those aged 16 to 18 (Papapostolou *et al.*, 2020).

Research on non-formal education highlights additional challenges faced by teachers. Kantzou *et al.* (2017) observed that while volunteer teachers are enthusiastic and committed, they often lack necessary training. Although these teachers reported using a communicative approach in interviews, their classroom practices typically followed more traditional methods. A significant responsibility for NGO teachers is to assist students with their schoolwork, which can detract from the non-formal curriculum. In addition, teachers often perceive formal textbooks as too demanding and advanced for their students (Palaiologou *et al.*, 2019). Mouti *et al.* (2021) reported difficulties in maintaining consistent class attendance, attributing this partly to students' unfamiliarity with school procedures and rules. Additionally, students are sometimes placed in classes based on age rather than literacy level, creating additional difficulty for teachers and creating the need for differentiated instruction to address diverse literacy levels (Mouti *et al.*, 2021; Palaiologou *et al.*, 2019). Given the limited research on non-formal education, it is essential to further document and understand the specific challenges faced by teachers in these settings to improve educational practices and outcomes.

2. Data and methods of the research

The current study examines the teaching methods and techniques teachers use in non-formal education to teach Greek to minor refugees and immigrants. Investigated concurrently are the difficulties that arise in the students' education.

The primary research questions were the following:
- What instructional practices do teachers in non-formal educational settings use to teach Greek as a second/foreign language?

- What challenges do teachers encounter in the context of teaching refugee and migrant minors?

The interviews were conducted from May to June 2023. They were carried out in Greek via the Zoom video conferencing platform because the participants were in various regions in Greece, and were recorded using the platform's built-in recording system. They were translated in English for the purposes of the article, ensuring that the meaning was the same.

The instructors who were interviewed were nine (9) in total, one (1) male and eight (8) female participants with different levels of expertise in teaching Greek to refugees/migrants (ranging from 1 to 7 years) in non-formal educational contexts, such as non-governmental organizations, institutions, accommodation centers, and refugee camps. All teachers had relevant training. Two (2) of them specialized in Language Education for Refugees and Migrants, one (1) was pursuing the same specialization, and some were working towards a master's degree during the time the research was conducted. Two (2) individuals were pursuing a PhD in Narratives and Neurolinguistics, respectively. Four (4) instructors had attended an instructional seminar on intercultural education, and one had participated in a seminar on teaching Greek as a second/foreign language.

Following qualitative research principles, this study aims to comprehensively understand teaching practices and challenges in educating refugee/migrant children through non-formal education by analyzing the personal meanings teachers there provide. Qualitative research methods were deemed appropriate for this purpose, as they allow researchers to explore meanings associated with certain phenomena in depth, beyond simple identification and enable a thorough examination of the fundamental causes and processes involved in creating meanings related to the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Using Creswell and Poth's (2017) guidelines, the researchers used purposive sampling to ensure that the selected participants matched the research aims and criteria. Based on the research rationale, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were constructed, following Holstein and Gubrium and Holstein's (2001) active interviewing methodology, which motivates users to actively shape their reality through interaction rather than only presenting factual information. Using open-ended questions allows participants to speak and share their ideas, which might be uncommon, radical, or unexplored by the researcher (Albudaiwi, 2017) and gives participants a chance to explore topics more thoroughly and analyze them from many perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Thematic analysis was chosen to analyze the data for its appropriateness in meeting the study goals. It involves methodically categorizing data to recognize patterns and establish interpretive structures and allows the researcher to identify themes with numerous meanings in the collected information (Tsiolis, 2018). The data analysis in the study followed the five phases detailed in Tsiolis' (2018) theme analysis technique. The interview was transcribed word for word. Then the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by selecting and gathering sections related to each study question. The third phase included coding and interpreting the data to understand meanings and establish conceptual definitions. Phase four involved transferring from codes to themes, and the final step was presenting the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

As educators navigate diverse teaching approaches and considerations for language development, the focus extends beyond conventional methods. There was a varied spectrum of pedagogical strategies employed by teachers, from student-centered paradigms to communicative methodologies. However, amidst this pedagogical diversity, a critical lens is cast on the unique challenges faced when instructing migrant and refugee students. Understanding the distinct needs of this demographic, educators strive to set nuanced goals aimed at fostering linguistic proficiency and cultural integration. These goals reflect a commitment to equity and inclusivity within educational settings, underscoring the importance of tailored approaches to meet the diverse needs of learners.

3.1 Teaching methodologies

The core responsibility of all teachers was to prepare students and facilitate their transition into formal education settings. Specifically, the pedagogical strategies employed by instructors aimed to complement and reinforce formal education or assist students with their homework tasks. According to most teachers, their duties involved a careful consideration of their students' linguistic needs, prompting them to adapt their teaching methods accordingly. Additionally, experiential learning, the communicative approach, and the use of games, particularly with younger students, were favoured teaching techniques to enhance the learning experience.

In terms of language objectives, Teacher 1 emphasized the necessity for goals to be pragmatic and tailored to the specific needs of the students. The teacher also underscored the significance of interactive language learning, which is closely connected to the everyday lives of the students. This approach not only supports language acquisition, but also ensures that learning remains relevant and engaging for the students.

"I teach Greek in addition to formal education and occasionally I provide support with school lessons. In general, my course is not teacher-centered in any way, it is mainly shaped by the children and the challenges they may have in some tasks, or in the vocabulary we have said we will cover. Generally, I try to incorporate real-world stimuli and adapt to what will be taught in the classroom. Of course, children also have a big role in this". (Teacher 1)

Moreover, the predominant pedagogical approach employed by most teachers was student-centered and focused on fostering communication. These educators prioritized actively listening to their students' needs, tailoring their lessons to meet those needs, and moving away from traditional, lecture-based methods of instruction. By doing so, they created a more dynamic and responsive learning environment that encouraged student engagement and participation. This approach involved continuous adaptation and the use of interactive teaching techniques to ensure that the instruction was relevant and effective for all students.

"As an educator, my approach is more free and tends to lean towards the communicative approach. I prioritize tapping into the knowledge and experiences that children bring from their schooling in

their countries of origin and during transit and I try to bring them to the surface. By using these experiences into the learning process, especially to try to activate the students' interest in something which might be very boring. I want to show them that I do not ignore a whole world. Yes, I am limited by my subject matter, in general. That's how I do it". (Teacher 3)

"A little student-centered like that, definitely, I let them lead the way in the lesson, so to speak. In other words, I try to be a little more collected and give the role of the teacher or team leader to a different person each time, I often let them do mini presentations as well". (Teacher 7)

Teacher 5 adopted a communicative teaching methodology, incorporating elements of experiential learning and a lively and playful teaching style. Yet, she also highlighted a phenomenon which was prevalent in camp settings, that children often prioritized oral production and focused on acquiring speaking skills over written ones. The teacher, however, wanted to achieve a balance between oral and written language skills. At the same time, she did not consider traditional methods of instruction suitable for the specific population:

"On the one hand, I want learning to be playful and experiential and more communicative; on the other hand, I want to put emphasis on writing and reading. Students can't be good at speaking and fall behind in writing. You have seen this phenomenon in the classes. And the children here talk to each other, so oral production is cultivated more. But we don't have the traditional way that everyone follows". (Teacher 5)

However, there were teachers who supported the use of more traditional teaching methods, such as Teacher 2. Her pedagogical approach integrated experiential learning alongside the Presentation-Practice-Production model:

"When we plan the lesson, we generally have in mind the triad of Presentation, Practice and Production. I structure my lesson in this way and, depending on how the students react, of course, make sure it ends in an activity, in a game which is related to the lesson, or some other experiential activity." (Teacher 2).

Teachers in the study did not strictly follow a set curriculum but adapted their teaching methods and choice of material to meet their students' diverse learning needs. Textbooks for teaching Greek as L2 were mentioned, including "Φτου και Βγαίνω" (Teacher 2), "Εντάξει" and "ΚΛΙΚ Α1" (Teacher 7), but traditional textbooks were found to be less effective and less suited to a diverse classroom. The teachers stressed that the needs of each classroom decisively determined their choice of approaches and material. They also preferred using audio-visual aids like flashcards, multimedia platforms such as YouTube and digital tools to enhance language learning. They employed digital platforms like Live Worksheets and Wordwall and used the Akelius language learning application on tablets. Additionally, they used board games like "Guess Who" for gamification. Some teachers faced challenges with interactive whiteboards, which were out of order and shared projectors (Teachers 2, 6). Teachers tailored their

instructional resources based on their students' age groups, using a lot of audio-visual materials with younger learners and engaging older students in projects and worksheets.

The research findings unveil a diverse landscape of teaching methodologies employed by educators in the study. While some of them advocate for student-centered approaches, others prefer communicative teaching styles. Interestingly, observations suggest a disparity in language proficiency development, with oral communication often surpassing written language skills, echoing trends observed in camp environments. Despite varying viewpoints, educators like Teacher 2 demonstrate the integration of experiential learning within established models, showcasing the adaptability and innovation in pedagogical practices. These insights highlight the importance of flexibility and balance in instructional strategies to effectively cater to the multifaceted needs of migrant/refugee learners.

3.2 Intercultural approaches

All teachers supported intercultural education and recognized its importance in diverse classrooms. However, their knowledge of its principles was, in some cases, rather intuitive, as some were not sure of the term, and its meaning had to be clarified during the interviews.

Its use did not come without challenges, however. For example, Teacher 3 recognized its importance, but faced challenges due to time constraints and pressure, which prevented its full implementation in the classroom. She also mentioned that she felt certain constraints on her ability to express herself freely, as she needed to be cautious not to offend any students:

"There is no time, unfortunately, to remember who I have in front of me, who these people are. They believe in many different religions, so I always have to be careful not to offend anyone, not to take anything for granted, not to think according to Western standards. For example, I am an atheist and that is something I should not proudly state in front of a class where everyone believes so deeply in Allah. For example, they might watch a series on Netflix where the girl has two boyfriends in high school and be shocked and I can't say that this is ok, it's not that bad. So, all these things that have to do with culture and my own association with them, are what I have in mind. This is the way I understand intercultural education". (Teacher 3)

Furthermore, the teachers provided several examples of their intercultural education approaches during the interviews. They incorporated resources related to Greece and Ukraine, including customs, historical and geographical knowledge, in order to promote intercultural dialogue (Teacher 4). Similarly, they fostered mutual respect among students by integrating research-based projects and presentations about the students' countries of origin into classroom activities and rules (Teacher 5). They enhanced intercultural communication during events like the Day Against Racism and Arabic Language Day, addressing student confrontations with discussions that emphasized diversity and equality (Teacher 6). They encouraged students to appreciate and support each other's unique backgrounds both inside and outside the classroom (Teacher 6). Additionally, they organized a collaborative event showcasing various international cuisines (Teacher 7). Teacher 7, in particular, even personally engaged with the cultural practices of her students, by attempting to abstain from drinking water during Ramadan, highlighting

her commitment to understanding and participating in their traditions. She also explored commonalities across different cultures, such as shared melodies, to strengthen intercultural bonds (Teacher 7).

"We tattooed our hands with henna, I asked them what that is etc. We managed after a while with the girls to go swimming, which their moms didn't agree to at first. Apparently, they came in short sleeves [she means they did not wear a swimsuit], *but it was very nice because in the end their mothers trusted us, and the girls at first felt very strange as they had never been swimming, it was very successful. This is a good result of this process of interculturalism". (Teacher 7)*

The creation of a safe environment in the classroom where a culture of respect among all students is fostered is particularly important:

"I tried to create a safe environment for all children, so that they could feel comfortable and share experiences and opinions, respect and tolerate anything different. We had discussions, group work and presentations which focused on accepting diversity in every way, books, music movies. We tried to understand the world and the different realities and how they all co-exist with each other". (Teacher 8)

The research findings reveal a diverse array of efforts by educators to instil intercultural practices within their classrooms. These initiatives range from incorporating cultural resources and fostering mutual respect through student-centered projects to enhancing communication during culturally significant events. The teachers' strategies underscore a commitment to promoting diversity and equality, while also addressing the unique challenges and opportunities of intercultural education. By integrating these practices, educators demonstrate adaptability and innovation in their approaches, highlighting the crucial role of intercultural awareness in creating inclusive and responsive learning environments for all students.

3.3 Use of students' L1/translanguaging

The teachers who were interviewed had diverse opinions on the use of the students' native language in education. They believed L1 incorporation was essential for knowledge acquisition and the students' well-being. Teachers emphasized the benefits of learning vocabulary in L1 for familiarity, comfort and easier acquisition of L2 vocabulary. Additionally, L1 incorporation instilled a perception of reciprocity, whereby the students felt that their teachers were also gaining knowledge from them. However, the teachers faced challenges in implementing L1 in the lesson.

One teacher highlighted a varied use of L1, such as in learning basic vocabulary, instructional materials, and the use of dictionaries. An added benefit to L1 incorporation was to empower students.

"I use it a lot, I usually try to ask the children, especially the little ones who have many difficulties in their first contact with the second language, to name various objects and ask them what this

object is called in their own language. Those who are already literate in their language, who are able to write, especially at the ages of 9-12, I urge them to have a small vocabulary in their books, which also helps in empowering them, there are also various things that we all do together like writing posters in their own languages". (Teacher 1)

However, it was noted that the utilization of the students' L1 might prove ineffective in cases where there is no shared first language among students:

"Sometimes the only thing that can act as a deterrent is when it [L1] *contributes to the exclusion for children who speak a language nobody else does, for example, I have 7 children who speak Arabic and one child who speaks Ukrainian, I will not reinforce him/her to interpret in class* [in his/her language], *because the other child may feel left out".* (Teacher 1)

Teachers pointed out that the use of L1 promotes engagement and shows respect for the students' linguistic resources and background (Teacher 3). It can create a feeling of familiarity (Teachers 5 and 6), although challenges may arise for students with varying language proficiency levels. The inclusion of L1 in the lesson also enhances motivation and increases participation:

"We each repeated the numbers in a different language. I showed them flashcards with numbers and asked each child to tell me the specific number in all languages. I also participated in the game. They loved it and they all participated and appreciated the fact that I used their language too. I tried to learn some words in their language myself as I saw how they participated in the lesson". (Teacher 6)

It seems that the use of the students' language did not involve translanguaging techniques and was basically used as a translation mechanism to facilitate the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. L1 was mainly employed to support vocabulary learning. This included translating new vocabulary into the students' languages during instruction and using phonetics to help students recall the pronunciation of Greek words (Teacher 7). Efforts to build common communication included learning basic vocabulary in the languages spoken by the pupils and using Google Translate for complex vocabulary explanations (Teacher 8). A broad assortment of books in different languages was available in the classroom, although further details on their use were not provided (Teacher 8).

In summary, the utilization of students' native languages in the classroom proved to be a valuable strategy for enhancing language learning and fostering intercultural understanding. Teachers employed various approaches to support communication and comprehension. These efforts highlight the importance of leveraging students' linguistic backgrounds to create more effective and responsive teaching practices.

3.4 Challenges in non-formal educational settings

The research findings highlight the importance of psychosocial support for students in educational settings, with educators emphasizing the need for professional help to the migrant and refugee students, since they have had many traumatic experiences during their journey to the host country and their relocation experience. The participants claimed that psychologists, social workers and interpreters were instrumental in providing assistance to improve students' psychological well-being. Concerns about some camps or accommodation centers being understaffed were raised, and the lack of psychosocial support was pointed out. The discontinuation of funding for the students' well-being support led educators to take on the responsibility of fostering emotional empowerment and support themselves. However, they felt they lacked the necessary expertise, and the presence of interpreters and psychosocial teams was considered crucial:

"[The interpreter] is mainly needed for different interpretations, and not for educational purposes, mainly for the psycho-social one. We are 3 teachers and 2 people from the psychosocial team, a psychologist and a social worker. We take care of anything that may arise regarding the children, it can be a fight, a conflict, or something more serious of a sexual nature, so I think this is an essential addition to our team". (Teacher 6)

Another challenge teachers face is the limited time they have to address students' socio-psychological needs due to the demanding nature of meeting educational requirements. This leaves them with very little time to inquire about students' well-being state or experiences:

"If I'm in a high school class, I'll go in, greet the kids, ask them how they are, etc., I try not to open the conversation too much because then it doesn't stop". (Teacher 3)

The primary challenge mentioned by most teachers was the irregular attendance of students and their lack of adherence to the schedule (Teachers 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9). The interviews revealed that this discrepancy was more pronounced during the summer and Ramadan. Teachers identified several potential reasons for students' irregular attendance, such as fatigue, peers leaving for other countries, and students struggling with formal education, which could diminish their motivation to participate in non-formal education. Teacher 5 noted that many students exhibited sporadic attendance due to abnormal sleep patterns, consumption of energy drinks, and a general lack of focus. Another reason for irregular attendance in non-formal education was students' employment in city center locations. For example, one of Teacher 6's students worked at the same place as his father, even though it is illegal in Greece to employ minors.

Furthermore, Teachers 1, 2, and 8 faced a persistent challenge in integrating new students into their classrooms. This was attributed to the diversity of the classes in terms of age and linguistic skills (Teachers 1,3,5). Several instructors (Teachers 2,8,9) pointed out the lack of a common language of communication, which could greatly impede learning. On top of that, the number of students in the classrooms was large, which posed another problem for the teachers

and made it difficult to give equal attention to each student (Teacher 7). In addition, the students and their families were not sufficiently aware of the demands and regulations of the Greek educational system and behavior expectations in the classroom.

Furthermore, Teacher 3 discussed the rigorous timetable she had to follow, and although she was officially classified as a part-time teacher, her actual teaching hours surpassed 30:

"There are hardly any breaks, and while my work is considered part-time, my actual teaching is 30 hours, that is more than full-time without the time I take for preparation, this is something that often happens in NGOs and it is problematic and wrong. It is exhausting. The other thing is that the teaching is very diversified, different ages, different levels, languages etc.". (Teacher 3)

She also emphasized the necessity of having a specialized educator to help in the classroom because many students had learning difficulties, anxiety issues, and aggressive tendencies. The teacher concluded that insufficient staffing led to poor-quality teaching.

Some of the participants highlighted challenges in specific refugee populations, particularly regarding pupils from Ukraine and those from Iran and Iraq. Teacher 4 noted that poorer living conditions often led to absenteeism among Iranian and Iraqi students, who had responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings. Lack of transportation and parents' work commitments further hindered their attendance and educational priorities. These students also showed persistent fatigue and struggled with Greek language proficiency due to inadequate prior education and a lack of motivation, viewing Greece as a transit stop before reaching other European countries.

The research findings reveal several challenges teachers face when educating migrant and refugee students in non-formal settings. These include diversified issues such as irregular attendance due to cultural and practical factors, language barriers, and varying levels of prior education. Teachers noted difficulties in engaging students who view their stay in Greece as temporary, as well as managing tensions arising from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, they highlighted the need to address students' unfamiliarity with the local educational system and classroom behavior expectations, emphasizing the importance of tailored approaches to meet these unique challenges.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The study aspired to shed some light on the intricacies of language teaching to migrant and refugee minors in non-formal educational settings, focusing on the practices employed and the challenges encountered. This analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how educators navigate cultural, linguistic, and practical barriers to facilitate effective learning experiences for this diverse student population. Regarding the teachers' instruction approaches, it was found that they preferred communicative approaches and student-centered teaching. This agrees with the findings of Richards and Rodgers (2014) concerning the widespread acceptance of the communicative method. Furthermore, teachers utilized several other pedagogical methods, such as tailored instruction and experiential learning. However, some teachers often

used traditional methods and the Presentation-Production-Practice paradigm (Long, 2014). The research results align with the conclusions by Mouti *et al.* (2021), Kantzou *et al.* (2017), and Magos and Simopoulos (2020), which indicate that while teachers may favor communicative language methods in theory, their classroom practices often focus more on language forms. Preference for traditional teaching methods may be due to insufficient teacher training and experience (Kantzou *et al.*, 2017; Simopoulos & Magos, 2020). However, this did not seem to be the case in this study, as most participants had significant training in teaching Greek as a second or foreign language and educating refugee and migrant populations. Additionally, they had considerable experience in this field.

The teachers were not restricted to a set curriculum, which gave them a lot of freedom to choose how they used teaching aids and resources. They employed several teaching methods which focused on the use of audio-visual materials in order to overcome language barriers. The results support previous studies indicating that educators utilize various educational tools beyond written materials (Mouti *et al.*, 2021; Rizakou, 2019). Therefore, it seems important that they receive systematic training to effectively teach their students how to derive meaning from multimodal texts that utilize semiotic resources (Mouti *et al.*, 2021).

Regarding the incorporation of the students' L1 in the lesson, there were varied responses. Educators agreed that integrating it into the educational process was very beneficial, since it created a feeling of comfort and familiarity among pupils. The teachers were not really aware of this and did not employ translanguaging techniques, though. Their use of the students' L1 was restricted to translating basic vocabulary into the students' languages or inquiring about equivalent phrases in their languages. In addition, the teachers sometimes acted as co-learners, engaging actively and gaining an understanding of specific L1 terminology used by their students, which improves the educational experience, increases motivation, and shows to migrant/refugee students that all languages are valued equally (Tsokalidou, 2017).

Most educators seemed to value diversity and expressed their respect for their students' experiences, viewpoints, and traditions. The teachers aimed to balance adhering to uniformity and embracing diversity, as outlined by Allard (2006), while also being careful not to provoke tensions in the classroom related to intercultural issues. They made a conscious effort to shift from passively accepting diversity to actively engaging students in discussions that helped develop new perspectives and analyze cultural traditions within historical and societal contexts (Byram *et al.*, 2002).

Educators encountered many challenges when teaching in non-formal educational contexts. Their main issues related to lacking a shared language of communication, inconsistent attendance, diverse language skills and age ranges among the pupils. Furthermore, some refugee children had stopped formal schooling for extended periods while still living in their home country, while others had never been to school. This posed a considerable barrier in the teaching process, as these students were not familiar with the methods, approaches, evaluation procedures and many other aspects of the educational system. This confirms previous research findings by Antoniadou *et al.* (2022), Mouti *et al.* (2021). and Stergiou and Simopoulos (2019). Multiple educators mentioned that the students had various mental issues and exhibited aggressive behavior, which required the help and support of a socio-psychological team. Studies

by Antoniadou *et al.* (2022) and Stathopoulou and Dassi (2020) have shown that mental problems and anxiety might hinder the teaching process. The study's findings reveal that educators placed a high priority on the psychological development of their students. They all believed they needed support from experts, such as psychologists, social workers, and interpreters, to provide emotional support to the students. Their contribution was considered essential to support joint initiatives with teachers and offer personal counseling to students.

In conclusion, the findings underscore the multifaceted challenges and innovative strategies employed by educators in non-formal settings to support migrant and refugee minors. The emphasis on intercultural practices, language support, and psychological development reflects a holistic approach to education, tailored to the unique needs of this diverse student population. These insights provide a foundation for further research and the development of best practices in the field of migrant and refugee education.

Note

All comments of the participants were in Greek, and they were translated by the authors of the article. To protect the study participants, no names were mentioned, only codes, e.g. Teacher 1, Teacher 2.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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