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Language repertoires of pupils with refugee and migration background: A case study at the 2nd High School of Intercultural Education in Ioannina, Greece

ABSTRACT. This article presents the findings of a case study conducted at the 2nd High School of Intercultural Education in Ioannina, Greece. In the first part, recent statistics on the education of students from refugee and migrant backgrounds are presented, as well as an analysis of concepts such as multilingualism, multilingual and intercultural competence, and multilingual and intercultural education. In the second part, the authors provide an overview of the school's multilingual development and evaluates key research areas, including the languages spoken by students, their level of proficiency, communication needs, and interventions aimed at fostering the school's multilingual and intercultural identity. Primary data were collected through questionnaires and the observational research method. The article concludes with recommendations for promoting intercultural awareness and multilingualism as essential elements in school communities. This work is part of the school's participation in the Erasmus+ project "MaMLiSE: Majority and Minority Languages in School Environment: Helping teachers, pupils, and parents."

Keywords: multilingualism, multilingual competence, whole-child approach, whole-school development, pupils with refugee and migrant backgrounds in Greece.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural and linguistic diversity is prevalent in Greek classrooms, with a significant proportion of students being bilingual or multilingual. As of April 2023, UNHCR statistics indicate that 62% of school-aged children from refugee or migrant backgrounds living with their families in Greece were enrolled in

formal education. Some children attended non-formal education classes, while 23% of those not attending public schools cited the absence of reception classes or vaccinations as barriers to accessing the education system. In Greek public schools, alongside Modern Greek as the official language, three internationally recognized foreign languages are offered: English, which is compulsory, and French, German, or, in some cases, Spanish or Italian as optional subjects. English dominates Greece's nine-year compulsory education (Koiliari 2015: 210; Svarna 2022: 1–14), and its popularity extends beyond the formal education system (Androulakis 2008: 17–28). As Koiliari (2005: 104) notes, current educational policies and language preferences are influenced by the promotion of entrepreneurship and economic development within the European Union. However, despite the intercultural rhetoric in public discourse, Greek schools remain predominantly monolingual and monocultural, neglecting the specific characteristics and ethnolinguistic identities of students with migrant and refugee backgrounds (Koiliari 2015: 110; Skourtou et al. 2016: 14–62).

In everyday school practice, Greek teachers operate with a working definition of "bilingualism", which, to varying extents, involves the alternation of languages (codeswitching) to achieve effective communication rather than full proficiency in both languages (Skourtou 2001: 184; Tsakaloudi & Palaeologou 2021: 113). This approach aligns with the principle of language interdependence, which holds that the languages in a bilingual individual's repertoire are not acquired independently but are in constant interaction. The more a bilingual learner develops their first language (e.g., Arabic), the faster they will acquire the second language (e.g., Greek). Conversely, when one language develops at the expense of another, it results in "subtractive bilingualism" (Skourtou 2001: 117; Vichou 2019: 15–19; Gaidartzi 2018: 12; Sotiropoulou 2024: 18). A key motivation for language learning, particularly for refugee and migrant students, is the perceived utility of the language, as many families view Greece as a transitional country (Koiliari 2015: 114).

The Council of Europe's new approach to language learning and teaching promotes plurilingualism, emphasizing that schools should embrace linguistic and cultural diversity and capitalize on the linguistic resources students already possess (Cavalli et al. 2009: 1–7, cited in Chatzidaki 2015: 1–6). Accordingly, a student's linguistic repertoire should not be seen as a collection of separate languages but as a synthesis, where different languages contribute to the individual's communicative competence (Centre for the Greek Language 2008: 1–5, cited in Chatzidaki 2015: 1–5). For refugees and highly mobile families, the host country may not be the first one, and students may have experienced multiple languages of instruction (Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. 2023: 173–199). Therefore, the goal of language education should not be merely to achieve "adequate knowledge" of one or more languages in isolation but to develop a dynamic linguistic

repertoire in which all linguistic abilities play a role (Centre for the Greek Language 2008: 1–4, after Chatzidaki 2015: 1–6).

The cultivation of multilingual and intercultural competence is interconnected and can only be nurtured through multilingual and intercultural education. Such education encompasses all languages in school, integrates them across subjects, addresses the specific educational and linguistic needs of all students, and ensures equal access to quality education. It facilitates the acquisition of language skills, leverages students' existing linguistic and cultural resources, and synthesizes the languages with which students engage. This approach supports the personal development of students and fosters respect for linguistic and cultural diversity in contemporary multicultural societies. As Beacco (2007: 116) asserts, "the aim of multilingual education is to increase understanding of the social and cultural value of linguistic diversity in order to ensure 'linguistic goodwill' and to develop intercultural competence" (Chatzidaki 2015: 1; Tsokalidou 2015: 198).

Multilingual and intercultural education is directed at all students and aims to develop both competencies. Plurilingual competence is defined as the ability "to master and use different skills in different languages, at varying levels of proficiency and for a variety of functions", while intercultural competence is "the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that enable an individual to recognize, understand, interpret, and accept other ways of living and thinking beyond their own cultural group". This is considered fundamental for fostering deeper understanding between people (Chatzidaki 2015: 1). Such education provides students with opportunities to construct their personal identities, become informed citizens of European values, and contribute to social cohesion, solidarity, participatory democracy, and mutual understanding, with a deep respect for linguistic and cultural diversity (Cavalli et al. 2009: 1, after Chatzidaki 2015: 1; Mouti et al. 2023: 14–34).

2. THE STUDY UNDERTAKEN

The 2nd Gymnasium of Ioannina was converted into an intercultural school during the 1998–1999 school year. Initially, reception classes were established to teach Greek as a second language to returning students and students with refugee or migrant backgrounds. In its early years, the school enrolled students primarily from neighboring countries, especially Albania, as well as from regions of the former Soviet Union, India, and China. In recent years, the school has admitted students mainly from Syria, Pakistan, Kurdistan, Afghanistan, and Albania. Most recently, in the 2023/2024 school year, the student population

comprised primarily Greek children along with several students with refugee or migrant backgrounds.

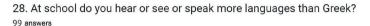
In the last two years (2021 and 2022), several interventions were introduced at the school to promote multilingual school development. These efforts focused on implementing plurilingual education in conjunction with intercultural training and multilingual school development – specifically, a whole-child approach and whole-school development (Szczepaniak-Kozak et al., 2023: 173–199) – through systematic observation and the use of questionnaires. Non-Greek-speaking students were also provided with free, specially designed textbooks.

To obtain insight into the outcomes of such systemic changes in the school, in November and December 2022, the present authors (teachers in this school) conducted lesson observations and a survey, based on a template created by the MaMLiSE project team for interviews on multilingualism. The template, translated into Greek and distributed electronically, was adapted to account for varying levels of pupils' proficiency in the language of instruction, Greek. The questionnaire addressed a range of topics, including language preferences, parental influence on language use, and the perceived benefits of learning multiple languages, both in school and in personal life. Respondents also shared their experiences with language support at school and their perspectives on participating in multilingual activities. The original questionnaire contained 36 questions (see Appendix), nine of which are the focus of this paper.

3. DATA ANALYSIS: MULTILINGUAL SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT IN THE 2ND GYMNASIUM OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION OF IOANNINA

Ninety-nine students completed the questionnaire, ranging in age from 13 to 15 years. The students were found to speak two, three, or even four languages. Specifically, 34.3% spoke two languages, 47.5% spoke three languages, and 12.1% spoke four languages. When supported by our lesson observations regarding the languages spoken during school breaks, it can be said that Greek is the dominant language, followed by English and Albanian. It is noteworthy that, based on these observations, students with refugee or migrant backgrounds used Greek and English in their communication with Greek-speaking students and teachers (during both lessons and breaks), while their native languages were used in conversations among peers. In 28.3% of cases, students alternated their language of communication with family members at home, while 39.4% reported speaking only one language, and 32.3% alternated their language of communication occasionally. It should be noted that these statistics refer to spoken communication

and not to written language. Additionally, a significant percentage of students (71.7%) reported that they "hear, see, or speak" languages other than Greek at school (see Figure 1).



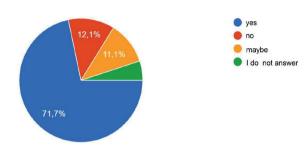


Figure 1. Languages heard or seen at school Source: current study.

The responses to questions 29, 30, and 34 indicate that students feel the need to strengthen their intercultural competence by incorporating more languages and intercultural activities at school. Specifically, 47.5% of students expressed a desire for more languages to be spoken at school, and 26.3% wanted more intercultural activities to be implemented (see Figures 2 and 3). Additionally, 54.5% of students indicated that they would like to attend a course to learn at least one more language spoken at the school (see Figure 4).

29. Do you think that you should, to a greater extent, at school hear or see or speak more languages besides Greek since there are classmates from other countries?

99 enswers

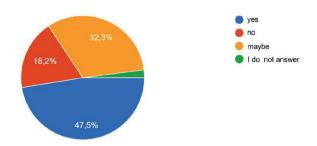


Figure 2. Pupils' expectations about their first languages at school Source: current study.

30. Would you like to participate in activities where there is multilingualism, i.e. more than one language (Greek or English) e.g. to do multilingual tasks, to sing songs in several languages, etc 99 answers

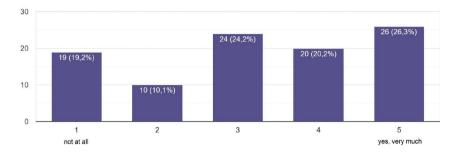


Figure 3. Pupils' expectations about multilingual activities at school Source: current study.

34. If there were classes for learning the above languages (eg Albanian, Arabic, Farsi, etc.) at school, would you like to attend any of them?

99 answers

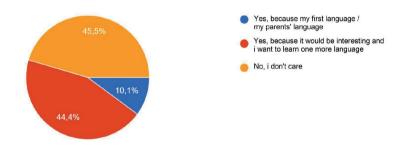


Figure 4. Pupils' expectations about courses in their classmates' first languages

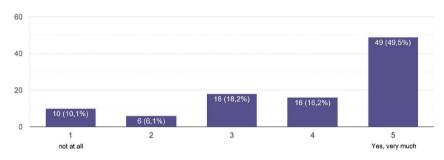
Source: current study.

Of particular interest are the students' responses regarding teaching strategies that can foster multilingualism. The most frequent answers were: using Greek vocabulary (41%), group activities (52%), using English to explain Greek vocabulary (29%), peer collaboration (42%), having two teachers in the classroom (15%), using dictionaries (27%), using tablets or laptops (55%), and using foreign language textbooks (35%).

The responses also provide insight into the students' views on the concepts of the "whole-child approach" and the "whole-school development" (Szczepaniak-Kozak et al. 2023: 173–199). Among the elements that contribute to an atmosphere supporting experiential aspects of whole-school development and

whole-child approaches, students listed: code-switching (34.3%), a positive atmosphere generated by feeling welcomed at school (82.8%), language support from peers (59.6%), language support provided by the school (47.5%), hearing languages other than the dominant one (71.7%), and school interventions aimed at strengthening its intercultural culture (e.g., creating information guides for foreign language learners in multiple languages, creating posters and signs to facilitate navigation around the school, meetings with parents and guardians, activating mechanisms to address individual issues students face, and involving them in activities). Overall, the majority of students (49.5%) consider multilingualism an asset (see Figure 5).

35. Do you think that the knowledge of several languages (multilingualism) is an asset in life? 99 answers



 $\textbf{Figure 5.} \ \textbf{Students'} \ views \ about \ benefits \ of \ multilingualism$

Source: current study.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2nd Gymnasium of Ioannina provides intercultural education to students who are less proficient in Greek by adopting educational practices that enable them to learn Greek as a second language, creating conditions that support students in school activities, and strengthening communication with their parents and guardians. The benefits these students derive from their participation in the educational process are reflected in the positive feelings they expressed in interviews and questionnaires.

Based on our professional experience, we recommend the following strategies to foster a multilingual and intercultural ethos in schools:

a) Leveraging and / or encouraging the use of students' entire linguistic repertoires (as well as those of their parents / guardians), both inside and outside the classroom.

- b) Ensuring close cooperation between parents/guardians and the school.
- c) Creating an action plan for the multilingual development of the school in collaboration with all teachers in the school unit.
- d) Establishing a dedicated space in the school (e.g., a library) where students are encouraged to speak their first languages.
- e) Training teachers in methods and strategies that promote the multilingual development of the school and facilitate the exchange of good practices; and
- f) Providing a variety of support for newly arrived students (e.g., information provision, peer guidance, specific social and psychological support, cooperation with local health authorities, etc.).

A key success factor is the close cooperation of all teachers in the school community, the exchange of effective teaching practices, and the promotion of multilingual and intercultural competence.

According to Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF 1990), the education of refugee and migrant children is a basic human right. On this basis, it is highly recommended to make use of such children's first languages, as these form the foundation for learning any second language. Recognizing students' first languages is, in fact, a recognition of their cultural capital. Additionally, a safe, diversity-friendly school environment, where teachers provide rich and varied learning opportunities and encourage personal and academic development, will help all students become linguistically and culturally aware. Awareness of the value of diversity and difference is essential for ensuring social cohesion, mutual understanding, solidarity, participatory democracy, and respect in modern multicultural societies.

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APPENDIX

The survey (originally distributed in Greek electronically) (White bullets: choose one, black bullets: choose more than one)

1.	Но	w old are you?
	0	12 years old
	0	13 years old
	0	14 years old
	0	15 years old
	0	over 15 years old
2.	In v	which country do you live or have you lived?
	•	Greece
	•	Turkey
	•	Albania
	•	Afghanistan
	•	Syria
	•	Pakistan
	•	Germany
	•	France
	•	Other:
3.	Но	w many languages do you speak?*
	0	1
	0	2
	0	3
	0	4
	0	5 and more.
4.	Wh	ich language(s) do you consider your first language?
	•	Greek
	•	Albanian
	•	Farsi
	•	Arabic
	•	Roma
	•	English
		French

German

	• Other:
5.	Which languages do you use at home (at mealtimes, when doing chores)? Greek Albanian Farsi Arabic Roma English French
	GermanOther:
6.	What languages do you use at home when you play? Greek Albanian Farsi Arabic Roma English French German Other:
7.	Do you need to use your mother's first language when you talk to her? O Yes, because she doesn't know my first language. O No, because we have the same first language.
8.	Do you need to use your father's first language when you talk to him? O Yes, because he doesn't know my first language. O No, because we have the same first language.
9.	Are your parents' languages important to you? What do you think about them? O I like to learn them. O I like to talk to them. O I prefer not to use them. O It's the language I learn at school.

10.	VVO	and you like to learn your parents languages better:
	0	Yes, I would.
	0	No, I wouldn't.
	0	Maybe, I would.
	0	It's the language I learn at school.
11.		uld you like to take classes at school or outside of school to learn your parents' firs guages?
	0	Yes, I would.
	0	No, I wouldn't.
	0	I am already learning my parents' first language at school or in evening classes.
12.	In v	which language do you communicate with your relatives who are outside Greece?
	•	Greek
	•	Albanian
	•	Farsi
	•	Arabic
	•	Roma
	•	English
	•	French
	•	German
	•	Other:
13.	Are	you learning your first language at home?
	0	Yes, I am.
	0	No, I am not.
14.	Is C	Greek a difficult language?
	0	Yes, it is.
	0	No, it isn't.
	0	Yes, it is quite difficult.
	0	It's my first language.
15.	Do	you mix languages when communicating at home with your parents and siblings?
	0	Yes, I do.
	0	No, I don't.
	0	Sometimes I do.
16.	Are	your parents' expectations about language use the same as yours?
	0	Yes, they are.

	0	No, they are not.
	0	They are similar enough.
17.	Wo	ould you like to change anything in the way you use languages at school and home?
		Yes, I would.
	0	No, I wouldn't.
18.	Do	es your family's urging you to learn your first language cause you anxiety?
		Yes, it does.
	0	No, it doesn't.
	0	It does a little bit.
	0	I am not encouraged/discouraged.
19.		nat languages do you use in public places? (e.g. during doing shopping, in restaurants ygrounds, school)
	•	Greek
	•	English
	•	Albanian
	•	Farsi
	•	Arabic
	•	Other:
20.	Wh	nat languages do you use when you communicate (play) with your friends?
	•	Greek
	•	English
	•	Albanian
	•	Farsi
	•	Arabic
	•	Other:
21.		you often switch languages when talking to others? If so, choose to which ones you itch.
	•	No, I don't.
	•	Yes, I do to:
	•	Greek
	•	English
	•	Albanian
	•	Farsi
	•	Arabic
	•	Other:

22.	Did :	you feel welcome at your new school?
	0	No, I didn't.
	0	Yes, I did.
	0	Other:
23.	Tell 1	us what the school did.
24.		the school offer you any language support? (e.g. extra lessons, activities, extra time ring competitions)
	0	No, it didn't.
	0	Yes, it did.
	0	It did but not always.
	0	Other:
25.	Do	/did you have a language assistant in the classroom?
	0	Yes, I do/did
	0	No, I didn't.
	0	Other:
26.		we you offered language support to a classmate (e.g. helping in class tasks or during excess, studying together)?
	0	No, I haven't.
	0	Yes, I have.
	0	Other:
27.		ve you received any language support from a classmate (e.g. helping in class tasks or ring a recess, studying together)?
	0	Yes, I have.
	0	No, I haven't.
28.	Ats	school do you hear or see or speak any other languages than Greek?
	0	Yes, I do.
	0	No, I don't.
	0	Maybe, I do.
	0	I prefer not to answer.
29.	at s	you think that it would be beneficial to hear, see or speak languages other than Greek school to a greater extent since there are pupils who are from countries other than sece?
	0	Yes, it would.
	0	No, it wouldn't.

	0	Maybe, it would.		
	0	I prefer not to answer.		
30.		Would you like to participate in multilingual activities, i.e. activities in which more than one language (Greek or English) is used, e.g. singing songs in several languages?		
	0	1 Not at all		
	0	2		
	0	3		
	0	4		
	0	5 Very much		
31.	Do	you think any of the following are needed in the lesson? (choose more than 1)		
	•	Vocabulary lists in Greek and other languages		
	•	Group activities		
	•	Using English in explanations		
	•	Peer cooperation, mutual help		
	•	A teaching assistant in the classroom		
	•	Dictionaries		
	•	Tablet or laptop with translation applications and for tasks		
	•	Activities where more than one language is used		
	•	Books in other languages (than Greek)		
	•	Other (provide an idea):		
32. 1	If yo	u selected Other, write what:		
33.		you think that language classes in the first language of your classmates (e.g. Albanian, ibic, Farsi, etc.) should be held in the school in the afternoon?		
	0	Yes, I do.		
	0	No, I don't.		
	0	I do not know		
	0	Maybe.		
34.		nere were classes for learning the above languages (e.g. Albanian, Arabic, Farsi, etc.) chool, would you like to attend any of them?		
	0	Yes, because it's my first language / my parents' language.		
	0	Yes, because it would be interesting and I want to learn one more language.		
	0	No, I wouldn't.		
35.	Do	you think that the knowledge of several languages (multilingualism) is an asset in life?		
	0	1 Not at all		

	O 2
	O 3
	O 4
	O 5 Yes, very much
36.	Do you want to mention anything else or leave a comment?
Tha	nk you for taking part in our survey.

Received: 7.12.2023; revised: 11.10.2024

Repertuary językowe uczniów z doświadczeniem uchodźctwa i migracji: studium przypadku w 2. Gimnazjum Interkulturowym w Ioanninie, Grecja

Abstrakt. Artykuł przedstawia wyniki studium przypadku przeprowadzonego w 2. Gimnazjum Interkulturowym w Ioanninie w Grecji. W części pierwszej zaprezentowano najnowsze statystyki dotyczące edukacji uczniów z doświadczeniem uchodźczym i migracyjnym oraz analizę takich pojęć, jak wielojęzyczność, kompetencje wielojęzyczne i międzykulturowe, a także edukacja wielojęzyczna i międzykulturowa. Następnie zaoferowano przegląd rozwoju wielojęzyczności w tej szkole oraz ocenę kluczowych obszarów badawczych, w tym języków, jakimi posługują się uczniowie, ich poziomu biegłości językowej, potrzeb komunikacyjnych oraz działań mających na celu wspieranie wielojęzycznej i międzykulturowej tożsamości szkoły. Dane zebrano za pomocą ankiet oraz metody obserwacyjnej. Artykuł kończy się rekomendacjami mającymi promować świadomość interkulturową i wielojęzyczność jako niezbędne elementy w społecznościach szkolnych. Badanie to przeprowadzono w ramach udziału szkoły w projekcie Erasmus+ MaMLiSE (Majority and Minority Languages in School Environment: Helping teachers, pupils, and parents).

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: wielojęzyczność, kompetencja wielojęzyczna, podejście holistyczne do ucznia, całościowa polityka szkolna w zakresie wielojęzyczności, uczniowie z doświadczeniem uchodźctwa i migracji.

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