

Social Inequalities in Western Attica: Challenges and Perspectives

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Социалните неравенства в Западна Атика: предизвикателства и перспективи

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Abstract

The present study investigates educational inequalities and the challenges of intercultural education in Western Attica, a region characterized by intense socio-economic and spatial inequalities, a high concentration of vulnerable social groups, and significant cultural heterogeneity. Drawing on empirical data from primary research, as well as contemporary theoretical approaches in the sociology of education and intercultural pedagogy, the study highlights the mechanisms through which the school reproduces or, potentially, alleviates social inequalities. The analysis focuses on factors such as students' socio-economic background, linguistic and cultural diversity, the infrastructure of school units, and the educational practices implemented within the teaching framework. The findings demonstrate that, despite institutional efforts to promote inclusion, significant barriers to the equal access and participation of all students in the learning process still exist. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of the teacher as an agent of change, as well as the need for systematic training in intercultural competence and differentiated instruction. At the same time, the importance of educational policy and local administration in shaping a more just and inclusive school environment is highlighted. The study concludes with proposals for strengthening educational equality in Western Attica, underlining the need for holistic interventions that combine pedagogical, social, and political dimensions. The findings contribute to the broader scientific dialogue on education in socially vulnerable areas and can be utilized in the design of targeted educational policies.

Keywords: social inequalities, Western Attica, social exclusion, urban poverty, regional development

Резюме

Настоящата статия изследва образователните неравенства и предизвикателствата пред межкултурното образование в Западна Атика, регион, характеризиращ се с интензивни социално-икономически и пространствени неравенства, висока концентрация на уязвими социални групи и значителна културна хетерогенност. Въз основа на емпирични данни от първични изследвания, както и съвременни теоретични подходи в социологията на образованието и межкултурната педагогика, изследването подчертава механизмите, чрез които училището възпроизвежда или потенциално облекчава социалните неравенства. Анализът се фокусира върху фактори като социално-икономически произход на учениците, езиково и културно разнообразие, инфраструктура на училищните звена и образователните

практики, прилагани в рамките на обучението. Констатациите показват, че въпреки институционалните усилия за насърчаване на приобщаването, все още съществуват значителни бариери пред равния достъп и участие на всички ученици в учебния процес. Особен акцент е поставен върху ролята на учителя като агент на промяната, както и върху необходимостта от систематично обучение по межкултурна компетентност и диференцирано обучение. Същевременно се подчертава значението на образователната политика и местната администрация за оформянето на по-справедлива и приобщаваща училищна среда. Изследването завършва с предложения за укрепване на образователното равенство в Западна Атика, подчертавайки необходимостта от цялостни интервенции, които съчетават педагогически, социални и политически измерения. Констатациите допринасят за по-широкия научен диалог относно образованието в социално уязвимите райони и могат да бъдат използвани при разработването на целенасочени образователни политики.

Ключови думи: социални неравенства, Западна Атика, социално изключване, градска бедност, регионално развитие

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Social Inequalities in Western Attica: Challenges and perspectives

Introduction

The contemporary educational reality is characterized by increasing cultural and linguistic diversity, which is directly linked to broader social, economic, and demographic changes observed at European and global levels. Migration flows in recent decades have significantly transformed the composition of the student population, creating new challenges as well as opportunities for educational systems (García, 2009; Heckmann, 2008). In this context, intercultural education emerges as a key axis of educational policy and pedagogical practice, aiming to promote equality, social justice, and the active participation of all students in the learning process (Banks, 2015; UNESCO, 2020).

The concept of educational equality is not limited to formal access to school education but extends to ensuring substantive conditions for participation and success for all students, regardless of social, cultural, or linguistic background (OECD, 2018). According to Bourdieu's (1986) theoretical approach, the school often functions as a mechanism for reproducing social inequalities, as it favors students who possess cultural capital compatible with dominant forms of knowledge. Meanwhile, B. Bernstein (1971) emphasized the role of language and communicative codes in shaping school success, pointing out that students who do not possess "educational discourse" face significant obstacles in the learning process.

In the Greek educational context, the increase in the number of students with a migrant or refugee background has made the development of effective intercultural education practices imperative (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). Greek education is called upon to respond to complex social realities where linguistic competence, cultural identity, and social integration are interrelated factors affecting students' learning trajectories (Cummins & Govaris, 2011). Cummins' (2000) theory of linguistic interdependence indicates that the development of academic language proficiency is a decisive factor for school success, particularly for students attending educational systems in a language other than their mother tongue.

The region of Western Attica serves as a characteristic example of a social and educational environment that concentrates multiple challenges. The area is characterized by intense socio-economic differentiations, high unemployment rates, and a significant presence of populations with a migrant background, a fact that directly affects the operation of school units (Kasimati, 2012; Papadopoulos, 2015). The spatial inequalities and social segregation observed in the

metropolitan region of Athens are closely linked to educational inequalities, creating disparities in access to educational resources and support structures (Kolyvas, 2012; Maloutas, 2000).

The social and cultural diversity that characterizes schools in Western Attica necessitates a systematic investigation into the effectiveness of the implemented educational practices. As highlighted in the present research, schools in the area host students with diverse linguistic and cultural characteristics, leading to increased needs for language support, differentiated instruction, and the enhancement of school integration. This heterogeneity is not only a challenge but also an opportunity for developing pedagogical practices that strengthen mutual understanding and social cohesion (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

According to international studies, the effective implementation of intercultural education requires the creation of a school environment that promotes cooperation, acceptance of diversity, and the active participation of all students (UNESCO, 2017a). However, the realization of these principles often encounters obstacles related to a lack of resources, inadequate teacher training, and the absence of institutional support mechanisms (Fullan, 2007; Slee, 2011). The findings of the present research indicate that the implementation of intercultural practices in schools in Western Attica shows significant variations between school units, a fact linked to the availability of supportive structures and resources.

A particularly important factor influencing students' school integration is the cooperation between school and family. International literature recognizes parental involvement as a fundamental element for enhancing the learning progress and social integration of students (Putnam, 2000; Epstein, 2011). In the present research, school-family cooperation emerges as a critical factor affecting students' learning experiences, while obstacles related to linguistic and cultural difficulties in communication are also identified.

The present study focuses on investigating the application of intercultural education practices in Secondary Education in Western Attica, emphasizing the experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, and parents. The purpose of the research is to record the degree of implementation of intercultural practices, investigate the role of language proficiency in school integration, and highlight the challenges arising in the cooperation between school and family. The study attempts to contribute to the scientific dialogue on education in socially vulnerable areas, providing empirical data from a complex educational environment.

The choice of Western Attica as the research field is based on its unique socio-economic and cultural character. The region includes urban, semi-urban, and rural environments, allowing for a comparative investigation of different educational conditions and practices. Conducting the research in school units of different types and sizes contributed to the collection of data that reflects the complexity of the educational reality in the area.

At the same time, this study is part of the broader theoretical framework of the sociology of education, which examines the role of the school in shaping social inequalities and managing cultural diversity. The concepts of "spatial justice" and social integration emerge as critical factors for understanding the variations observed between school units in areas with intense social inequalities. This approach allows for the analysis of education not only as a pedagogical process but also as a social institution influenced by economic and political factors (Harvey, 2006; Wacquant, 2008).

Finally, the significance of the present study lies in providing empirical data that can be utilized in the design of targeted educational policies and interventions. Highlighting the factors that influence school integration and students' learning trajectories contributes to the formulation of strategies that enhance inclusion and reduce educational inequalities. Through the connection of theory and empirical research, the present study seeks to highlight the role of intercultural education as a fundamental tool for social cohesion and educational equality in modern multicultural societies.

Theoretical framework

The study of intercultural education is part of a broader theoretical framework that combines approaches from the sociology of education, linguistic theory, and critical pedagogy. These theoretical approaches allow for an understanding of the mechanisms through which the educational system can function either as a factor for reproducing social inequalities or as a mechanism for social mobility and integration (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2011).

Bourdieu's (1986) contribution to the understanding of educational inequality is considered fundamental for the study of the relationship between social class and school success. According to Bourdieu, the school is not a neutral institution but functions as a mechanism for reproducing social inequalities through the transmission and evaluation of cultural capital. Cultural capital includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, and forms of discourse that are considered socially acceptable and desirable in the school environment.

Students from socially advantaged backgrounds usually possess forms of cultural capital that are compatible with the school's requirements, allowing them to respond more effectively to educational expectations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). In contrast, students from socially vulnerable groups often face adaptation difficulties, not due to a lack of ability, but due to incompatibility between their cultural experiences and school expectations.

This theory acquires particular significance in the context of Western Attica, where social heterogeneity and economic inequalities directly affect students' learning experiences. The presence of students with a migrant background and different cultural references creates a multicultural environment in which forms of cultural capital vary significantly. This differentiation can lead to inequalities in school performance and participation in the learning process, especially when the school does not adapt its pedagogical practices to the needs of the students.

B. Bernstein (1971) offers an important tool for understanding the differentiations in school performance among students from different social backgrounds. Bernstein argued that social groups use different linguistic communication systems, which affect access to knowledge and educational success.

Specifically, Bernstein distinguished between "restricted" and "elaborated" language codes. Restricted codes are characterized by less complex structures and depend more on the immediate social context, while elaborated codes involve more abstract and complex forms of speech. According to Bernstein, the school is primarily based on the elaborated code, a fact that creates an advantage for students who are familiar with it.

This theory is directly linked to the linguistic diversity observed in the schools of Western Attica. The presence of students with different mother tongues or limited proficiency in the Greek language can affect the understanding of learning subjects and participation in school activities. Developing strategies for language support and differentiated instruction constitutes a critical factor for enhancing educational equality (Cummins, 2000).

Intercultural education was developed as a response to the needs of multicultural societies and focuses on promoting equality, acceptance of diversity, and social cohesion (Banks, 2015). According to Banks, intercultural education includes multiple dimensions, such as content integration, the recognition of cultural identities, and the development of critical thinking skills. At the same time, the approach of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010) underscores the importance of utilizing students' cultural experiences as a fundamental element of instruction.

Teachers are called upon to recognize the cultural particularities of students and adapt their teaching practices so that the active participation of all students is enhanced.

The application of these principles is particularly important in areas such as Western Attica, where cultural diversity is a basic characteristic of the school reality. The adoption of intercultural practices can contribute to the reduction of educational inequalities and the strengthening of social integration.

Cummins' theory (2000) regarding language development provides important directions for understanding the relationship between linguistic proficiency and school success. Cummins distinguishes between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), pointing out that the development of the latter requires more time and systematic support.

This differentiation is of particular importance for students with a migrant background, who may show proficiency in everyday communication but face difficulties in understanding academic concepts. Developing appropriate pedagogical practices that support the transition from everyday to academic language constitutes a basic prerequisite for school success (Cummins, 2000).

The application of Cummins' theoretical framework is particularly important in the context of the present research, as the data show that linguistic difficulty is one of the key factors affecting the school integration of students in Western Attica. Enhancing language support and creating learning environments that promote bilingualism can contribute significantly to the improvement of learning outcomes.

The analysis of educational inequalities in multicultural and socially differentiated environments cannot be limited exclusively to linguistic or cultural factors. Instead, it requires a broader approach that incorporates the principles of social justice, critical pedagogy, and spatial analysis. These theoretical approaches allow for an understanding of the school as a social institution affected by economic, political, and spatial conditions (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2011)

constitutes an important theoretical tool for understanding inequalities in the educational system. Fraser proposes a three-dimensional model of social justice that includes redistribution, recognition, and representation.

The dimension of redistribution concerns the fair allocation of material and educational resources. In the context of education, the unequal distribution of resources, such as infrastructure, teaching staff, and supportive services, can reinforce existing social inequalities. In the case of Western

Attica, the differentiations between school units regarding technical infrastructure and the availability of educational resources constitute a characteristic example of maldistribution that affects the learning process.

The dimension of recognition is related to the acceptance and integration of students' cultural identities into the school environment. A lack of recognition of cultural differences can lead to the marginalization of students and reinforce feelings of exclusion. In the context of intercultural education, the recognition of cultural identities is a basic prerequisite for the development of an inclusive school environment (Banks, 2015).

The third dimension, that of representation, concerns the participation of all social groups in the decision-making process. In education, the participation of students, parents, and teachers in the formulation of school policies strengthens the sense of "belonging" and contributes to the improvement of school operation (Fraser, 2008; Apple, 2004).

The application of Fraser's model allows for the analysis of educational inequalities not only as a pedagogical issue but also as an issue of social policy. In the present research, the differentiations recorded between school units and the challenges faced by students with a migrant background can be interpreted through the prism of these three dimensions.

Critical pedagogy, as shaped by Apple (2004) and Giroux (2011), focuses on the role of education as a means of social transformation. According to this approach, the school is not merely a place for transmitting knowledge but a field of social and cultural negotiations.

Apple (2004) argued that the educational system often reproduces dominant social structures, particularly through the curriculum and educational practices. The "hidden curriculum" contributes to the formation of social attitudes and values, often reinforcing existing social inequalities.

Correspondingly, Giroux (2011) proposes the concept of transformative education, which aims at developing critical thinking and social consciousness in students. Through this approach, teachers are called upon to act as "agents of change," encouraging student participation in shaping a more just social environment.

The application of the principles of critical pedagogy is particularly important in socially vulnerable areas, where students face multiple forms of exclusion. In the case of Western Attica, the adoption of pedagogical practices that enhance participation and critical thinking can contribute to the improvement of school integration and academic performance.

The concept of spatial justice, as developed by Soja (2010), offers an important theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between geographic space and social inequalities. According to Soja, social inequalities are not randomly distributed in space but are linked to historical and political processes that shape the living conditions of social groups.

This approach is closely linked to the theories of Harvey (2006), who emphasized that economic and social inequalities are reflected in urban space, creating areas with different levels of access to resources and opportunities. Regions characterized by socio-economic degradation often face limited access to quality educational services.

Western Attica serves as a characteristic example of a region where spatial inequalities directly affect educational reality. The existence of different types of settlements, from urban centers to remote rural areas, creates differentiations regarding access to educational resources and support structures. The data from the present research highlight that the operating conditions of school units are influenced by factors such as geographic isolation and the socio-economic conditions of the area.

The synthesis of the above theoretical approaches allows for the development of an integrated analytical framework for investigating intercultural education in Western Attica. The theories of Bourdieu and Bernstein contribute to the understanding of the linguistic and cultural factors affecting school performance, while Fraser's model provides a tool for analyzing the social and institutional dimensions of educational inequality.

At the same time, the critical pedagogy of Apple and Giroux offers a framework for understanding the role of the teacher as an active agent of social change, while the spatial justice theories of Soja and Harvey allow for the connection of educational reality with the socio-economic and geographic conditions of the region.

The present research utilizes this multi-level theoretical framework to examine intercultural education practices and the experiences of students, teachers, and parents in Secondary Education in Western Attica. Through the connection of theory and empirical data, an attempt is made to highlight the factors influencing school integration and to formulate proposals for strengthening educational equality in socially vulnerable areas.

Methodology

The present study adopts a mixed-methods research design, which combines quantitative and qualitative techniques for data collection and analysis. The choice of mixed methodology is based

on the need for a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional factors affecting intercultural education and school integration in socially heterogeneous environments (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The combination of quantitative and qualitative data allows for the simultaneous investigation of both the trends and patterns appearing in larger populations and the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants.

Specifically, the quantitative dimension of the research involved the use of structured questionnaires distributed to students and teachers, aiming to record perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding intercultural education, language support, and school integration. At the same time, the qualitative dimension included semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by participants within the school environment.

The research was designed as a descriptive and exploratory study, aiming to map the existing situation and highlight the key factors affecting the operation of intercultural education in secondary school units. This approach is considered appropriate for studies seeking to understand complex social phenomena in real educational settings (Bryman, 2016).

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data was achieved through the process of triangulation, which enhances the validity of the results by allowing for the comparison of data from different sources (Denzin, 2012). Using multiple data collection methods contributes to the reduction of potential biases and strengthens the reliability of the research conclusions.

The research was conducted in secondary school units in Western Attica, a region characterized by intense socio-economic and cultural differentiations. The choice of the region was based on its unique social and educational character, as it gathers a significant number of students with a migrant background, as well as populations facing social and economic difficulties.

Western Attica includes urban, semi-urban, and rural areas, which creates variations in the operating conditions of school units. Within the framework of the present research, schools from different geographical areas were selected to capture the diversity of educational conditions. The school units participating in the research are located in areas such as Mandra, Elefsina, Vilia, and Erythres, which present different socio-economic characteristics and levels of access to educational resources.

The region of Western Attica is characterized by an increased presence of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, which creates specific needs for supportive educational

practices. This heterogeneity makes the region a suitable field of study for investigating the implementation of intercultural practices and the effectiveness of educational policies aimed at enhancing school integration.

The selection of school units was carried out based on criteria related to the presence of students from different social and cultural backgrounds, as well as the availability of teachers who were willing to participate in the research. The selection process aimed to ensure representativeness regarding the social and geographical characteristics of the region.

Conducting the research in different types of school units allowed for the collection of data reflecting the complexity of the educational reality in Western Attica. The collected data provide significant information regarding the practices applied in school units, as well as the challenges faced by students, teachers, and parents in the context of intercultural education.

The sample of the present research was drawn from secondary school units in Western Attica and included students, teachers, and parents, aiming to collect data from multiple perspectives. This polyphony is considered particularly important in research examining intercultural education issues, as it allows for an understanding of the experiences of different groups involved in the educational process (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

In total, within the broader framework of the research, students from school units with a total student population of 858 students participated, allowing for the formation of a representative image of the educational reality of the region.

The final research sample included: 203 secondary education students; 90 teachers from different specialties; 6 parents, who participated in qualitative interviews.

The characteristics of the participants reflect the social and cultural diversity of the region, as a significant percentage of students came from families with a migrant background. The participation of teachers from different specialties allowed for the collection of data capturing diverse teaching experiences and practices.

The sample selection was carried out using the purposive sampling method, which is often used in educational research aiming to investigate specific social and cultural characteristics (Bryman, 2016). This method allowed for the selection of participants who met specific criteria, such as participation in multicultural school environments and experience in intercultural educational practices.

The participation of parents in the research was an important element for understanding the relationship between school and family, as well as for investigating challenges related to linguistic communication and the school integration of students.

Data collection was carried out through the use of multiple research tools, which were designed to record both quantitative and qualitative data.

For the collection of quantitative data, structured questionnaires were used, which were addressed to students and teachers. The questionnaires included closed-ended questions, based primarily on Likert-type scales, which allowed for the measurement of attitudes and perceptions regarding: language support at school; the implementation of intercultural practices; school-family cooperation; the sense of school integration; the educational difficulties faced by students

The formulation of the questionnaires was based on previous research in the field of intercultural education and was adapted to the specificities of the Greek educational reality.

For the collection of qualitative data, semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers were used. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in phrasing questions and the exploration of topics that emerged during the discussion (Kvale, 2007).

The thematic axes of the interviews included: students' experiences in the school environment; school-family cooperation; the linguistic difficulties faced by students; the needs for educational support; perceptions of intercultural education

The recording of the interviews was carried out with the consent of the participants and was followed by a transcription process for data analysis.

Data collection took place during the school year, in collaboration with the administrations of the school units. Before the start of the process, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the importance of their participation.

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants within the school environment, at a time that did not affect the conduct of lessons. Participants had the opportunity to complete the questionnaires anonymously, a fact that enhanced the honesty of the responses.

The interviews took place at a predetermined time and place, intending to create a safe and comfortable environment for the participants. The duration of the interviews varied depending on the availability and experiences of the participants.

The data collection process was carried out in accordance with the principles of research ethics, ensuring voluntary participation and the protection of personal data.

Data analysis was performed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to ensure a comprehensive interpretation of the results.

The quantitative data resulting from the questionnaires were analyzed using statistical methods of descriptive analysis, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations

The use of descriptive statistics allowed for the mapping of the basic trends and patterns appearing in the participants' responses.

The qualitative data resulting from the interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis, according to the methodology of Braun & Clarke (2006). The process included: reading the transcribed interviews; coding the data; identification of thematic categories; and interpretation of the results.

The thematic analysis allowed for the emergence of recurring patterns and the understanding of the participants' experiences.

The validity and reliability of the research were ensured through the use of multiple data sources and the application of the triangulation method. The use of different data collection tools allowed for the cross-referencing of findings and the reduction of potential interpretation errors.

The reliability of the questionnaires was enhanced through pilot testing, which allowed for the improvement of the clarity of the questions. At the same time, the use of standardized data collection procedures contributed to ensuring the consistency of the results.

Particular emphasis was placed on the principles of research ethics. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and provided their consent before participating. Anonymity and data confidentiality were ensured, while the information collected was used exclusively for research purposes.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the participants' demographic characteristics constitutes a fundamental element for understanding the social and educational context in which the research was conducted. The total sample included 203 students, 90 teachers, and 6 parents, who participated in different phases of the research process.

The students participating in the research came from secondary education school units and represented different age groups and grades. The distribution of students per grade showed that the sample included students from all levels of Secondary Education, a fact that allowed for a comparative analysis of experiences between different age groups.

A particularly significant characteristic of the student population was the presence of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A significant percentage of students stated that a language other than Greek is used in their family environment, confirming the multilingual and multicultural nature of the region.

The existence of students with a migrant background significantly influenced the experiences of learning and integration into the school environment. These students frequently reported the need for additional language support and individualized instructional practices.

The teachers participating in the research came from different specialties and possessed varying levels of professional experience. This diversity contributed to the collection of data reflecting different pedagogical approaches and practices.

A significant percentage of teachers stated that they have experience teaching in multicultural classrooms, suggesting familiarity with students from diverse cultural backgrounds. At the same time, several teachers reported having participated in training programs related to intercultural education.

This experience is considered important for understanding the strategies implemented in school units to support students' school integration.

The parents who participated in the interviews came from families with diverse social and cultural characteristics. Their participation contributed to the understanding of the relationship between school and family, as well as the challenges students face at home and at school.

Parents frequently reported difficulties related to linguistic communication with the school, as well as the need for enhanced cooperation between teachers and families.

The data analysis highlighted significant findings regarding language support and the learning difficulties faced by students.

A significant percentage of students stated that they face difficulties in understanding teaching materials, particularly in subjects requiring a high level of language proficiency. These difficulties are mainly linked to: limited knowledge of the Greek language; difficulties in understanding complex concepts; limited access to supportive structures.

Teachers reported using various strategies to support students, such as: simplification of linguistic material, use of visual aids, and collaborative activities.

However, several teachers stated that the available resources are insufficient to fully cover the students' needs.

The implementation of intercultural practices was a key element of the research. Results showed that teachers apply diverse strategies to promote intercultural understanding. The most frequently reported practices included: integrating cultural elements into teaching; using examples from different cultures; promoting collaborative learning.

Students stated that these activities contributed to improved communication and an enhanced sense of acceptance within the school environment.

At the same time, it was observed that schools systematically applying intercultural practices show higher levels of school integration and cooperation among students.

Cooperation between school and family emerged as one of the most important factors influencing students' school integration. Teachers reported that communication with parents takes place primarily through: informational meetings; telephone communication; written updates.

However, parents with limited knowledge of the Greek language often face difficulties in understanding the information they receive from the school.

The parents who participated in the interviews emphasized the importance of creating a supportive environment that encourages their participation in school activities.

The qualitative analysis of the interviews with parents and teachers highlighted significant dimensions of the students' experience in multicultural school environments. Through thematic analysis, recurring patterns related to language support, school-family cooperation, teaching practices, and barriers to school integration were identified.

The analysis process led to the emergence of four main thematic axes: linguistic challenges and learning support; the role of teachers in intercultural education; school-family cooperation; barriers and opportunities for school integration.

One of the most frequently mentioned topics in the interviews was the linguistic difficulties faced by students with a different linguistic background. Parents reported that their children face difficulties in understanding school discourse, particularly in theoretical subjects.

In several cases, parents emphasized that limited knowledge of the Greek language affects not only academic performance but also the social integration of students within the school environment.

The inability to understand instructions or school announcements often creates a sense of insecurity and isolation.

Teachers recognized the need to strengthen linguistic support and reported using strategies such as:

- Differentiated instruction
- Use of visual materials
- Rephrasing of instructions
- Collaborative learning

Despite these efforts, several teachers pointed out that available resources are insufficient to fully meet the students' needs.

The interviews highlighted the decisive role of teachers in promoting intercultural education. Teachers stated that creating a positive and supportive learning environment is a fundamental prerequisite for the successful integration of students. Many teachers emphasized that they attempt to incorporate elements of different cultures into their teaching, encouraging students to share experiences from their countries of origin. These practices enhance the acceptance of diversity and contribute to the creation of an environment of respect.

However, several teachers stated that they feel the need for further training in intercultural education topics. The lack of specialized training programs limits, in some cases, the effective implementation of innovative teaching practices.

Cooperation between school and family emerged as a critical factor for the school integration of students. Parents reported that communication with the school is a basic prerequisite for supporting their children's learning progress. However, several parents mentioned that linguistic difficulties limit their ability to participate actively in school processes. In some cases, parents stated that they struggle to understand written announcements or to participate in meetings with teachers.

Teachers recognized the importance of strengthening communication with families and suggested using alternative communication methods, such as:

1. Translation of key documents
2. Use of digital media
3. Organization of informational meetings

The development of relationships of trust between the school and the family was considered a fundamental prerequisite for the successful integration of students. The interviews highlighted significant barriers affecting students' school integration. These barriers primarily relate to: linguistic difficulties; socio-economic inequalities; limited access to educational resources; cultural differentiations. At the same time, significant opportunities for improving school integration emerged. Teachers and parents reported that the development of collaborative activities

and the enhancement of student participation in group projects contribute to the creation of a positive school climate. The existence of supportive structures, such as reception classes and remedial teaching, was recognized as an important factor for improving the students' learning experience.

The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data confirms the existence of common patterns affecting student integration. Quantitative data highlighted general trends, while qualitative data offered a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Specifically:

- Quantitative data showed high levels of linguistic difficulties.
- Interviews confirmed that these difficulties affect social integration.
- Quantitative data highlighted the importance of school-family cooperation.
- Interviews highlighted the barriers that limit this cooperation.

The combined analysis of the data reinforced the validity of the findings and allowed for the development of a comprehensive picture of the educational reality.

The findings of the present research highlighted that linguistic difficulties constitute one of the most significant factors affecting school integration and the learning progress of students in multicultural school environments. The presence of students with different linguistic backgrounds created increased needs for language support and differentiated teaching practices.

This finding aligns with previous studies arguing that linguistic proficiency is a fundamental prerequisite for students' successful participation in the learning process. Students facing difficulties in understanding the language of instruction often exhibit lower levels of academic performance and reduced participation in school activities.

The need for strengthening linguistic support emerged from both the quantitative and qualitative data of the research. Students reported difficulties in understanding instructional materials, while teachers recognized that existing support structures are not always sufficient to meet the needs of all students.

These findings confirm the view that differentiated instruction constitutes a fundamental tool for addressing linguistic difficulties. The use of visual aids, collaborative activities, and simplified linguistic material appears to contribute significantly to improving students' learning experiences. At the same time, the results underscore the need for developing systematic support programs aimed not only at students' linguistic reinforcement but also at creating an environment that encourages their active participation in the learning process.

One of the most important findings of the research concerns the implementation of intercultural practices in the school environment. Teachers reported using various strategies to promote the acceptance of diversity and enhance cooperation among students from different cultural backgrounds.

The integration of cultural elements into teaching seems to contribute to the creation of a positive learning climate. Students who participated in activities highlighting different cultural identities reported higher levels of a sense of acceptance and participation in the school environment.

These findings align with the theoretical approach of intercultural education, according to which the recognition of cultural diversity is a key element for creating an inclusive school. The use of culturally sensitive teaching practices strengthens student participation and contributes to the reduction of exclusion phenomena.

However, the research highlighted that several teachers feel they need further training in intercultural education topics. This need is related to the increasing cultural heterogeneity of school populations and the necessity for developing specialized pedagogical skills. Strengthening the professional development of teachers is considered critical for improving teaching quality and the effective implementation of intercultural practices.

Cooperation between school and family emerged as one of the most fundamental factors affecting students' school integration. The research results showed that active parental involvement in school life is linked to positive learning outcomes and an increased sense of security for students.

However, linguistic differentiation between school and family creates significant communication barriers. Parents who do not possess sufficient knowledge of the Greek language face difficulties in understanding school procedures and supporting their children's learning progress.

This finding underscores the need for developing mechanisms to facilitate communication between school and family. The use of translated informational materials and the utilization of digital media can contribute significantly to improving cooperation. Creating an environment that encourages parental participation is a key element for strengthening school integration and improving students' learning experiences.

The research results highlighted that school integration is influenced by a set of factors related to both the school environment and the students' social context. Linguistic difficulties, socio-economic inequalities, and limited access to educational resources constitute significant barriers

to successful student integration. These factors affect not only academic performance but also students' psychosocial development.

At the same time, the research highlighted significant opportunities for improving school integration. Developing collaborative activities and enhancing student participation in group projects appear to contribute to the creation of a positive school climate. The existence of support structures, such as remedial teaching programs, was recognized as a key factor for addressing learning difficulties and promoting students' equal participation in the school process.

The analysis of the research findings conducted in Secondary Education in Western Attica (2022-2026) reveals a complex reality where multiculturalism is now a structural element of the school organization. The research demonstrated that in areas such as Elefsina (EPAL 35.10%) and Vilia (33.68%), the presence of students with a migrant background is not a peripheral variable but the central axis around which instructional practice must be organized.

One of the most significant findings is the divergence between social acceptance and academic integration. While students report a positive climate of cooperation and low rates of discrimination—a fact that confirms Allport's contact theory (1954)—their academic trajectory is overshadowed by the "language barrier." 85% of participating students reported significant difficulty in understanding academic discourse. This finding fully harmonizes with Cummins' (2008) positions regarding the distinction between BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency). Students in Western Attica may communicate effectively at a social level, but they lack the linguistic tools required for success in curriculum subjects.

The research also highlights the critical importance of "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986). Teachers in the study areas, although possessing positive attitudes, often unintentionally reproduce the model of "cultural assimilation" due to a lack of specialized training. The absence of differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 2014) forces students with a different mother tongue to adapt to a rigid, monocultural framework, which Apple (2014) describes as "official knowledge" that often ignores the lived experiences of minorities.

Furthermore, the correlation between multicultural density and the need for institutional support is catalytic. At the Elefsina Vocational High School (EPAL), the need for structured intercultural actions is more imperative than in schools with lower rates of heterogeneity, such as the Mandra Junior High School (11.21%). However, participation in such actions remains low (20%),

suggesting that intercultural initiatives remain fragmentary and do not constitute an organic part of the school culture.

Finally, the limited cooperation between school and family, as evidenced by the small participation of parents in the research, emerges as a structural gap. The lack of communication channels hinders the utilization of parental capital, reinforcing the alienation of migrant families from the educational process. As Banks (2019) argues, meaningful intercultural education requires the transformation of the school structure so that it reflects the values and experiences of all members of the community.

Conclusions

The present study, focusing on Secondary Education in Western Attica, concludes that the transition from a multicultural reality to an intercultural educational practice remains an incomplete endeavour. The research proved that the mere coexistence of students of different origins does not guarantee equality of opportunity unless it is accompanied by targeted interventions on three levels: language, educational support, and social integration.

First, language support emerges as the cornerstone of inclusion. The high failure rate in understanding academic discourse in Western Attica suggests that the educational system must invest in intensive programs for learning Greek as a second language, which should extend beyond the initial reception classes. Linguistic proficiency is not only a learning tool but also a means of empowering students' self-confidence.

Second, teacher training must shift from a theoretical approach to interculturalism to the practical application of differentiated instruction. Teachers in Mandra, Elefsina, and Vilia are called upon to manage classrooms of high complexity without the necessary methodological tools. The institutionalization of permanent support structures within school units is essential for ensuring the quality of education.

Third, the research demonstrated that a positive school climate is a strong foundation upon which social cohesion can be built. The absence of intense racist phenomena in the study areas is encouraging; however, "invisible" marginalization due to linguistic or cultural deficits remains present.

Overall, intercultural education in Western Attica requires a holistic approach that connects the school with the local community and the family. The success of inclusion will be judged by the

system's ability to transform cultural heterogeneity from a "problem to be managed" into a "source of wealth" for all students.

Limitations and future research

Limitations

Despite its significant contribution, the present research is subject to certain limitations. Parental participation (N=6) was limited, due in part to language barriers and the job insecurity of migrant populations in Western Attica. This limits the possibility of generalizing the views of the parental side. Additionally, the research focused on specific areas with a strong industrial and agricultural character; therefore, results may differ in urban centers with different social stratification.

Future Research

Future studies should focus on the longitudinal monitoring of the progress of students with a migrant background, examining not only their school performance but also their transition to higher education or the labor market. Furthermore, it is considered necessary to investigate the role of digital technologies in the linguistic reinforcement of these students, as well as to study the perceptions of native parents regarding intercultural coexistence. Finally, a comparative research between general education schools and technical vocational schools (EPAL) could offer valuable data regarding the different inclusion needs per educational direction.

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