NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR THE INTEGRATION OF MIGRANT STUDENTS: THE CONTEXT OF ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN GREECE

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the vital role of non-formal education in the integration of migrant students. It examines how teachers nowadays, at school or outside school context, have to use a variety of teaching strategies, in order to cope with special social situations. The increasing diversity within the field of formal education has resulted in a great difficulty to distinct what ought to be either included or excluded. In such a multicultural environment young people face problems regarding their identity due to cultural or religious differences. Coexistence of the attributes that a person has in relation to others in a community (national, ethnic, religious, linguistic diversity) is a mission and obligation of the school. The article shows that the process of integration is supported through the implementation of non-formal educational practices within Greece through specially selected practices concerning non-formal education.

Key words: *non-formal education, formal education, integration, migrant students, refugees*

1. INTRODUCTION

The fundamental purpose of this paper is to emphasize the importance of non-formal education for the integration of migrant students and the context of non-formal learning in Greece. The heterogeneity of the modern Greek class, which hosts a random number of students from various cultural backgrounds (Skourtou, Vrastalis, Govaris, 2004) in combination with the consequent religious diversity, imperatively renders the teacher a proponent of diversity. However not all, hindrances, such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of participation in society and active or passive exclusion from school are to blame for the vicious cycle of marginalisation (Vergidis, 1998).

Non-formal education is associated with the needs of underprivileged groups, is related with specific categories of people and has flexibility in its organization and methods (Smith, 2009). It seems that formal education practices promote the development of the students' social skills. The educational system is the sole establishment that supports the pupils' social and cultural integration. Thus, it has evidently made a significant contribution in creating the conditions for the introduction and acceptance of pluralism and diversity. Although, diversity is not in the spotlight, it can still be a part of the educational factors which can be utilized proportionately (Gotovos, 2002). Through experiential techniques and curricula, a school can achieve free expression of feelings, opinions, attitudes, practices and, even, conflicting values, so that students are able to comprehend and redefine stereotypical perceptions and behaviours (Kaga, 2002).

The issue of the education and integration of refugees greatly concerns the Greek state, especially after the consecutive waves of refugees and the latest developments in the European public and political sphere. Of course, there has been an active interest in the education of refugees since the 1980s, when efforts were made to teach the Greek language to migrant and refugee children in order to integrate them into Greek society (Tzortzopoulou & Kotzamani, 2008:30). At the same time, the importance of education through non-formal learning and youth work is recognised as parallel or complimentary to formal education and as a way to engage marginalised students (Downes et al, 2017:64). This integration process is, however, inevitable and the educational institutions are responsible for ensuring how it can benefit learners. Therefore, the general aim of this study is to explore this relationship between formal and non-formal education for inclusion of students from different cultural backgrounds.

2. THE TERM "NON-FORMAL EDUCATION"

According to UNESCO (2006:39) 'Non-formal education has always been part of the solution for marginalised and vulnerable population groups because programs are based on an integrated approach that takes into account all the factors influencing the opportunities and life-chances of different population groups, and the role played by education systems themselves in the process of social inclusion and cohesion.' Activities of non-formal education revolve around active citizenship, environmental migration, human rights, awareness of policies for migration, cultivating the interdisciplinary spirit among students and teachers, collaboration, resilience and internalising the values of respect (Smith 2009:4).

The Parliament Assembly of Council of Europe (1999) recognises that "… formal educational systems alone cannot respond to the challenges of modern society and therefore welcome their reinforcement by non-formal educational practices. The Assembly recommends that governments and appropriate authorities of member states recognize non-formal education as a de facto partner in the lifelong process and make it accessible for all".

Non-formal education refers to that type of education which takes place outside of the formally organized school. Cases in point include adult literacy and continuing educational programs for adults and school drop-out youth which do not necessarily emphasize certification (UNESCO 1997a; UNESCO, 1997b). These instances describe non-formal education as "any organized and sustained educational activities that do not exactly correspond to the definition of formal education".

Alternatively stated, non-formal education may refer to any educational activity organized by different agencies for a particular target group in a given population, especially adults outside the framework of formal education, seeking to provide selected types of skills. The concept of literacy is fundamental practice which is a powerful way of conceptualising the link between different literacies and the social structure in which they are embedded and which they help shaping (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Heath, 1983; Martin-Jones, 2000; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1995).

Schools are expected to offer more experiential learning, challenging children's preconceptions, experiences and knowledge, linking learners' background with the demands set by the curricula. From the point of view of formal education, this means informalization (Kolb, 1984). On the other hand, the emphasis placed on certified learning and the constant pursuit of an enriched resume may require non-formal educational institutions to find ways of certifying skills, clarifying learning conditions and preparing learners for skill demonstration, which, from the point of view of non-formal learning, might mean further formalization (European Commission, 2015).

The implementation of non-formal practices at school or institution context produces an authentic material as students do not prepare or organize something that is not spontaneous. With the experiential and interdisciplinary approaches children are encouraged to question and review their opinions. Consequently, they manage to co-exist, to cooperate and to settle their differences in a spirit of authentic dialogue.

Depending on the type and thematic focus of non-formal education programs (Medrich, 1982), learning activities can affect different aspects of a child's development, ranging from honing academic skills to non-cognitive development (Simkins,1977; European Commission, 2015).This can be illustrated by some examples from European countries: a) Community work, b) Youth work (focuses on making young people more active in society), c) Social work d) Animation (i.e. a specific form of non-formal education) (France and Italy), e)Youth organizations (as the main experts in non-formal education) (Parliament Assembly of Council of Europe, 1999).

3. CONTEXT OF NON–FORMAL EDUCATION PROVISION IN GREECE: A REVIEW OF SELECTED CASES OF RELATED NON-FORMAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

The inclusion policy is promoted for all vulnerable groups of student population in Greece. The education of refugees' children and their inclusion and integration in school structures is a key priority

for the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs already from school year 2016-2017. Intercultural Education concerns the structuring of relations of different cultural groups with the aim to alleviate inequality and social exclusion. It sets the framework for harmonious and effective integration in the general education system of students with educational, social and cultural particularities.

A number of compensatory and supporting structures are put in place for this purpose, such as: the institution of Intercultural Schools and Minority Schools, Reception Classes, Remedial Teaching and Additional Teaching Support, as well as Educational Priority Zones; Educational Priority Zones promote equal inclusion in the educational system of students from areas with low educational and socio-economic indicators (Eurodice, 2019; Ministerial Decision, 2016 no. 131024/Δ1/ 8-8-2016). In Greece, there is currently no comprehensive national framework for the certification of non-formal education and informal learning. However, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance (EOPPEP) (JMD 119959/H/20.10.2011 and Law 4115/2013) is the main administrative body of the National Network for Lifelong Learning.

The Greek Ministry of Education since the beginning of the refugee crisis has established Reception Facilities for Refugee Education and Refugee Education Coordinators (2016) and has invited organizations willing to provide educational activities in refugee reception centers to submit their proposals and fill out an online form in order to obtain relevant certification from the Institute of Educational Policy. This database helped Central Government design any necessary amendments to its Educational Policy (Palaiologou, 2018).

In August 2016, a government-sponsored committee proposed a refugee education action plan and the establishment of an implementation unit at the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs in Greece. There have been two main types of formal education provision since 2016/17 on the mainland. First, some children attend regular schools – most of them located in zones of educational priority – with existing reception classes serving immigrant children. Second, new reception classes for refugee children living in open accommodation sites were established in nearby schools. Children attend an afternoon shift and follow a special program of Greek, English, information technology, mathematics, music and physical education. Refugee education coordinators serve as liaisons between the refugee and school communities (Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, 2017).

In the year 2016-2017, the Ministry of Education, composed and implemented a plan for the integration of children up to 15 years of age into the educational system and for the creative employment of children in pre-school and early childhood within the hospitality structures. According to Law 4415/2016, it is stated that, by decision of the Ministers of Economics and Education, Research and Religious Affairs, "reception facilities for the education of refugees are established, along with the organization, operation, coordination and program of the refugees training in the above structures, as well as the criteria and the process of staffing them".

A recent report by the SIRIUS Policy Network on Migrant Education examines NFE (Non Formal Education) programs in 17 European countries, identifying successful programs as well as the challenges they face (Sirius Watch, 2018).Many NFE programs—implemented only at the initiative of local NGOs or schools, without higher level support—also show a failure on the part of national or regional policymakers to recognise the benefits of NFE and prioritize its systematic use in schools**.** The SIRIUS report found only a handful of countries in Europe where policymakers actively promote NFE as a tool for achieving educational goals. Without higher level support for NFE, many children are left out because their schools or community organizations do not offer relevant opportunities (UNESDOC, 2019).

A study in Greece following more than 500, mostly male, 13-year-old students with migrant backgrounds over two years found that native students' attitudes affected immigrant students' well-being. Immigrant students were more likely to perceive little discrimination if they felt liked by natives, even if they perceived discrimination against them as a group (Reitz et al., 2015). In Greece, the linguistic barrier was the main reason refugee children stopped attending formal education

(REACH and UNICEF, 2017). However, insufficient provision on the five islands remains a problem. (Anagnostou and Nikolova, 2017).

Furthermore, the government introduced legislation in June 2018 that formalizes the refugee education structures and introduces stricter criteria for teacher recruitment (Greece Government Official Gazette, 2018). Under the provisions of Law 4547/2018 the supporting structures of primary and secondary education are remapped and enforced with the establishment of (Eurodice, 2018):

- the Regional Centers for Educational Planning (PEKES),

- the Centers for Educational Support and Counselling (KESY),

and the strengthening of the School Networks for Educational Support (SDEY) and of the Cross-scientific Committees for Educational Evaluation and Support (EDEAY)

3.1 Links with the school

European countries are obliged by several international legal provisions to offer accessible, acceptable and adaptable education to all children. A recent report by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2018) stresses the urgent need to give priority to the implementation of inclusive and effective educational programs as well as the infrastructure and teaching resources to support them. Education policy is the likely starting point for understanding the conceptualization, implementation and governance of non-formal programs and informal activities (Ngaka, Openjuru, Mazur, 2012).

According to Unesco (2016), categories of policy could include: The provider; Coverage (demographic, local implementation, other countries with implementation and any network exchange); Inputs (kinds or types of teachers/trainers, training, student/trainees, resources and the learning environment, other elements such as materials and tools, etc.); Processes (curriculum, pedagogy/andragogy, learning model, type of activities); Outcomes (intended) (for student/trainee, teacher/trainers, organization, community, etc.); School link (the nature and effects of); Impact evaluation (methodology/assessment).

Good fellowship practices for refugee students, Erasmus + Student-Refugee Integration Guides, as well as peer counselling have been reported as good practices for addressing the dropout of university studies.

In Greece transnational Cooperation Activities (TCAs) are being implemented. The International Cooperation Meetings are organized by the National Units of the countries participating in the Erasmus + Program and their aim is to improve the quality of the integrated implementation of the program, thus contributing to the increased use of the program at the systematic level. One of the actions that the National Scholarship Foundation (IKY) organized was the Pilot Program on "Social Inclusion Revisited: Role Modeling in Education". The objective of the Transnational Cooperation Activities (TCA) was the exchange of good practices on the prevention of early school leaving through education and social inclusion.

Jean Monnet Project IncludU (2016-2018) has been run by the Laboratory of Educational Policy, Research, Development and Interuniversity Cooperation and has aimed to familiarize pupils with EU fundamental values of equality, tolerance and non-discrimination through interactive and experiential workshops, innovative educational material combining ICTs, gaming, art and fertile exchange of ideas and experiences. Moreover, the Jean Monnet Project IncludU has blended pupils and teachers together with senior citizens and migrants who experienced the repercussions of discrimination and displacement in order to raise their awareness on the importance of an Open and Democratic Europe (Asderaki, Markozani, 2018).

In 2018 the City of Athens transformed 25 schools into environments open for extra-curricular activities and language courses for all Athenian refugees. The school premises were customized to become centers of action where the refugees as well as the local community are invited to take part in recreational, cultural, educational and sports activities. Schools remain open until 9:30 p.m. on weekdays and between 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekends. The Council of Europe has included the program in the Guide for Good City Practices on human rights and migrant and refugee integration.

The program has a broader direction, addressed not only to refugees and migrants. This initiative is funded by Stavros Niarchos Foundation (Palaiologou, 2018; Council of Europe, 2018).

A project titled "Integration of Refugee Children in Greek Schools" will be implemented in Greece during 2019-2021. The 3-year project will be carried out in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education Policy and other partners. It is financed as a pre-defined project under the EEA/Norway Grants. More than 12000 refugee children are expected to be enrolled in Greek schools next school year (For the school year 2018-2019 approximately 8000 refugee children enrolled in Greek schools). Together with a strong team of experienced Greek experts, EWC will work with 150 secondary schools all over Greece. The main aim is to help school directors and teachers to create safe and inclusive schools and classrooms where refugees are welcome into a learning environment which aspires to provide quality education to all.

Given the vast number of refugees arriving in Greece, there are many challenges related to the provision of education to all in accordance with the international legal obligations. Furthermore, the financial and social crisis still affecting the Greek society as a whole is also greatly affecting the educational system.

4. CONCLUSION

Generally, education creates opportunities for the social interaction of young people by fostering dialogue among students from different countries and developing a mutual understanding. Moreover, it invites students and teachers to reflect on current problems (human rights, refugees, bullying, democratic & digital citizenship etc.) and act upon them as active citizens. School is a community in which the students actively participate in this simultaneously micro- and macro-system.

Children from lower socio-economic classes are at risk of not learning about the importance of setting goals, succeeding in education or having a job at home. In order to be able to function successfully in society, it is necessary to give young people the opportunity to develop various competences that would help them later in life. The difficulties faced by pupils due to the economic and social background they live in (e.g. extreme poverty, low educational attainment, social expectations, disabilities, learning difficulties, etc.) are factors that may eventually lead to premature school drop-out.

Support for students at risk of leaving school and / or those who have already left school, requires continuous and effective collaboration between the school and social and medical services, psychologists and social workers, as well as the wider local community and Higher Education Institutions. Preventive measures should address all pupils, not just those at risk of school leakage, to avoid stigmatization.

It seems that partnerships between schools and their communities might be used to overcome difficulties in promoting values and behavioural practices that socio-economically disadvantaged children do not always have the opportunity to learn at home.

The role of governments usually lies in the provision of funds, often organised in specific funding streams and targeted funds for project-based initiatives. Funding may be organised at different levels, including the EU and national levels, however, local governments were identified as the key funders and supporters of local initiatives.

The factors that promote integration include school participation in the Erasmus + Program, flexibility of the education system to meet the needs of each pupil, open school culture, continuing education and empowerment of teachers, effective control of early school leaving, measures by municipalities to reintegrate pupils into school through extra afternoon-summer activities. Unfortunately, reliable data sources are currently a major weakness - a gap - in terms of non-formal education and effective planning and coordination are required, as has been well documented in Greece (UNESDOC, 2019).

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