



TeaM



Teaching Marginalized Groups

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**CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICES IN ADULT
MIGRANT EDUCATION IN GREECE, ITALY, GERMANY,
CYPRUS AND TURKEY: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW**

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Existing Initiatives and the Current Educational Situation in the Target Countries.....	3
2.1. Greece	3
2.2. Italy	4
2.3. Germany	5
2.4. Cyprus.....	6
2.5. Turkey.....	6
3. Common Challenges and Barriers	7
4. Good Practices and Suggestions for Improvement.....	11
5. Concluding Remarks	14
6. Disclaimer	16
References.....	17





1. INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this review, focus is being placed upon teaching practices that target language training to adult migrants. However, other integration processes will briefly be accounted for as they are seen to be interrelated with the overall topic of teaching to these specific marginalized groups. The 2015 European Agenda has strongly recommended that EU Member States should as part of the integration process make available to migrants courses that are tailored to fit their specific needs.

But what are these specific needs and how are teachers and trainers being prepared and further supported into accommodating them? This report gathers the knowledge and experience shared during the 1st Learning, Teaching, Training Activity (LTTA) of the Teaching to Marginalized Groups (TeaM) Project, where adult trainers from Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Germany and Turkey gathered to discuss current practices, challenges and teaching methods employed within their nationally specific contexts and to problematize the generally observed lack of meaningful support for both teachers and learners. A common occurrence throughout the participant countries has been that the teaching approaches and educational initiatives in relation to migrants that have been shaped are to a great degree contingent upon the implemented policies of each country. The discussion mainly focused on refugees as their great flow over the last years in all of the partner countries has brought to light a lot of inefficiencies in terms of policies and educational approaches.



2. EXISTING INITIATIVES AND THE CURRENT EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN THE TARGET COUNTRIES

2.1. Greece

The great influx of immigrants and refugees during the past decade has highlighted the need for adult language education to be implemented in more innovative and meaningful ways. Within the Greek context most provisions made are in relation to refugee children, i.e. Refugee Reception and Education Structures (Δομές Υποδοχής και Εκπαίδευσης Προσφύγων, DYEP) which addresses children of all school ages, *Educational Priority Zones (ZEP): reception classes within the mainstream school that refugee students attend parallel to their regular classes. Refugee Education Coordinators (RECs) Non-formal education provided by NGOs and to her non-formal groups.* In accordance with Kantzou et al (2017) by 2017, and to the author's knowledge to this day and age, "no specific project had been developed to address the need for language education of adolescent and adult migrants with a refugee status" (Kantzou, 2017, p. 21). Similarly, the European Commission has reported that the majority of the actions taken are firstly, undertaken by NGOs and secondly, address mostly children.

The provision of educational structures that see to the needs of children is of course of quintessential importance, but simultaneously the major focus on it denotes the inadequate measures taken to accustom the needs of adult migrant learners and probably is telling of an underlying notion that adult learners are -or should be- solely responsible for their own learning. Most notably, the European Commission states that

Despite such efforts the adult education field in Greece has not come with a clear agenda or a plan regarding this issue. NGOs organising basic adult education on a non-formal basis to refugees in Reception Centres seem to be more active in terms of provision, but more synergies among the NGOs and existing local adult education structures like KDVMs (Local Lifelong Learning Centres) is needed.



Resources are currently extremely low. (European Commission, para. 5-7 in Zarifis, 2016)

What is more, in so far, there is a scarcity in methodical and systematic research on a national level in Greece in reference to language instruction for refugees and migrants. Nonetheless, this does not mean that efforts are not being made, but rather that this lack of research might be indicative of adult migrant education not being prioritized over children's, as well as, denotive of the complexities engulfed in teaching to adults with a diverse cultural background in relation to that of the hosting country. In particular, some of the initiatives that could be considered as good practices in relation to adult migrant learners are those coordinated by Greece National Education Sector Working Group (ESWG)¹ (2016) and Athens Open Schools (2016-2019).²

As briefly mentioned above, within the Greek national context there is exhibited a lack of systematic research on adult migrant education. Nonetheless, in 2016 there was composed a postgraduate program titled "Language Education for Refugees and Migrants" by the Hellenic Open University along with the PRESS research program. The former as indicated by its title sets out to provide further training to educators that are, will or aspire to get involved in refugee and migrant education and the latter research program aims at tracing the particular needs of the aforesaid target groups of learners.

2.2. Italy

Whereas the educational setting in Greece has not been systematically developed and arranged, in Italy, there have been formulated Italian as L2 courses and assessment tools that address migrant populations. One such project is the "*Italiano L2 in contesti migratori: Sillabo e descrittori (IL2S)*" project, which is in congruence with the delineations of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

¹ Can be found in <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations>

² As stated on their website "Athens Open Schools was included in the Council of Europe's handbook on "Promoting Human Rights at the Local and Regional Level" as a best-practice example for promoting the smooth integration of refugee children" retrieved from <https://athenspartnership.org/open-schools>



(Council of Europe, 2001). This necessity emerged from the consensus view that reevaluating the way Italian was being taught, assessed and certified in order to provide literacy opportunities to migrant adults was imperative (see for example *Minuz et al., 2016; Minuz & Borri, 2016; Borri et al., 2014; Balboni, 2008; Rocca, 2008*). Nonetheless, and despite the aforesaid coordinated actions, it needs to be stressed that the latter have primarily focused on migrants as a unified conglomerate with particular reference to immigrants excluding to take into consideration the specificities of refugee populations, thus, neglecting to make the distinction between refugees and immigrants as two distinctive groups of migrants (Bianco & Ortiz Cobo, 2019).

2.3. Germany

In Germany, in accordance with the determined and established human rights policies with particular reference to the right to non-discrimination, Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW) (Education and Science Workers' Union) has been at the forefront “*promoting the rights and entitlements of refugees and migrants in the different areas of education for many years*” (Vogel & Stock, 2017, p.27).

Actions taken within the domain of providing quality education and safeguarding respect towards diversity are regulated by BAMA, the federal committee on migration, diversity, and anti-discrimination in cooperation with relevant committee structures in the federal states.

The GEW has been advocating for reformation of the German national educational policies by indicating the need to get down to brass tacks of migration within the context of globalization (Vogel & Stock, 2017). However, as reported by Ahmad AL Ajlan (2019, p. 2) “Despite this importance of language-learning for all refugees, existing policies do not address the diversity within the refugee population”.

The research conducted for the purposes of this review yielded very few results in the literature in reference to adult migrant education within the German context. Most attention has been casted upon refugee children and school education, which in turn draws attention to the lack of research in relation to adult migrant learners’ needs.



2.4. Cyprus

In the Republic of Cyprus there are three official languages, namely Greek, English and Turkish (Angeli, 2019).

The lack of proper programs is interlinked with the Cyprus policy for asylum seekers being granted permanent residence which is directly associated with language certification and passing oral examinations while language barriers impede the refugees' ability to enter university and/or integrate in the labor market (Drousiotou & Mathioudakis, 2017).

Another important note that can be also linked to the other partner countries as well is the predominance of the monolingual bias in language learning and teaching, which neglects the specific educational, linguistic, cultural background of the asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees.

Furthermore, the textbooks of Greek as a second language presuppose a level of literacy in the mother tongue and a degree of familiarization with the functions and conventions of written discourse.

2.5. Turkey

As far as Turkey is concerned, although it has a grave issue with the great influx of refugees, it does not have a systematic approach and framework for refugee education and it is suggested that “Turkey’s response to these needs is inadequate” (Beltekin, 2016, p.186). Beltekin (2016, p. 186) calls for “A holistic social sciences perspective that includes international law and policy fields is required” while drawing attention to the current state of education which neglects refugee learners. In congruence with teachers’ accounts in relation to underage Syrian students, the latter receive meager support from public schools (Taskin & Erdemli, 2018, p. 169).



3. COMMON CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

“Every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship and occurs not only within a nation, between various forces of which the nation is composed, but in the international and world-wide field, between complexes of national and continental civilisations” (Gramsci 1999, p. 666)

The acquisition of the hosting country’s language has become a determinant factor for the refugee/immigrants’ obtainment of legal status, making language a tool for monitoring migration (Krumm, 2012). The way hegemonic notions are enmeshed with language courses pedagogy is something that needs to be problematized in order to transform the pedagogical approaches which seem to have a disciplinary or conditioning character that aims to construct the ideal citizen based on ethnic and racialized norms. As eloquently put forth by Heinemann (2017, p. 192)

“Migration discourses are an integral part of hegemonic ideologies that aim to produce ‘useful migrants’ and thus stabilise the status quo of actual power relations. Migration regimes can perfectly be detected and deeply analysed in language courses as contact zones as a continuation of imperialism. Migrants and refugees represent here the other, meanwhile teachers and institutional staff represent the predominant society”.

Who decides who belongs and who does not? A conditional belonging which is also gendered and racialized in both the educational system and in society is among the most complex barriers that the migrant population is faced with as they are embedded upon both social and political processes that coconstruct the identity of the migrant as that of the “other”. They are allowed to exist on specific terms and under specific conditions in the hosting country where sometimes integration is tautological to assimilation. The diverse power relations between learners and teachers then bear a great significance in the learning process itself. It would seem that it is crucial for migrant teachers to take a



leading role when it comes to migrant education as they might be in a better equipped position of understanding the difficulties of being racialized and discriminated against based on one's citizenship status, ethnicity, gender and level of literacy.

The already extant problem of illiteracy in the target learners' native language (Kantzou et al, 2017) can be a particular challenge in L2 acquisition, as these learners have their distinctive set of needs (Fanta-Vagenshtein, 2011; Marrapodi, 2013).

Political instability and volatile legal frameworks in relation to immigration is also another challenge. Additionally, a disproportionate attention is being observed towards underage refugee learners in all of the examined countries. As Angeli (p.13) notes with reference to Cyprus "a holistic approach is lacking in national policy on language training or on integration in general has yet to be developed language training for adult asylum seekers and refugees". Further on, the constant mobility of the refugee population is detrimental in their learning processes as they are experiencing instability and anxiety, factors that hinder their learning and function as demotivational parameters. This might be more evident in the case of Greece, as more often than not Greece is not the final destination for the refugees that enter its borders, but rather a passage to another European country. Greece not being a destination country for all refugees disincentivizes learners from learning the language or committedly engage in courses. Even their constant forced dislocation from the islands to the mainland can cause turbulence, uncertainty and lead to different experiences in terms of local treatment towards the refugees.

A relatively recent study (Kantzou et al., 2017) demonstrated the necessity for further help, assistance and guidance in designing and implementing educational practices. More specifically, research suggests that teachers

need guidance with regard to the teaching goals, syllabus development, educational material used and method of instruction to help refugees and migrants



acquire language based on their needs and the requirements of the host community (Kantzou, 2017, p. 31)

The exhibited fragmentation in language education for refugees and immigrants derives partially from the fact that it is mainly coordinated by NGOs and local organizations and individuals (Kantzou et al, 2017) rather than the state.

Pinson and Arnot (2007) have suggested that linguistic integration has been directly associated with legalizing the migrants' presence in the host country and on this ground little attention has been placed on the specific needs of immigrant and refugee learners. This bears as a ramification EU countries offering courses that are not highly affiliated and related to the learners' needs. This draws attention to the exigency for courses to be developed that touch upon more practical aspects (Fernandez Vítóres 2013; Extramiana & Van Avermae, 2011).

The above necessity has shown the emergence of new needs that have to be covered and, especially in relation to the Italian didactics, it has been pinpointed by many (e.g. Minuz et al. 2016; Minuz and Borri 2016; Borri et al. 2014; Balboni 2008; Rocca 2008) the urgency to rethink the Italian didactics and to modify the language certification processes to meet the needs of migrants. This can also expand to refer to the rest of the countries discussed in this review.

It is imperative that it be stressed that the marginalized group in question, that is of refugees and immigrants are not a uniform, unvarying, identical group. But rather, they also may share great ideological, empirical, cultural disparages. Other intersectional inequalities are also presented and proliferate language learning inequalities when marginalized groups are treated as homogenous, i.e. in cases where teaching focused on oral language practicing rather than writing as it was seen as less practical, less immediately useful and more difficult (Kantzou, 2017, p. 26).

Furthermore, the reasons behind migration differ essentially among diverse groups of migrants. Refugees for example do not have the time or the choice to plan and choose



their destination as they are forced to flee dangerous circumstances and plea for asylum in whichever EU state will grant it to them, whereas economic immigrants or immigrants who aim at reuniting with family members and/or other reasons face different circumstances both legally, emotionally and financially.

The very particular traumatizing experiences that many refugees have faced such as persecutions, wars etc. can have an adverse impact on their learning capacity (Delaney-Black et al. 2002; Saigh et al. 1997). Apart from these experiences, other stress inducing predicaments like socioeconomical instability, poor living conditions in the host country (Campesi, 2011; Kirmayer et al., 2011) can deter their learning endeavors.

In accordance with Bianco and Ortiz Cobo (2019, p. 2), the specific needs of refugee learners “have only recently started to be addressed by Italian didactics”. In their study (Bianco & Ortiz Cobo, 2019), it was found that based on teachers’ perceptions around the courses provided to refugees, these courses were not deemed adequate to support their integration. However, in this same study an oxymoron was detected as despite the lack of competence in the national language, in practice refugees did manage “to integrate in the workplace even with very little knowledge of the national language” (Bianco & Ortiz Cobo, 2019, p. 11). Bianco and Ortiz Cobo (2019) identify as the reasons for this detected inadequacy the already low literacy and educational levels of the learners which were not able to be surpassed within the few hours that were dedicated for these courses. A recent study underscores “the need for more hours of Italian language courses as well as lessons based on specific integration needs” and that the integration practice itself implies language learning (Bianco & Ortiz Cobo, 2019, p.1)

Within the German national context, language is being discussed in the literature as an imperialist tool that aims to formulate useful migrants for the state (e.g. Heinemann, 2017). However, migrants and especially refugees are faced with impediments when it comes to performing high paid jobs or jobs pertinent to their previous work experience. As stated in the report by GEW



there are qualified teachers among the refugees who are eager to share their experience and use their skills in German schools and who could help to ease pressure in the system, but are rarely accepted for work in their profession. Recognition of their qualifications is impeded by bureaucratic procedures and their lack of proficiency in German language. (Dita Vogel and Elina Stock, 2017, p.31)

A similar pattern is being detected explicitly in scholarship with reference to Cyprus where, as Angeli (2019) suggests, Cyprus views refugees as “guest workers” a model that has been prevalent for the past thirty years at least and which takes a toll in the development of language education.

4. GOOD PRACTICES AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Both illiterate and educated learners as well as both newcomers and those who’ve been living in Greece for some time were included in the same classes (Kantzou 2017, p. 27). This has been suggested to prove helpful in the learning process as more advanced learners helped the “weaker” ones by translating to them, explaining the tasks etc (Kantzou, 2017, p. 29).

The Council of Europe has suggested a 4-level classification of literacy in order to facilitate the creation of customized lessons: pre-literate, illiterate, semi-literate, and literate adults. In this light, each specific group of learners’ needs and particularities need to be considered. Literacy and integration are viewed as interrelated processes (e.g. Kantzou et al, 2017) and should be viewed as interconnected in the learning process by way of providing learners with information that is useful on a practical level for the improvement of their well-being and professional prospects. Lang (2014) calls



for a flexible pedagogical approach that will be based upon premises that take into account psycholinguistics and philosophical points of departure.

On a more empirically grounded level, the importance of Needs Analysis is highlighted especially when it comes to refugee and immigrant populations that will assess the needs of not only the target learners, but also those of the host community (Little, 2008).

On a European level, the toolkit created by the Council of Europe in the context of the project titled “Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants - LIAM” sets out to provide with certain guidelines volunteers and organizations who work with refugees. As also indicated in the sections above, there is being observed a general lack of systematic approach to migrant teaching in most host countries and it falls upon independent individuals to undertake the enterprise of teaching their native language without necessarily having obtained any professional qualifications and training that would help them in their endeavor. Some suggestions to be considered are that policies make provisions for the development of inclusive schools, the implementation of further teacher training, the organization of awareness raising campaigns and actions to sensitize local communities. Above all, instead of having refugee education being outsourced to volunteers, a strategic and systematic coordination is required among the different bodies involved not only on education but also on other bodies that engage in other aspects that permeate the lives of migrant learners.

Initiatives like MATHEME (2010-2015) in Greece which created courses which targeted immigrant learners whose marginalized position intersected with unemployment disability, illiteracy, gender (see Androulakis et al., 2017), the International Training of Trainers held in Bologna, Italy where about 40 professionals received training on dealing with diversity in education, the International/transition classes that work together with regular classes, the Vocational classes for refugees and asylum seekers between 16 and 21 years and Mentoring programs in Germany for the professional integration of refugee teachers can be seen as some of the good practices that need to be further developed and examined. In reference to successful approaches in Cyprus, a study has shown that “teaching outside the framework of a classroom was



a language training practice that had proven to be very effective and pleasant for participants” (Angeli, p.12) along with the use of technology.

Angeli (2019) suggests that part of the solution to the challenges and barriers imposed on refugees would be a more concrete, purposeful national policy for integration that will make a better use of EU resources and funding and calls for an assessment of ongoing language programs. Meaningful legal and legislative changes are a prerequisite however for such changes to actually have a long-lasting and substantially positive impact.

Furthermore, there is the need for new ways of evaluating the already acquired qualifications of migrant learners to further enhance their employability prospects. Moreover, surpassing the monolingual bias and advocating for multilingual and intercultural practices in education is of quintessential importance for successfully realizing an inclusive anti-oppressive education.

For the above goal to be achieved, it is imperative that teacher training programs incorporate courses that focus on anti-racism pedagogies while also being trained in innovative methodologies based on needs analysis.

In Germany, in relation to the exhibited shortage of teachers and the bureaucratic restrictions in acknowledging the qualifications of refugee teachers, there has been created a program in Hamburg titled '*Here to participate!*' which intends to connect members of the teachers' union with refugee teachers so that they can exchange of knowledge, perspectives and ideas (see Vogel & Stock,2017).



5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To recapitulate, this LTTA led to a better understanding of the common challenges faced by adult migrant trainers. In brief, these common challenges have been identified to be the following: high mobility rates of refugee population, illiteracy in L1, lack of training material tailored to the specific needs of refugees and immigrants, lack of guidance for teachers and a syllabus that covers their learners' needs, refugees and immigrants treated as a homogenous group, insecure legal status, long asylum procedures, predominance of monolingual bias in language teaching, learners with traumatizing experiences and last but not least the learners' diverse socio-cultural and educational background and professional experience.

The extensive joint discussions facilitated the participants' understanding of the common challenges and fostered a set of brainstorming activities for retrieving good practices that can and should be implemented in their training contexts. The trainers also extensively discussed the issue of power relations between trainer and migrant learner and how these can affect the learners' positive or negative attitude towards integration and/or host country's language learning.

Another remark that was discussed was that if policies and trainers are to consider the real needs of refugees, classes for other languages apart from that of the hosting country need to be conducted as many of them and especially in the case of Greece intend to relocate.

In Greece, issues like political instability, lack of adequate infrastructure and systematic research on adult migrant learning and teaching along with the lack of sufficient teacher training on adult migrant learning are challenging for adult migrant learners. In Italy, lack of enough training courses, the treatment of diverse groups of migrants in the same terms, and the levels of difficulty on language certification exams and lack of practical aspects of the courses have been identified as problematic. In Germany, within the literature, there has been detected a critique towards hegemonic notions that underlie



the power relations between trainer and learner as well as language as becoming a colonial and hegemonic tool that aims at conditioning the “ideal citizen”. Within the German context, there has also been discussed instances of migrants exhibiting resistance to learning the language. Even when such resistance is not demonstrated, the impediments faced are based upon the prioritization placed upon bureaucratic processes rather than the language learning courses. Similarly to Germany, in Cyprus there has been expressed the argument that migrants are also treated as guest workers which in turn has an impact on the language training design and development. Monolingual bias in the pedagogical approaches to language teaching is also perceived as problematic. In Turkey, scholars point to refugee education in specific as being ignored and that there is a need for a comprehensive sociopedagogical perspective.

I would like to end this review with the important note that adult migrants’ learning and integration processes cannot be fully successful unless current enforced laws radically change to accommodate such processes allowing migrants in the full spectrum of all the facets of society instead of constructing them and sentencing them in a life of precarious otherness. Having noted that, the weaknesses exhibited are not strictly related to a specific country’s deficiencies, but can be attributed to an overall transnational cross-cultural symptom of insufficiency towards providing for migrants primarily based on past and still existing ethnocentric and racialized hierarchies. In a similar vein, no country is utterly bereft of innovative and inclusive initiatives towards migrants that are most often sustained by the same institutional and political mechanisms that restrict them.



6. DISCLAIMER

This review is by no means purported to be comprehensive. On the contrary, it calls for other future projects to further delve deeper in the complexities embedded in deliberating the challenging topic of migrant education. This review was the outcome of a five-day training activity that bore as its focal point the challenges faced by adult trainers in teaching to adult migrant learners for the purposes of the Teaching to Marginalized Groups (TeaM) Project funded by the Erasmus+ program. However, it should be noted that the ideas and arguments expressed therein exhibit only the views of the author.



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