

**Research Article****“The Teacher is not a Magician”: Teacher Training in Greek Reception Facilities for Refugee Education\***Marina MOGLI<sup>1</sup>  Sotiria KALBENI<sup>2</sup>  Lida STERGIU<sup>3</sup> **Abstract**

Greek Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFREs) operated for the first time in Greece during the school year 2016-2017, as a result of the need of refugee children to participate in formal education either in the refugee reception centers or in school units, with the purpose of their educational integration. The aim of this study is to examine the process and criteria with which teachers in RFREs were chosen and the training they received. The research participants were seven teachers and one Refugee Education Coordinator (REC) in the cities of Volos and Larisa, Greece. Through semi-structured interviews, the participants expressed the challenges they faced which resulted from receiving insufficient training in teaching refugee children. Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that the lack of training of teachers working in RFREs causes multiple problems, which impede educational procedures. It was found that the teachers were not able to successfully approach their refugee students so as to create the prerequisites for the children to be smoothly integrated into the Greek educational system. Lack of skills for students' psychological support and communication difficulties due to lack of a language of mediation also causes many issues which obstruct the educational process.

**Keywords:** Refugee children, refugee education, teacher training

**1. INTRODUCTION**

More and more people nowadays cross borders looking for peace, security or a better standard of living. The number of displaced people has increased dramatically since 2011 onwards. The number of displaced people worldwide in 2015 was 65.3 million, the largest number recorded ever since the end of World War II and it is believed to have reached 68.5 million (UNHCR, 2018). Most refugees for the past few years have been from Syria, Afghanistan and Somalia (Operational Portal, 2019).

Immigration is a result of a combination of factors (financial, environmental, political and social) either in the country of origin or in the host country. The European Union has long been considered a desired immigrant/refugee destination, due to its financial and political stability (Statistics for Migration, 2017). The various wars in different parts of the world, the entrance of ISIS and the difficult conditions in refugee camps in their neighboring countries made a lot of people want to reach Europe (Palmén, 2015). The influx of refugees that followed has caused a so-called “refugee crisis” (Ceccarelli, 2016) with more than one million asylum seekers and immigrants entering Europe.

One of the first countries where many immigrants/refugees enter Europe is Greece, as it is located in the border of the EU and is the nearest European country near many of the

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immigrants'/refugees' countries of origin (e.g. Syria). The exact number of immigrants/refugees arriving in Greece is difficult to calculate, as many of them enter the country without official documentation and/or have crossed the borders to other west European destinations. From 2015 until the beginning of 2016, more than 1 million people have crossed Greek borders (UNHCR, 2019), while the number of immigrants and refugees residing in Greece till March 2019 is estimated to be 76.000 (UNHCR Greece Factsheet, 2019). The estimated number of refugee and migrant children across Greece is 27.000, among them many unaccompanied minors, whose number is calculated at about 3.464 (UNICEF, 2019).

### **1.1. Refugee Children Education**

A big number of the refugees who come to Europe are under 18 years old. According to UNHCR, it is estimated that children make up more than half of any refugee population (United Nations, n.d.). The education of refugee children constitutes a challenge, as their experiences and needs are multifaceted (cognitive, psychological, emotional, social etc.). Many of those children face various traumatic experiences connected to their pre-migration experiences in war zones, as well as the arduous journey to get to Europe. In addition, they have faced a lot of uncertainty during their arrival in a host country in Europe. Some are separated from their families, they have to take care of other family members if their parents died and generally lose social stability and access to education (Boyden, de Berry, Feeny & Hart, 2002). The fact that they have stayed for longer or shorter periods of time without attending school requires specific educational interventions and specific educational materials. Traumatic experiences, among other adversities, can hinder learning and make this group of children a very sensitive one, with particular needs (Szente, Hoot & Taylor, 2006). Consequently, it is necessary to help teachers so that school classes respond more to refugee students' needs. School, on condition that it encourages inclusion and empowerment of all students (not only refugees), can initiate a therapeutic intervention, increasing the resilience of students with refugee backgrounds (Hayward, 2017).

UNHCR stresses that education is not only a human right but also a basic constituent of refugee children's adaptation to their new society (United Nations Human Rights, 1989; UNHCR, 2000). With the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 28, free basic education for all children becomes obligatory and the Commission urges nations to take all necessary measures so that refugee children can attend school regularly and the percentage of children who leave school might decrease (United Nations Human Rights, 1989). Many researchers agree that education is of utmost importance for social integration and the rehabilitation of the children's social and psychological health (Eisenbruch, 1988; Sinclair, 2001). Research has shown that education is significant for the psychological adaptation of refugee children. Teachers and school environment are very important for the socialization and the integration of children with a refugee or immigrant background (Juvonen & Bell, 2018) as well as the development of their resilience (OECD, 2018). Educational institutions can play a more active role in facilitating transitions to citizenship for refugee youth through an inclusive approach (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). The European Commission in a report in 2016 points out that more efforts are needed in order for school systems to function without children being excluded. Schools have to become better suited to refugee children and function without excluding any pupils, especially regarding integration of newly-arrived refugees and immigrants (Education and Training in Europe, 2016).

## 1.2. Teacher Training

Teachers have a key role to play in helping students adjust in their classrooms and society in general. Providing refugee students with a safe and welcoming classroom environment is critical for school success but largely dependent on teachers' knowledge, values, practices, and attitudes (Kovinthan, 2016). They should be offered more support and training to deal with increasingly multicultural classrooms, tackling bullying and engaging with parents of immigrant students (OECD, 2018). There is a need for help to be provided to teachers so that they become more diversity-aware and so that school classes respond better to the needs of refugee students (Magos & Margaroni, 2018).

Unfortunately, when teachers have not been properly trained so that they understand the difficulties and experiences of refugee children, they often misinterpret the efforts of the students and their families to adapt to their new environment (Hones, 2002; OECD, 2018). Misunderstandings due to cultural differences result in prejudice and discrimination (Kovinthan, 2016). As a consequence, students who are already trying to overcome language and cultural difficulties have to try to also overcome these negative attitudes (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001).

Results from research confirm that discrimination is the biggest obstacle regarding refugee and immigrant student adaptation and has long-term consequences to the self-esteem, social contacts, motivation and performance of those children in school (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Teachers are often not provided with the training, skills, and information to effectively identify and meet the needs of refugee students (Kanu, 2008; Kovinthan, 2016; MacNevin, 2012). In her study of intermediate and high school students in Prince Edward Island (PEI), MacNevin found that teaching refugee students requires educators to become proficient in different teachings skills, overcome challenges that exist in supporting children emotionally, include refugee students socially and academically in all aspects of the classroom, and build on student's prior experience. Her results also show that most teachers did not have the training or resources to put these practices into place (MacNevin, 2012). As a consequence, there is a need to train pre-service and in-service teachers in order to teach in classes that consist of children of different nationalities.

## 1.3. Reception Facilities for Refugee Education in Greece

The particular challenges that refugees face in Greece, many of whom stay in camps, create additional difficulties for refugee children's education compared to immigrant children that enrolled in Greek schools in the past. In order for refugees to be integrated into the Greek educational system, already existing Reception Classes –a quite flexible and still running institution- were reorganized (RFRE Reception Facilities, n.d.). Refugee children living in urban settings (such as UNHCR accommodation, squats, apartments, hotels, and reception centers for asylum seekers and unaccompanied children) are enrolled into the regular local schools, where usually Reception Classes operate.

In order to respond to the needs of refugee children, especially those residing in Reception Refugee Centers (camps), the Greek state started Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFREs). They are formal educational settings which first operated in the school year 2016-2017 during afternoon hours, in order to smoothly integrate refugee children into the school culture after their long absence from any educational environment. The weekly schedule of RFREs involves the teaching of Greek, Math, English and ICT, while it also includes Art and PE. The weekly program is open and aims to respond to the particular needs of refugee children, so that suitable conditions leading to their future school success (in the Greek or another educational system if they are relocated to another country) are forged (RFRE Reception Facilities, n.d.). RFREs' aimed to urge refugee children to get out of refugee camps, to integrate these children into a European educational system and to help them

come into contact with the Greek culture and civilization. However, in their operation, there were many difficulties and shortcomings.

In every refugee camp there is a Refugee Education Coordinator (REC), with full-time teachers undertaking the position, after applying for it. RECs propose measures for the smooth operation of RFREs and issues regarding the implementation of the educational policy of the Ministry of Education in RFREs, briefing of parents and mediation, in cooperation with the teachers who work in RFREs. The teachers working in RFREs are obliged, according to the Ministry's guidelines, to facilitate procedures that lead to refugee students' integration into the Greek educational system, to promote interaction with the rest of the students and to show pedagogical flexibility in teaching, taking into consideration the students' cultural identity. They receive training during their work and are supported by the REC (O.G.G: Criteria, 2016).

Regarding training of the teaching staff that has worked or are currently working in RFREs, data from relevant research show the need for adequate teacher training and at the same time the lack of relevant training and support the teachers should be getting. According to research by Gargasoula (2018) on secondary education teachers that worked in RFREs, one of the most urgent problems these teachers faced with respect to the efficiency of the reception facilities in their first year of operation was the non-existent/insufficient teacher training and support. According to research by Paschalis (2017) regarding teacher training and counseling, most teachers considered the training and counseling that was provided insufficient, both at their appointment for the position and during the school year. The teachers attributed the lack of training to the fact that RFREs had been recently organized and stated that their supervisors lacked the necessary knowledge regarding counseling and guidance. The same researcher concluded that the teacher training which was organized differed in various school districts. One teacher mentioned that there were many training and educational seminars, whereas the rest of the teachers who participated in the research pointed out that they mainly had to look for information on their own in order to successfully fulfill their duties (Paschalis, 2017).

Marouli (2017) conducted research to investigate the attitudes and training needs of primary education teachers working in RFREs in Athens and found that the majority of teachers (judging by their education and their experience until they started teaching refugees) do not feel equipped to successfully fulfill their duties and to teach refugee students. The teachers stated that they need training regarding the culture, educational systems and the language of their student population. They have not been adequately trained on how to teach Greek as a second/foreign language and they lack adequate skills and techniques to support their students, so they felt they need to be trained in psychology, counseling and psychosocial support. On the other hand, the interest they showed regarding the refugee experience in general and their students' experiences in particular as well as the supportive educational environment they created proved their emerging intercultural competence, which should be enhanced through suitable and relevant training.

A study conducted by Maligkoudi, Tolakidou and Chiona (2018) indicated that, although educators claim to be supportive of their refugee students, not all of them engage themselves and their students in teaching practices that support their students' language and cultural backgrounds. According to Koukoula (2017), the educational approach of teaching students of immigrant/refugee backgrounds should incorporate the fundamental principles of intercultural education, something which is not always the case, as, very often, the teachers claim to adopt intercultural principles in theory, but in practice they do not and cannot be characterized as intercultural competent (Simopoulos, 2014).

The teachers who were employed to teach in RFREs did not receive the necessary training so that they could respond to the challenging task they undertook. The purpose of the case study was to investigate the previous training (if any) the teachers had before being appointed, as it was assumed that they did not possess the necessary intercultural competence needed in order to teach refugee

populations. The researchers also aimed to investigate the specific training needs of teachers who were involved in refugee student education.

The research hypothesis concerns the problems and challenges the teachers who work in RFREs face. In the present paper, we shall report findings related to the following research questions:

- 1) What previous training did teachers working in RFREs have regarding intercultural education and the teaching of their subject to vulnerable groups, and was this taken into account during their employment procedures?
- 2) In what way and in what subjects are RFRE teachers trained before they start working and/or during their service?
- 3) What are RFREs teachers training needs?

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Methodology

The present study is a case study, as it focuses on examining the attitudes of a number of teachers who were employed in RFREs in primary and secondary schools in the cities of Volos and Larisa, Greece, during the school year 2016-2017. It is characterized as a case study as it is an in-depth analysis of a case and is bounded by time and activity (Creswell, 2014).

### 2.2. Sample

The sampling was purposeful and its results could not be generalized. It aims to present what Patton (2002: 230) calls an “information-rich case”, which gives a detailed picture of a specific situation and draws in-depth conclusions.

During the school year 2016-2017, it was the first time RFREs operated in Greece and there had been many negative reactions to the planning. According to Simopoulos and Alexandridis (2019), part of the educational community supported the integration of refugee students into regular public schools, highlighting the dangers that they felt would be created by the development of a parallel system. On the other hand, some parents voiced xenophobic attitudes and threatened to occupy schools if RFREs operated in the schools their children attended.

In the present study eight (8) semi-structured interviews were conducted, from seven (7) teachers and one (1) REC in RFREs in primary schools in the cities of Volos (inside the city) and Larisa (on the outskirts of the city), during the school year 2016-2017. Teachers who choose to work in RFREs are mostly unemployed and see applying in the RFREs as a chance to get a job and also to get experience in teaching, which would lead to better prospects of finding a job in a public school in the future. The participants were three (3) primary school teachers, two (2) English teachers, one (1) ICT teacher, one (1) PE teacher and one (1) kindergarten teacher.

### 2.3. Data Collection

In order to facilitate the interview process, an interview guide was developed, with three parameters in mind: general information about the research participants' education, the training they got before starting to work in RFREs (both formal training and also their own personal efforts of getting ready to teach refugee students) and their experience working in RFREs. All the interviews were in Greek and the excerpts here have been translated into English.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

Analyzing the research results was conducted using thematic analysis, through which answers to the research questions were attempted (Tsiolis, 2017). The steps followed were: 1) transcription of the recorded interviews, 2) careful reading of the transcriptions, finding and collecting the excerpts that

refer to every research question, 3) coding 4) transition from codes to themes and 5) reporting results (Tsiolis, 2017).

### 3. FINDINGS

#### 3.1. Appointment in RFREs: requirements and incentives

Regarding the first research question that concerned the RFRE teachers' previous education and training in the field of intercultural education, the teaching of their subject to vulnerable groups and if this was taken into account for their employment in RFREs, it was found that the studies of the participants (both in Bachelor and Master's level) were not connected to intercultural education nor to the teaching of their subject to vulnerable groups.

Exceptions to this are the RECs, because for their employment, a Master's or PhD in intercultural education is required, as well as experience in Reception Classes. However, although the teachers who were interviewed had not made related studies regarding intercultural education and teaching of their subject to vulnerable groups, they seemed to be sensitive toward intercultural issues and made an effort to develop intercultural competence.

*"I thought I was helping those children who have lost everything and have come here without hope" (Teacher 4)*

*"I have become familiar with different people, people from other religions" (REC)*

*"I must also participate in this area of education for these children who have come to Greece, that is, I have considered it my duty as a teacher to do so" (Teacher 7).*

Some of the participants had relevant experience in Reception Classes:

*"I applied because I had an experience in reception classes and I would also like this experience [teaching in RFREs]" (Teacher 3)*

*"It seemed interesting to me because I already had experience from volunteer courses in the Immigrants' Center in Volos, I felt that this would also be useful and generally I am interested in these groups" (Teacher 5)*

*"I have been in reception classes for four years. Three times were in classes with children of Albanian origin or from other foreign countries, one year it was with Roma students" (Teacher 4).*

However, the teachers appointed were selected according to their position in the list for prospective teachers, which is compiled annually by the Greek Ministry of Education. Consequently, RFREs are staffed with teachers who have had no relevant experience or training. The participants mentioned:

*"We were not called based on our previous experience" (Teacher 4)*

*"It was pure luck who was employed" (Teacher 5)*

*"We are here by chance" [in school] (Teacher 2)*

*"They called me to the RFREs because no one before me [in the list of teacher applicants] had applied for them. Some [teachers] went and did not like it" (Teacher 7).*

#### 3.2. Dealing with the reality of teaching in RFREs: lack of training

The teachers who were appointed to teach in RFREs did not receive any kind of training before their appointment to the position. However, most of the research participants, out of personal efforts (discussions with colleagues, reading relevant books/articles online etc.) and out of personal interest,

had searched for relevant bibliography regarding refugee education and the adjustments that needed to be done in their teaching practices in order to teach the specific target-group.

*"I was looking by myself also. I looked at bibliography, what is happening in other countries; I talked to an acquaintance in Sweden who works in a refugee center for minors and how they teach the language there"* (REC)

*"But I have read about social inequality in school, vulnerable groups"* (Teacher 4).

Also, another element that outlines the intercultural profile of the participants in the study is that most have shaped a worldview that is in accordance with the principles of interculturalism.

*"I applied for personal reasons, that is I was always interested in different people"* (REC)

*"I have turned my interest into language teaching to people who do not speak [Greek] as a first language. Generally, I deal with non-native, marginalized groups and generally the underprivileged in education"* (Teacher 6)

*"Generally, I have been dealing with marginalized groups for years out of personal interest, I have been working with gypsies and because I have also been working with immigrants for several years in a number of various Immigrant Centers and social spaces"* (Teacher 6)

*"I thought I was helping those kids who have lost everything and have come here without hope"* (Teacher 5).

Others participated in relevant training programs on their own initiative or did research on the field writing articles in scientific journals and participating in presentations in conferences on the topic.

*"I have a yearly specialization in the teaching of Greek as a foreign language, in the University of Thessaloniki, 450 hours, a distance-learning course"* (Teacher 2)

*"My dissertation and, in general, some other research papers I have done and all the publications I have done so far have been on these groups"* (Teacher 6).

### **3.3. Pre- and in-service RFRE teacher training**

Regarding the second research question, as to the way and the topics RFRE teachers are trained in, before or/and during their service, it was found that official training (i.e. organized and systematic training from an official organization) before and during classes was thought by the participants to be insufficient and even non-existent. The participants expressed this in their interviews using very emphatic language and it was obvious that there was a dire need for teacher training which was not covered by the Greek state.

*"No, nothing, nothing (no training). Absolutely nothing. We were totally unprepared to handle behavior problems. And no one could help us"* (Teacher 2)

*"No, of course not [no training was done], we begged them to organize a seminar, but nothing!"* (Teacher 5)

*"The only training was just a webinar that was done by the Ministry of Education through skype, no, I would not call it training exactly, it was some information I think, informational training, mainly to inform us about how we will work but I do not think it was a training session. Other training from a school counselor or through another seminar from the administration of Primary Schools or directly from the ministry did not exist"* (REC)

*"Nothing, nothing. Absolutely nothing. We were totally unprepared to manage behavioral problems"* (Teacher 4).

A participant pointed out that some teachers had no experience in teaching in general, as it was the first time they entered a classroom, which made it double difficult for them to manage a class of refugee students.

*"We had colleagues who first entered class in general"* (Teacher 4).

There were, however, some efforts of mainly informative meetings but which took place late, at the end of the school year, and training aimed at RECs, but this was mostly evaluation rather than training meetings. In addition, there were occasional efforts of informal, indirect training, in the middle of the school year, organized inside the school, on the teachers' initiative, which, according to the research participants, were not sufficient to cover their urgent training needs and which were characterized by a participant as "a drop in the ocean". Like, for instance, The PRESS program, which was an online course offered by the Hellenic Open University aiming to provide some theoretical background and training to teachers who were involved in refugee education. The teachers were informed about it in case they wanted to enroll in the course.

*"Only an experiential awareness-raising seminar for refugees was implemented"* (Teacher 1)

*"At the beginning we did not receive any training, but now that I think about it at the end of April, we have been given the right to participate in the PRESS program, a project that has to do with refugees. No specific training"* (REC)

*"Education from the Ministry of Education, they did an online, one-time training early February, for 4-5 hours. Before the lessons, nothing. No training"* (Teacher 4)

*"An experiential seminar was held in the middle of the school year, towards the end of the year about how a refugee's life is. Somehow, the journey of the refugee. Inside the school they turned off the lights. For many colleagues it was useful, for me it wasn't because I had heard many such stories [from the participant's refugee students when she volunteered and taught Greek in the Immigrant Centre in her hometown]. This happened but it was a drop in the ocean. I consider the training to be of the utmost importance"* (Teacher 5).

Even Refugee Education Coordinators, who were responsible for the smooth educational integration of refugee students and had many official organizational duties, including the facilitation of the communication between school and families, supporting teachers in case they had difficulties, and were required to have been highly educated (a Master's/PhD preferably in intercultural education was required so that they could be appointed to the position), felt unprepared and stressed the fact that they also needed training.

*"The training is incomplete. I did not have any training at first. I was trying on my own to fight with all these administrative-pedagogical-humanitarian-administrative [issues] of primary and secondary[education]"* (REC).

The general lack of relevant training and experience seems to also apply to school counselors whose role is to give guidance to teachers and school principals, but who, as the research participants mentioned, also felt uneasy in their new role, as, they themselves stated that they were unable to support the teachers regarding training.

*"And the counselor, who wanted to (help), but he also said that he had no experience on the subject to help us anymore" (Teacher 4)*

*"[The counselor told us] it has never been done, we have no experience, I don't have any personal knowledge, I cannot help you. Do whatever you want and good luck " (Teacher 5).*

### 3.4. Teachers' Training Needs

Regarding the third research question which is about the training needs of RFRE teachers, it was found that the research participants consider their becoming acquainted with the culture and cultural capital of their refugee students very important. They think it is essential that they know about the educational system in their students' country of origin so that they can adjust the educational practices they would choose.

*"I would like to know about the life of these children, the previous experiences they had, to know how their educational system was there" (Teacher 3)*

*"We should have been informed about the educational experience in their country" (Teacher 5).*

One of the teachers also mentioned the discrepancy between the two educational systems, that of the country of origin and the one of the host country. The specific teacher used student-centered and communicative approach methods in her class (group work, art work, songs etc.), causing negative reactions from the students, who were used to a more traditional educational system and a teacher-centered approach:

*"What is this? Go to the board and teach" [in English, since the Syrian student who said this did not speak Greek] (Teacher 5).*

The participants also noted the need to be better acquainted with different linguistic and cultural systems (different alphabets, different writing systems). They also considered necessary getting to know more about the Kurdish and Arabic language:

*"All the time I had taught Greek as a second language to children, the majority had their language written in a Latin-script alphabet. For me it was unfamiliar, it was very difficult for me to understand writing from right to left" (Teacher 1).*

Many of them pointed out the difficulty in teaching without a language of mediation. They utilized English, but not all students spoke the language, especially the younger ones, so they wanted to know different techniques on how to teach students who do not speak the language of the host country. They thought it was crucial that they become acquainted with techniques of adjusting teaching their respective subjects to refugees, techniques of teaching their subject without any language of mediation.

*"Many children do not even speak English, it is quite difficult to teach a language without having a language as a basis, without any communication" (Teacher 1)*

*"I definitely needed training on how to teach the Greek language without having a language of mediation, i.e. many children do not even know English, it is quite difficult to teach a language without a language as a base without communication. I think training would be very important in this case" (Teacher 7).*

The teachers also wanted to get to know methods followed in other countries regarding refugee education.

*"I would like to know what is happening in other countries with regard to refugee education" (Teacher 6)*

*"We could share experiences with other countries as well" (Teacher 7).*

It was also considered significant to become acquainted with the children's religion and particularly with Islam.

*"I needed training in relation to culture. In relation to Islam. What is Ramadan? Why do they wear a headscarf?" (Teacher 1)*

*"The children during Ramadan came [to school] tired and hungry. Some [teachers] did not know about this. There was, on the part of some teachers, ignorance, indifference towards these people's culture and even hostility, especially regarding religion" (Teacher 5).*

The research participants stressed the fact that they wanted to get training in issues of psychological support of their refugee students. They stated that they were not ready to deal with the emotional charge of their students and to deal with the crises and problems of refugee students due to post-traumatic stress of war and the refugee journey.

*"The children were traumatized, they had psychological problems, we couldn't face them [the problems], we didn't have such kind of experiences" (Teacher 7)*

*"A student of mine kept telling me «My mother cries every day, every day» and I didn't know how to deal with it" [teacher's comments in Greek, student's comments in English] (Teacher 5)*

*"I would like training on the management of the emotional load that these people carry. I would like a training on how to manage the psychological problems of children" (REC)*

*"I would definitely like training and some support on how to manage student crises in the RFRE and how I have to support them psychologically, what should I do about it" (Teacher 2).*

The teacher also stressed that they needed training on how to deal with their students' families, whose members were also traumatized and who considered Greece a transit country, as they believed they would be relocated to other European countries.

*"Family management was a very big issue because all the families were «separated» How would you talk and ask them things? Everyone thought of the prospect of leaving, but you had to explain that here we will not teach you in order to stay, we will teach you in order for you to get a tool to make your integration easier" (Teacher 5)*

*"Dealing with families was a very big issue because all families were «separated». How will you go and talk to them and [how] will you ask things from them?" (Teacher 1)*

The teachers also wanted support on how to deal with problems caused because of the fact that the refugee students had stayed out of a school environment for a long time. Some parents had even told them that some students had not attended school for one to three years before attending the RFREs.

*"There were children who did not sit down on a chair; there were children who were aggressive" (Teacher 5)*

*"There were children with huge difficulties in cooperation and concentration. And difficulty in following rules" (Teacher 7).*

The teachers wanted to learn techniques of integrating refugees into the educational system, as they themselves mentioned:

*"We need to get to know techniques about how to integrate underage refugees in the school environment" (Teacher 1).*

#### 4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

Based on the study findings, it can be concluded that the lack of training of teachers working in RFREs causes multiple problems, which impede educational procedures. These problems are related to the inability of the teachers to successfully approach their refugee students so as to create the prerequisites for the children to be smoothly integrated into the Greek educational system. Lack of skills for their students' psychological support and communication difficulties due to lack of a language of mediation also causes many problems which obstruct the educational process.

The need for school personnel training is –in different degrees- common in many countries which receive students with an immigrant/refugee background (MacNevin, 2012; Kanu, 2008; Kovinthan, 2016; Crul et al., 2017). According to the European Committee Network of Educational Policy Eurydice that published a research report on the relevant educational policies of 42 European countries, the newcomers are usually placed in introductory classes, if they do not possess the necessary language skills which would allow them to attend the mainstream classes. School directors are often not trained to assure immigrant students' successful integration, while policies and measures tend to focus on these students' academic rather than social and emotional needs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

The results of the present research highlight the urgent need to train RFRE teachers and RECs before they start their service and during their employment, as their role is very demanding, complex and at the same time very important. This need must be taken into deeper consideration, given the way some teachers talked about their experience teaching refugee students as something which was a unique and a defining moment in their life:

*"For me it was the experience of a lifetime my work in RFREs. I felt somehow that I participated in the history of the world" (REC).*

Besides, the present results about the training needs of RFRE teachers indicate some important suggestions of intervention, which in combination with other relevant results (e.g. Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019) and future research could be taken into account in the intended implementation of teachers' training programs. For example, acquiring information and knowledge about refugee students' cultural values, beliefs and practices seems to be necessary not only for addressing students' needs but also for reducing incidents of prejudice and discrimination from teachers (Kovinthan, 2016). Similarly, familiarization with different linguistic and education systems, as well as with the consequences of disrupted schooling and proper teaching methods to overcome the emerged obstacles would be useful to future training plans.

The success of educational and social integration of refugee students depends largely on the quality of offered education in host countries. Teachers as representatives of educational policy measures -in practice and not only in theory- need to feel supported and efficient, so as to successfully respond to their duties and be able to teach their refugee students appropriately. As one REC states:

"You can't put a person in deep waters [meaning putting someone into a difficult position without any preparation], no matter how many good intentions he/she might have and even if he/she is good, it can't be done if you don't help him/her. The teacher is not a magician" (REC).

Last, but not least, school success depends, to a great extent, on the ability of education systems to integrate immigrant and refugee students into the mainstream classes; that's why most European systems which implement separate introductory/preparation classes for refugee and immigrant students tend to shorten time spent in these structures, in an attempt to reduce hindering students' integration (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). In Greece's case, great attention must be paid to the time periods refugee students spend on RFREs as well as to a faster integration in regular school classes.

The lack of a teachers' training focused on refugee students' learning and psychosocial needs is highly underlined by the results of the present research. Teachers of the present sample expressed their need to be trained and properly prepared so as to be able to respond to a variety of educational challenges, such as refugee students' cultural and linguistic variety and variability, their psychological support due to traumatic experiences and disrupted education; additionally, teachers need to be familiarized with efficient teaching methods and materials. Given the very positive intentions expressed by some teachers, training is crucial in order to prevent them from disappointment and to transform their present potential into solid knowledge and competence. Similarly, further research and targeted training for the rest of teachers working in regular classes is highly required in order to facilitate refugee students' educational and social integration.

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