

The impact of interculturalism in formal education: the study case of Greece

O impacto do interculturalismo na educação formal: o caso de estudo da Grécia

Georgia Karountzou¹

Maria Pliota²

ABSTRACT

In many parts of the world, the attainment of proficiency in two or more languages is viewed as a highly desirable goal. Sometimes the development of bilingual skills takes place outside the bounds of formal education, impelled by individual factors in sociocultural context. The recent refugee crisis as well as the continuous migration made it imperative for the Greek educational system to be updated and to apply new methods, teaching techniques that include intercultural practices, so that the school becomes able to manage the cultural heterogeneity of students. The emphasis here is on understanding how two (or more) languages are used within the Greek educational system to promote the goal of bilingual proficiency for enrolled students with the use of ICT.

Keywords: Interculturalism, translanguaging, bilingualism

RESUMO

Em diversas partes do mundo, a obtenção de proficiência em duas ou mais línguas é vista como um objetivo altamente desejável. Às vezes, o desenvolvimento de habilidades bilíngues ocorre fora dos limites da educação formal, impulsionado por fatores individuais, estes relacionados ao contexto sociocultural. A recente crise de refugiados, bem como a migração contínua, tornou imperativa a atualização do sistema educacional grego e a aplicação de novas metodologias e técnicas de ensino que considerem as práticas interculturais, para que a escola se torne capaz de gerenciar a heterogeneidade cultural dos alunos que a ela chegam. A ênfase aqui está em entender como duas (ou mais) línguas são usadas no sistema educacional grego para promover a meta de proficiência bilíngue para alunos matriculados com o uso das TIC.

Palavras-chave: Interculturalismo, translinguagem, bilinguismo

¹ Georgia Karountzou holds a BA in Pedagogic from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, a M.Ed in Education from the Hellenic Open University (HOU) a M.A in Comparative Education and Human Rights from UCL, University of London and a PhD in Intercultural Education. She has conducted research in the fields of teacher training in typical education simultaneously gaining significant teaching experience in Higher Education. Her published articles pertain to such topics as Intercultural Education, ICT and Bilingualism. E-mail: eorgiakaarountzou@yahoo.gr

² Maria Pliota holds a BA in French Teaching from the University of Thessaloniki, a M.Ed in Education from the Hellenic Open University (HOU) and a MSc in Environmental Education. She has conducted research in the fields of Environmental Education and achievement. Her published articles pertain to such topics as Environmental Education, ICT and Biligualism. E-mail: mariapliota@gmail.com

Introduction

The notion of nation in Europe is developed in two versions characterized - according to the country which implemented them - as French and German version. According to the French version, the formation of a nation is based on the belief that it exists as well as on the consciousness of people that they belong to it. Other cultural elements, e.g. racial unity, common language, etc. act only as enhancers since the nation is a primarily a mental-emotional construct. On the contrary, according to the German version, the nation is an objective entity which is not only based on the existence of a common consciousness, but also has some objective unifying elements such as e.g. racial unity and a common language (VOGT, 1996).

The Enlightenment contributed decisively to the appearance and the strengthening of the faith in the nation which was considered to have geographical borders, an easily recognizable language and culture – part of a common history-, while it is identical to the notion of state and it should be protected because it is in constant danger from outside factors (BURNS, 2006).

The emergence of multiculturalism though, emphasizes diversity and identity related differences in modern societies. Today, we encounter in all European countries measurable percentages of heterogeneity which fall within one of the following categories: repatriates, citizens of European Union, refugees and asylum seekers, those who have the status of a migrant living for a small or a long period of time in the state with an approved residence permit and those who live for a short or long time in a state without having a legal and state- recognized right of residence (GAVROGLOU, 2002). The movements of populations from one country to another affect the demographic composition of the host countries and form societies with a multicultural character. Cultural inhomogeneity has increased even more in recent years after the new influx of immigrants and refugees from countries such as Syria and Iraq.

This inhomogeneity was extended to the formal education which was called to manage classes with a heterogeneous student population and bilingualism/diglossia. This created the need to redefine educational policy in order to meet the new learning challenges. States took measures and established intercultural schools that respect the social, cultural and educational needs of all students (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, p. 60). The role of the teacher is crucial, as he is called to adopt methods and practices that will promote a democratic and cooperative climate, respect and equal provision of learning opportunities for all. However, despite the measures taken by states and the innovations implemented with intercultural education, the difficulties and problems remain.

The theoretical background of intercultural education

The first model of educational approach to multicultural education emerged and prevailed by the mid-‘60s and is known as the “assimilation model” since it’s

based on the assumption that the migrant and refugee populations must be absorbed by local homogeneous culture in order to be able to participate equally in the formation and maintenance of a society (PALAIOLOGOU & EVAGGELOU, 2003 as cited in BINO, 2019). The evolution of this model led to the “integration model” that appeared in the second half of the ‘60s and dominated until the early ‘70s and stated that immigrants are recognized as cultural institutions, who can maintain their culture and native language in order to exploit their characteristics for shaping their new national identity (KATSIKAS & POLITOU, 1999). The ascertainment that ethnocentric models of cultural diversity management did not provide all students with equal opportunities for academic success led in the mid-70s’ to the “multicultural model” that recognizes the cultural diversity of modern societies as a given fact and aims at unity through the emergence of diversity (HABERMAS, 1999). In the late 80s’, another multicultural model emerged mainly in UK and USA, the “antiracist model” aiming at equal educational opportunities for all young people, regardless of their ethnic or racial background. Nowadays, the most accepted model is the “intercultural model” which is addressed to all students and not only to children with different cultural background. According to Essinger (1991, as cited in KESSIDOU, 2008) the four basic principles of this model are: a) Empathy training that involves understanding the difference, the place where they are, and the problems of others, (b) Education for solidarity through the cultivation of collective consciousness by overcoming social inequality, (c) Education for intercultural respect by participating in the culture of others and others in our own culture and (d) Education against the nationalistic way of thinking, stereotypes and prejudices.

According to UNESCO (2007, p.19-20), the distinct aims of Intercultural Education consist of “ a) learning to know, by combining sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in-depth on a small number of projects, b) learning to do, in order to acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and to work in teams, c) learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence – carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts – in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding, peace and cultural diversity and d) learning to be, so as to better develop one’s personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility.”

The contribution of Translanguaging pedagogical approach to the promotion of a multicultural education

Education has long been a problematic area for the development of multilingual competencies. Bilingual education, in the form of immersion programs, dual-language and heritage schools, has traditionally adopted methods that insist on separating the languages in the learning process, for fear of cross-contamination and negative interference (CREESE & BLACKLEDGE, 2010). According to Richards,

Platt & Platt (1992, p. 199) , language attitudes can be defined “as expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language” and they are distinguished into instrumental attitudes which are pragmatic, achievement –oriented with utilitarian goals and driven by a desire for personal success, security and status and integrative language attitudes which are mostly social, interpersonal and driven by a desire to befriend and/or identify with a language group and to be accepted into their cultural activities.

Research shows that there is a considerable body of work considering plurilingualism based on the need for social and educational justice and the promotion of bi/plurilingual minority speakers’ well being, especially as societies and classrooms become more and more diverse and traditional formulas of bi/multilingual education fail to attend to this diversity (VALLEJO & DOOLY, 2020, p.5). Cummins (2007) criticizes the discouragement of translation, code-switching and use of L1, arguing that separate bilingualism ignores the learners’ linguistic interdependence as much as their cultural identities. Most bilingual schools aim for formal transmission of knowledge through an ethnocentric curriculum instead of cultivating mutual cultural understanding (BAKER & JONES, 1998). Additionally, popular communicative methods such as task-based teaching, completely ignore the bilingual students’ L1 and prevent them from activating their background knowledge. While transitional bilingualism aims to integrate learners into the monolingual education, thus often resulting in L1 attrition, and additive bilingualism develops L2 along with L1, both types are inadequate and outdated, given the linguistic diversity existing in the 21st century classrooms (WEI & GARCIA, 2015). It is correctly argued that the “two solitudes” (CUMMINS, 2007) approach to bilingualism provides limited opportunities for the psychosocial and academic development of students.

On the contrary, originally conceived as an alternative pedagogical approach to bilingual education, the term translanguageing (WILLIAMS, 1994) has gained significant relevance over the last years. Translanguageing (TL) is explained by Otheguy et al., (2015) as “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (p. 281). While both bilingual education and TL cater for the learners’ development of linguistic competencies, their methodologies and views on language are completely divergent. Mainly, TL rejects the separation of languages and views bilingualism as a continuum instead. From an external perspective, named languages are social constructs, loaded with ethnic ideologies, whilst from the bi/multilingual speakers’ perspective, languages are not separate but fluid, interrelated linguistic objects (OTHEGUY ET AL., 2015). In practice, TL includes the use of the learners’ full linguistic repertoire, including any word, gesture or semiotic sign in any given language within their internal shared linguistic system. It also involves -but goes beyond- code-switching, translation and other ways of sense-making techniques for negotiation of meaning. Further to this, translanguageing questions the assessment methods of bilingual education, which

restrict multilingual learners' skills by ignoring their complex linguistic repertoire and subjecting them to language proficiency tests that assess only a portion of their idiolect (OTHEGUY ET AL, 2015). Therefore, it becomes evident that TL is "an approach to bilingualism that is centered not on languages, as has been often the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable" (García 2009, as cited in GARCÍA & LIN, 2016).

In that respect, translanguaging supports the emergence of *dynamic bilingualism*, that is a lifelong *process* of language growth. Furthermore, it is a valuable pedagogical tool. As García & Wei (2014) illustrate, TL is crucial for the empowerment of language-minoritized students as it allows them to strengthen their cultural identities, depend on their already acquired knowledge to develop biliteracy skills and "interrogate linguistic inequality. . . so as to engage in social justice" (p.235). It is clearly suggested that translanguaging addresses the limitations of bilingual education and emerges as a transformative pedagogy that not only maximizes the student's performance by employing a multitude of resources (GARCÍA & WEI, 2014), but most importantly, transcends the barriers of language and nationality, giving voice to all students, particularly those from language or ethnic-minoritized backgrounds.

The intercultural dimension in Greek education

Until the 1980s, Greek education was monopolistic in nature and supported the doctrine of "one nation, one language, one religion". The public school educated the children through textbooks on topics that mainly concerned the Greek language, Greek history and the Christian Orthodox religion (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, p. 49). The main goal of the curriculum was the possible national and cultural homogenization, a fact that until then had been successfully implemented, since Greece was one of the most homogeneous countries in Europe. Foreign language education existed only in the private sector with the establishment of Greek-English, Greek-French, Greek-German and Greek-Italian schools, thus creating the only form of intercultural education in Greece (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, p. 49).

After the 1980s, however, the mass movements of populations and the repatriation of expatriate Greeks made Greece a host country of civilizations. This multiculturalism, as it extended to the field of education, now forced Greek education to find modern ways to meet the educational needs of children with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, p. 50).

The educational system had to put a final end to the monocultural character of education as an ideal situation and to proceed to its institutional and methodological renewal with the implementation of an intercultural teaching. (KAROUNTZOU, 2020, p. 54).

It is pointed out that the intercultural dimension promotes in education "universal" values such as interaction, interdependence, mutual acceptance,

reciprocity and equality between all of children. It is also stressed the importance of intercultural policy as a tool aimed at developing the skills and attitudes that are necessary for effective interaction within in a multicultural class. Finally, interculturalism in education as a means of mitigating social injustices, ensures universal access to the goods of knowledge and social inclusion, guarantees the emotional security of students, and respects their personalities and particularities.

The role of ICT in Intercultural Education in Greece

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become an extremely useful tool for teachers promoting the principles of Intercultural Education and the Inclusive School. However, ICT are not sufficiently utilized in the Greek Educational system. Collaborative learning with the use of Technology, as research highlights, has multiple results, some of which include reinforcement of bilingual students' self-esteem, development of a positive attitude towards learning and accepting all their peers, improvement of intercultural communication, better understanding classes' content, demise of stereotypes and development of critical thinking. Through the school-based community, an online learning environment can probably be established and developed that in turn allows each student to cultivate relationships with peers first in the classroom and then in the wider social environment outside the classroom, to commit themselves to the accomplishment of one common purpose and to collaborate and interact with other students trying to achieve a goal while cultivating cultural, moral values supported by communication and necessary social skills required for further enhancement of their living standards.

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The legal framework of intercultural education in Greece

The Greek Ministry of Education established reception classes for the first time with the ministerial decision, in primary and secondary schools of Thessaloniki in the 80's. The reception classes were addressed to Greek returning students from Germany in order to help them integrate into the Greek school and the Greek society in general. The classes were quite similar to the German model of education and were part of the regular school, but operated independently with a separate and insufficient syllabus, resulting in rapid school failure (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, p. 50).

Two years later, the Ministry of Education decided to establish tutoring departments addressed again to returning students of the country. The enrollment of the children this time was done in the regular classes of the schools with the difference that they had to attend six hours of teaching per week outside the regular hours. However, the lack of qualified teaching staff in the teaching of the second language and the absence of appropriate textbooks and curricula soon led students to school failure (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, pp. 50-51).

The failure of the Greek system in managing the education of returnees is due to the fact that it never took into account the cultural capital of the children, did not upgrade the educational material, did not train the teachers with training seminars and did not mainly implement an assimilative educational policy.

Immigrant inflows to Greece have been increasing over the years forcing the Ministry of Education to take again decisive measures for education. With the enactment of Law 2413 in 1996 "Greek education abroad, intercultural education and other provisions", the Ministry of Education officially established intercultural education (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, p. 60).

Intercultural education was initially aimed at expatriate students, but there were still unclear gaps in its content and objectives. Four science programs were designed in the spring of 1997 around intercultural education aimed at groups of children with cultural backgrounds. The programs concerned the education of repatriated and foreign students, the education of gypsy children, the education of Muslim children and the education of expatriates.

The Ministry of Education took care of the training of teachers and the writing of new school textbooks. New intercultural schools were established that respected the social, cultural and educational needs of all children and the Schools for Repatriates were renamed intercultural schools. Attendance at these schools was a prerequisite for the existence of a large number of foreign language children with the consent of the teachers' association, the principal and the principal. The educational future of Greece seemed better with the introduction of intercultural education, while its monocultural character gradually began to be limited (CHRISTIDOU-LIONARAKI, 2001, p. 61).

Recently, the Greek school was called upon to re-manage the educational and social needs of children who arrived in Greece from the influx of refugees. To this end, the Ministry of Education has developed an educational program for refugees living in shelters. The goal of the Ministry was to alleviate social stereotypes and to learn the Greek language, so that refugee students can gradually integrate into organized classrooms and Greek society. The Ministry established the first Refugee Reception and Education Structures (DYEP). The DYEP follow open type study programs, while the refugee children are enrolled either in the school units in which the DYEP operates or in the branches located near accommodation centers. Finally, the establishment, organization, operation, coordination and training program are supervised by the management, coordination and monitoring team of refugee education, while in each, a teacher has been appointed as Refugee Coordinator (KAROUNTZOU, 2020, p. 343 - 344).

Conclusion

In recent years, as globalization and human mobility continue to incite societal reforms in various domains of our public and private lives, significant interest has been developed by Greece in the coining and adoption of terms that address the new realities

of our era. Moreover, the implications of an increasingly diverse society can be felt in every aspect of our lives, namely in our cultures, beliefs, values and linguistic practices. Language and culture, in particular, are two notions so tightly interwoven, that any societal transformation is evidently bound to trigger a change in language use as well. This ongoing, dynamic reality unfolding in today's globalized world, not only challenges the traditional ways of thinking, but also dictates the need for the development of a "culturally sustaining pedagogy" (TSOKALIDOU & SKOURTOU, 2020) vis-a-vis the education of multi-competent, empathetic global citizens.

Lamp (2015, p. 152) suggests that "the interplay between power structures, historical experiences and current dispositions is endemic, producing a monolingual habitus (Gogolin 1994, 2002) that cannot be redressed by top-down language-in-education policy alone; for multilingualism to be normalised and valued by all, opportunities for deep and critical re-education both in formal educational structures and informal public spaces are required, drawing on research evidence regarding the benefits of multilingualism for all in order to challenge solidified beliefs and practices".

The recent refugee crisis as well as the continuous migration made it imperative for the Greek educational system to be updated and to apply new methods, teaching techniques that include intercultural practices, so that the school becomes able to manage the cultural heterogeneity of students. An analytical program with an intercultural orientation concerns all students and focuses on both the acquisition of knowledge and the socio-emotional development of the individual. It takes into account the different ways in which they learn, cultural characteristics and values and the knowledge, experiences and abilities of each student. It helps students acquire critical thinking, collaborate, respect human rights and understand that the various social groups and people interact and depend on each other (Evangelou, 2005 as cited in Karountzou & Pliota, 2021).

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