

Evaluation of Teaching Mobilities in the Context of Intercultural Education

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ABSTRACT

This specific intervention aims to limit the rates of school dropout. In order to limit the rates of school dropout and to increase the school performance of students with different cultural characteristics, who attend the schools of the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica in the school years 2021- 2022, mobilities were implemented in the context of the Erasmus program following intercultural education. Implementing the mobilities was deemed necessary because in the cities of West Attica, during the same period, incidents of delinquency, violence, and battles took place daily between different foreigners or between foreigners and Greeks or Roma. The implementing method of the intervention is an observation with a structured observation sheet with open-ended questions. Positive results, coming out of the mobilities, were that the teachers who served in those schools, who did not always have the required knowledge in intercultural education, were made aware and trained in the effective management of heterogeneity both in students and in their parents for the benefit not only of the school community but more broadly of society—the consequences of this action concern the parents of the children and the society in general.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In order to limit the increased rates of school dropout and the low school performance of students with different cultural characteristics, which appear in the school years 2021-2022, the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica implemented a specific training plan for teachers who serve in it. The methods of structured observation with open-ended questions and evaluation of activities with qualitative and quantitative research were used to implement this specific intervention. In addition, it was found that

the teachers serving in the schools of the specific Directorate did not know to manage diversity effectively. Participatory observation [1] was applied in this specific action, which took place for seven teaching hours per day in different classes and sections of the Cypriot school. During it, the participating teachers filled in a semi-structured observation sheet. A few semi-structured interviews were conducted in focus groups of teachers serving in the Cypriot school. All primary data were analyzed by thematic analysis [2]. The results of this were taken into account in the drafting of the project evaluation report. Also, parents of students with different cultural characteristics do not communicate with their children's teachers. Finally, in the cities of West Attica during the same period, there were increased incidents of delinquency, violence, and battles between different foreigners or between foreigners and Greeks or Roma.

Aim of mobilities in the context of intercultural education

The mobilities aimed to operate effectively open, democratic and multicultural schools in West Attica, which effectively manage the existing multiculturalism according to the principles of intercultural education [3], [4]. In particular, the aims are 1) the teachers to become familiar with the methods and content of intercultural education and to cooperate harmoniously with the foreign family to benefit the students [5]. 2) the parents of the students have to understand the benefits of including all children in the school community, and parental involvement has to be strengthened. 3) for students to feel safe, to limit xenophobia and racism, behaviors that their classmates have, as a reflection of what is happening in society and leads to social exclusion. Also for the students to become stronger so that they can manage emotions and relationships and overcome the difficulties, as mentioned earlier, of adaptation to the school and social environment, so that these difficulties do not come at the expense of their regular school and social integration [6], [7].

Inequalities within schools, especially between students with different cultural characteristics, are now a daily challenge for educational organizations [8]. The aim is to achieve social justice in the organization's operation, i.e., the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica, and in the schools that appertain to it [9]. Decisions and initiatives are now taken with a clear and oriented ethical framework of values and ideas related to intercultural education. In particular, a culture of equal opportunities and acceptance of diversity is beginning to be formed to eliminate the obstacles faced by students with different cultural characteristics in studying and learning and, generally, achieve social cohesion [10], [11]. Also, the pedagogical recognition of the pluralistic nature of society, in combination with the assurance of different approaches to issues of individual differences, individual skills, cultures, religions, and lifestyles, are adopted both in the pedagogical methods and practices, as well as in the teaching materials [12]–[14].

The introduction of quality improvement in mobilities was set as a priority by the project's final beneficiary, the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica. The project was integrated into the organization's strategic planning. Emphasis was placed on adopting and implementing changes for the successful management of diversity, establishing perceptions of change and improvements among all employees, and early detection of errors, accuracy, completeness, etc. In this context, working meetings were organized to clarify

practical and logistical issues regarding the mobilities and actions of the project's promotion, during which clear instructions were given in advance. The Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica ensured that actions of sufficient quality had been carried out, i.e., continuous and extensive internal audits of deliverables were carried out to improve them to comply with modern and international bibliography requirements and to achieve total quality.

Implementation of mobility planning in the context of intercultural education

During the implementation of the project, the applicable legislation for the safety of mobilities among the participants was observed. Emphasis was placed on the valid regulations to limit the covid 19 pandemic, and adequate insurance coverage was provided for all participants in mobilities, covering travel insurance, civil liability insurance, accidents, serious illnesses, and death insurance. A safe environment that respects and defends each person's rights, physical and emotional integrity, mental health, and welfare was also ensured for all employees at the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica. The participants in the mobilities were selected mainly based on the scope of their work in order to adopt the practices of improving diversity in the organization's operation and culture to capitalize on the project's positive results in the long term. In addition, the teachers who participated in the mobilities had experience in European programs and adopted a culture of "open" educational organizations, schools, and international collaborations [15], [16].

The school has chosen to attend the project, i.e., the host. In other words, the High School in Larnaca Drosia has teachers with excellent scientific training both in pedagogy and in the cognitive subjects of their specialty, but also the students who attend it do not develop undesirable behavior, and their school performance is high. Finally, successful actions have been implemented for the effective management of diversity.

Then, before the start of mobilities, the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica informed the Greek consulate in Cyprus about mobilities. During the mobilities, the participants had the telephone number of the Greek consulate in Cyprus so that they could contact it in case of emergency, as well as a list of helpful telephone numbers of public services in Cyprus in case they were needed.

Then, the teachers, who serve in the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica, had to carry out five days of job shadowing at the High School of Drosia in Larnaca, Cyprus. At the same time, training was carried out for teachers who serve in the school units of the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica. Eraut's [17] model was then applied, and they focused on training on a) the defect approach, b) the growth approach, c) the change approach, and d) the problem-solving approach. A pan-Hellenic educational conference was held on the topic: "Intercultural education: Equality, acceptance, inclusion" at the Special Vocational Education Workshop of Elefsina on the 19th and 20th of October, 2022.

The implementing body of the field project, i.e., the High School of Drosia in Larnaca, was selected with strict quality criteria. The High school of Drosia in Larnaca shows high school performance rates. It develops effective diversity management techniques in intercultural education and management of otherness (gender, race, religion, physical

characteristics, etc.), considered critical for dealing with unemployment, social exclusion, and social cohesion. For the best planning of the mobilities, preparatory meetings were held remotely.

E-Twinning was used in teacher pieces training to understand good practices implemented in European schools, manage diversity and achieve the inclusion of students with different cultural characteristics. Good practices of student inclusion were learned and implemented in the context of student awareness. The Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica had and still has access to the School Education Gateway, from which it received appropriate information for the professional development of teachers for mutual support and networking. Opportunities for collaborative projects and mobility were critically approached. The SEG was also used to study good practices from European programs, online training for teachers to assist in dealing with local challenges, but also in other helpful scientific resources, such as teaching materials, courses, and the European toolbox for schools, which are used in the context of intercultural education and can be applied in the schools of West Attica.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Results from the application of mobilities in the context of intercultural education

The results of the specific project are the limitation of inequalities [18] and the achievement of equal opportunities in the school units of West Attica, which are multiple for all members of the school community:

- 1) Teachers were trained to apply the principles of intercultural education, empathy, solidarity, and intercultural respect. They developed communication skills through cooperative action, deconstructed gender stereotypes and ethnocentric logic of superiority and hierarchy, and practiced effective conflict management through constructive dialogue, consensus, and meaningful cooperation. Therefore, they contribute to reducing school dropout and improving the school performance of students with different cultural characteristics.
- 2) The students felt safe due to the limitation of xenophobia and racism, adopted by their classmates, as a reflection of what is happening in society and leads to social exclusion. They were empowered to manage emotions and relationships without intolerance and fanaticism.
- 3) Parents who adopt the characteristics of the dominant culture understand the benefits of including all children in the school community so that parental involvement will be strengthened, and parents with different cultural characteristics will get concerned with their children's attendance and performance at school [19].

In addition, all those involved in the mobilities have only positively expressed their participation. In a limited qualitative survey, they state that satisfaction is an overwhelming percentage of 100%. The positive elements of the mobilities are related to the planning of the mobilities, the interaction between Greek and Cypriot teachers, the exchange and diffusion of good practices related to intercultural education, and the inclusion of students with different cultural characteristics in the educational community of West Attica. In their

comments, the participants point out the positive results of implementing the specific project in their personal and professional development.

In implementing the mobilities, goals related to sustainable development were set and achieved. The correlation of interculturalism with environmental sustainability was highlighted during the training seminars for the teachers and the students' awareness activities. They were concerned about the impasses of modern humanity's ecological and economic crisis because environmental problems are so urgent. The Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica is to problematize the members of the school community, even those with different cultural characteristics, so that they become aware of achieving a sustainable way of life, production, and consumption.

During the implementation of the mobilities, emphasis was placed on utilizing digital technologies. New digital tools and technologies were used to plan training meetings effectively during preparatory meetings. Also, during project monitoring, teachers understood ways to integrate new technologies into the educational environment, which offer new learning opportunities, allowing access to other learning environments and resources that can be used to engage and motivate learners. They critically approached good practices that contribute to the achievement of interactive learning and the inclusion of students with different cultural characteristics based on problem-solving while allowing the personalization of the learning experience [20]–[24]. All project promotion actions were used to train teachers' and students awareness. At the same time, during the realization of the Pan-Hellenic conference, new technologies were used to communicate with the conference participants, write the proceedings, and disseminate the project results.

2.2 Evaluation of mobilities' plan in the context of intercultural education

After implementing teachers' mobilities within the framework of Erasmus, the evaluation of the actions themselves and the actions that were carried out afterward for disseminating their results was implemented. All those involved in the mobilities have only expressed positivity about participating in them. The positive elements of the mobilities are related to the planning of the mobilities, the interaction between Greek and Cypriot teachers, the exchange and diffusion of good practices related to intercultural education, and the inclusion of students with different cultural characteristics in the educational community of West Attica. In their comments, the participants point out the positive results of implementing the specific project in their personal and professional development.

Additional positive results of the specific project are for the students who attend the schools of West Attica and mainly those who belong to the vulnerable social groups to study in them and live in West Attica.

In addition, positive results of the specific project also occur in the case of parents with different cultural characteristics. They raise awareness to cooperate more effectively with the school their children attend, and their parental role is strengthened.

The institution of evaluation is an integral part of our daily life. It is linked to various parameters (identification of positive elements and weaknesses, identification of problems, prioritization of objectives, evaluation of the design, utilization of the research efforts of the scientific and educational community, evaluation of the project, improvement of quality of

the project, professional development, etc.) [25]. Evaluation as a systematic administrative process [26] is included in the administrative exercise's activities to review and report on what has been done. In this way, the process of identifying positive and negative issues, achieving or not initial goals, and identifying new practices to improve the education provided is strengthened.

The design and development of a reliable evaluation system are deemed necessary for the modernization of education and the improvement of the quality of the educational project. The establishment of an evaluation system presupposes the examination and definition of its main characteristics, the utilization of historical experience from the efforts to implement corresponding systems in Greece and internationally, and the educational and strategic options it is called upon to serve. The evaluation system is linked to many parameters and contributes positively to critical issues such as the improvement in the quality of education, educational modernization, economic development, and social cohesion.

3. CONCLUSION

The specific project contributed to the fact that the teachers in the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica treat all the students who attend the schools equally but also bring to the school's students from vulnerable social groups who do not attend them and live in West Attica. At the same time, through their participation in the mobilities, they will understand the different learning and social needs of the students who attend the modern school units of intercultural education and general education of the Directorate. They will implement practical cross-curricular activities to empower children with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They will cooperate more effectively with the family of refugees and immigrants. They will recognize models of multiculturalism/diversity management applied in education and will express critically about them.

Therefore, the specific program was successfully implemented, as evidenced by the quantitative and qualitative surveys carried out during and after the completion of the project. In addition, it responded to the current needs of the schools of the Directorate of Secondary Education of West Attica. Its results will be both short-term and long-term. They will contribute to the elimination of gender and racial discrimination, to the reduction of delinquency, to the resolution of the social and economic problems plaguing the region, and to the achievement of social cohesion and social justice.

Investigations of the association of gender and school dropout and social and cultural characteristics with school dropout could be done. Quantitative research could also be implemented with the same purpose.

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