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Multiculturalism, prejudice, and teachers' expectations for the acculturation strategies of the refugee students

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Abstract

Research objectives (aims) and problem(s): Ongoing migration flows in Greece continue to increase the cultural diversity of the student population and heighten the need to include refugee students in the educational system. The aim of this study is to assess teachers' attitudes toward intercultural relations in the school context, focusing on their views on multiculturalism, their prejudices toward refugees, and their expectations regarding the acculturation of refugee students.

Research methods: This study employs a quantitative methodology and a synchronic research design. A total of 155 teachers participated by completing a questionnaire composed of the Multicultural Ideology Scale (Berry, 2017), a Prejudice Scale, and the Acculturation Expectations Scale (Berry, 2017). Data analysis was carried out on three levels: first, descriptive statistics were applied to outline response distribution and key sample characteristics; second, correlations between variables were examined; and finally, regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of independent variables on dependent ones, allowing for interpretation of potential causal relationships.

Process of argumentation: Teachers, as members of the majority group, exert considerable influence in shaping the school environment. Based on this premise, the study investigates teachers' attitudes toward multiculturalism, their prejudices toward refugees, and their expectations regarding the acculturation strategies that refugee students should adopt. Promoting multiculturalism within schools can contribute to intercultural interaction and support the development

of equal relationships. Furthermore, greater understanding of acculturation strategies can improve the management of educational challenges related to refugee populations, thus encouraging an inclusive educational environment.

Research findings and their impact on the development of educational sciences: The study found that teachers in Greece generally acknowledge and accept cultural diversity and exhibit low levels of prejudice toward refugees. They tend to favor integration and assimilation strategies over separation. Multiculturalism was shown to support integration and assimilation, while prejudice was associated with a preference for separation. Regression analysis confirmed that multicultural attitudes reduce prejudice and promote integration, whereas prejudice increases support for separation. Embracing multiculturalism in the school context facilitates intercultural contact and strengthens relationships between students and teachers. Understanding acculturation expectations is critical, as it directly influences the educational and psychological adjustment of refugee students. Teachers who support integration can help prevent conflict in multicultural classrooms.

Conclusions and/or recommendations: Acculturation is a dynamic process shaped by two interacting conditions. This study examines teachers' expectations regarding the acculturation strategies of refugee students. However, it remains unclear to what extent refugees are able to voluntarily choose or consent to a particular strategy, as their freedom to do so is often limited. Refugee students may shift between strategies in response to their evolving needs and external demands. Importantly, integration or assimilation should not be viewed as the only culturally legitimate options.

Introduction

In Europe (specifically in the countries of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, and Spain), migration flows between 2016 and the beginning of November 2020 amounted to 927,715 refugees, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). In Greece alone, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Asylum Department, the number of refugees entering the mainland during 2014–2015 is estimated at 904,948 (861,630 refugees in 2015 and 43,318 refugees in 2014). For the subsequent years (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020) up to November 2, 2020, the International Organization for Migration estimates that 346,012 refugees entered Greece, either by sea or by land. These

refugees primarily came from Afghanistan (38%), Syria (24%), Congo (11%), Iraq (about 4%), and Palestine (3.7%).

During the data collection period of this survey (January to February 2021), migration flows had decreased by up to 92% compared to January 2020 (292 arrivals vs. 3,713 arrivals). Accommodation facilities are being shut down as the asylum process accelerates. The Ministry of Migration and Asylum is proceeding with returns and relocations (according to a publication from the Ministry of Migration and Asylum: <https://migration.gov.gr/enimerotiko-ianouariou-2021/>). All these continuous migratory flows in Greece have increased both the diversity of the student population and the need to include refugee students in the educational process. The coexistence of individuals from diverse cultural and ethno-cultural backgrounds in schools requires maintaining a balance between academic performance and social adaptation. This balance will help avoid the development of crises that could later be transferred and manifest more broadly in society. Given their role as members of the majority group, teachers have a significant influence in this context. Based on this assumption, issues arise concerning teachers' attitudes toward multiculturalism, their prejudices toward refugees, and their expectations regarding the acculturation strategies followed by refugee students.

The idea of multiculturalism encompasses the acceptance of cultural diversity (Berry & Kalin, 1995) and promotes the inclusion of members of immigrant groups (Lebedeva & Tatarko, 2013). In other words, multiculturalism refers to a relational framework oriented toward the cultural heterogeneity of society members who interact with individuals from other cultures (Berry, 2017; Schalk-Soekar & Van de Vijver, 2008). These individuals are motivated to form groups in which the distinctive features of their cultural heritage are preserved, rather than absorbed into the melting pot of the majority group (Batkina et al., 2021; Lebedeva & Tatarko, 2013). The key characteristics of multiculturalism include the preservation of cultural diversity, intergroup contact, and the willingness to engage in mutual change (Berry, 2017; Lebedeva & Tatarko, 2013).

According to Kessler et al. (2010), prejudice in itself shapes emotional reactions, as prejudiced attitudes often develop before individuals have

had any actual contact with out-group members. Hartley and Pedersen (2015) highlight the value and role of emotions as predictors of intergroup behavior and attitudes. They also emphasize the importance of measuring emotions, as these provide a wide range of insights into how out-groups are perceived. This range helps to understand the majority's reactions toward the out-group in a given situation. According to Intergroup Emotion Theory (Smith, 1993), the emotional response triggered by intergroup evaluations causes tendencies for specific intergroup behaviors. The more distinct the emotions experienced by group members, the more distinct their attitudes and/or behavioral intentions (Mackie et al., 2008).

Acculturation is the process of direct cross-cultural contact and the adaptation of an individual to a new culture (Pavlopoulos, 2018). During this process, all parties involved adopt specific strategies for cross-cultural interaction (Berry, 1997). According to John Berry's model (1997, 2011), the preferences expressed by members of the majority group regarding the desired acculturation strategies of minority group members are termed "acculturation expectations." These expectations include four preferences commonly held by majority members: the "melting pot" or "pressure cooker," which refers to a preference for the assimilation strategy (no to cultural identity maintenance, yes to interaction); separation, which indicates a preference for the separation strategy (yes to cultural identity maintenance, no to interaction); exclusion, which represents a preference for the marginalization strategy (no to cultural identity maintenance, no to interaction); and multiculturalism, which reflects a preference for the integration strategy (yes to cultural identity maintenance, yes to interaction). The latter reflects the view of cultural diversity as a dominant characteristic of society (Berry, 1997, 2011).

Previous findings

In research by Lopez and Vazquez (2006) and Beremenyi (2011), teachers' prejudices toward specific minority groups appeared to affect the academic success and adjustment of minority group students. In Zembylas'

(2010) study, Cypriot teachers were reportedly disturbed by the presence of Turkish Cypriot students in the classroom due to historical reasons. Zembylas (2010) concluded that Cypriot teachers were unable to manage student population diversity and multiculturalism effectively.

According to Makarova and Herzog's (2013) survey, most teachers – around 55% – expected culturally diverse students to adopt the separation strategy, while 36% believed that the desired acculturation strategy was integration. In Eisikovits' (2008) study, two teacher profiles were identified: those who reported an inability to manage or change their assimilationist attitudes in their usual educational practices, and those who struggled to work with culturally diverse students and displayed a degree of marginalization. According to Makarova and Birman (2016), students from other cultural backgrounds face a monocultural school system, teachers' tendencies, and pressure toward assimilation and overall homogenization. This conclusion is also supported by Tabatadze and Gorgadze's (2017) research, in which teachers perceived the cultural diversity of their student population as a problem and therefore used assimilationist approaches to manage their multicultural classrooms.

In Greece, a study by Motti-Stefanidi et al. (2008) found that teachers rated more highly the performance and adjustment of immigrant students who reported stronger engagement with Greek culture. In contrast, maintaining ethnic culture did not appear to positively influence teachers' ratings. This suggests that teachers tend to prefer students who assimilate into the host culture, which reflects an assimilationist ideology (melting pot). The authors point out that this may be because the Greek educational system, like others, operates on the basis of assimilationist models, promoting engagement with the host culture rather than the preservation of cultural diversity. This finding reinforces the importance of multicultural awareness and the need to strengthen integration policies that recognize and respect the multiple cultural identities of migrant students. The authors highlight the need for further research on teachers' acculturation expectations in relation to their immigrant students. Understanding these expectations is critical, as they can influence both teachers' attitudes toward students and the educational

and psychological adjustment of migrant students in the school environment.

A study by Sapountzis (2013) highlights the coexistence of both positive and negative attitudes toward immigrants and their acculturation. On the one hand, positive views are expressed regarding immigrants' contributions to society and the importance of integrating them through education. However, these views are often accompanied by suggestions to restrict their rights or to implement separation strategies – such as the proposal to create separate schools for migrant children in order to avoid “lowering” the overall standard of education. This contradiction reflects deeper social and ideological tensions. The acceptance of immigrants as members of society coexists with the fear that their presence may threaten cultural and social cohesion. Thus, while integration and assimilation may be advocated in principle, in practice strategies that reinforce separation and exclusion are often adopted.

In Pavlopoulos and Motti-Stefanidi's (2017) survey, integration emerges as the main acculturation strategy for Greeks, with 35.6% of participants preferring it and assigning it the highest mean score ($M = 3.94$), which indicates high overall acceptance. Marginalization is the next most common strategy, with 27.6% of respondents selecting it as their primary approach, although it has only a moderate mean level of acceptability ($M = 2.30$). Separation is chosen as the main strategy by just 15.4% of participants, but it has a slightly higher mean ($M = 2.41$), suggesting that although it is not frequently selected, it is not entirely rejected either. Finally, assimilation is selected by 21.4% of respondents but receives the lowest mean score ($M = 1.97$), which indicates that it is not generally well accepted, even among those who prefer it as a dominant strategy.

In Figgou and Baka's (2018) research, an interesting contradiction emerges in teachers' discourse: on the one hand, teachers reject assimilation as an acculturation strategy, viewing it as problematic when students are overly eager to abandon their mother tongue and identification with their country of origin. On the other hand, they believe that similarity to Greek students – in terms of language, habits, and general behavior – is necessary to achieve harmonious interpersonal relationships

in the school environment. As a result, students with an immigrant background are asked to balance between two opposing demands: a) to maintain their own cultural identity, and b) to resemble their Greek classmates in order to integrate smoothly into the school setting.

The findings of Fili and Pavlopoulos' (2024) research indicate that the Greek educational system remains largely monocultural, which poses challenges to the successful integration of refugee children. Teachers report deficiencies in training, facilities, and appropriate teaching resources, while students' acculturation is affected by factors such as language barriers, acceptance by the local community, and their families' living conditions. The pandemic has further contributed to these integration challenges, with distance learning proving particularly inadequate for refugee populations due to the lack of technological resources and internet access. Teachers emphasize the importance of better intercultural education, increased psychosocial support for students, and closer collaboration with families. Despite the obstacles, it is noted that a supportive and welcoming school environment can greatly facilitate the successful integration of refugee students.

All this evidence, combined with the widely held belief that school is a microcosm of society, highlights the importance of examining the present field and the primary context in which the process of acculturation occurs and "unfolds" (Makarova, 't Gilde, & Birman, 2019). Accordingly, this paper aims to assess teachers' attitudes and views on intercultural relations in the school setting, with a focus on their views on multiculturalism, their prejudices toward refugees, and their acculturation expectations. The research questions explored in this paper are as follows:

- What are teachers' views on multiculturalism?
- What are teachers' prejudices toward refugees?
- What are teachers' acculturation expectations for refugee students?
- What are the relationships between multiculturalism, prejudice, and teachers' acculturation expectations?
- How do multiculturalism and teachers' prejudices toward refugees predict acculturation expectations for refugee students?

Method

Participants

The target population from which the sample was drawn consisted of teachers working in primary schools (where 70% of refugee students are enrolled, compared to approximately 30% in secondary education, according to UNHCR, 2019 mixed indicators). The sampling method used was non-probability sampling, specifically snowball sampling. Data collection took place between January 18 and February 12, 2021. The quantitative data were compiled in an Excel file and then processed and analyzed using SPSS Statistics 25.

The research instrument was accompanied by an introductory note, in accordance with ethical guidelines, outlining the purpose of the research and ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, to strengthen the validity of the findings. The note also clarified that participation was voluntary, involved no financial compensation, and could be discontinued at any time. Table 1 presents the demographic data of the 155 teachers who participated in the survey. The majority of respondents were female ($n = 137$, 88.4%), and 91.6% ($n = 142$) reported having students from diverse ethno-cultural backgrounds.

Procedure and Measures

The Multicultural Ideology Scale

In this study, the concept of multiculturalism was approached from a psychological perspective – as an attitude associated with multicultural ideology – and refers to the recognition of a culturally heterogeneous society (conceptualization). To this end, the Multicultural Ideology Scale was used, as proposed and applied in Berry's MIRIPS project (2017) on intercultural relations between majority and minority groups. The scale primarily measures the dimension of cultural preservation (recognition of different ethnic origins), rather than group equality (operationalization) (Pavlopoulos & Motti-Stefanidi, 2017).

The scale was translated and standardized in Greek – using the back-translation method – by Pavlopoulos and Motti-Stefanidi (2017). The only adaptation made was the substitution of the term “migrant” with “refugee.” The Multicultural Ideology Scale consists of 10 declarative statements measuring the degree of agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale. Five of these statements are negatively worded, while the other five are positively worded. During data processing, the negative items were reverse-coded to align conceptually with the positive ones.

The Prejudice Scale

This study employed a five-point Likert scale to measure six emotional responses. Three emotions were positive (admire, trust, like), and three were negative (feel angry, irritated, annoyed) (Dijker, 1987; Kessler et al., 2010; Zagefka et al., 2014). The scale ranged from “not at all” to “very much,” with teacher respondents indicating the intensity of each emotion. To further assess teachers’ behavioral intentions – specifically their willingness for social contact or desire for distance from the target group (i.e., refugees) – two additional statements were included. These measured respondents’ attitudes and intentions toward overt behavior involving members of the refugee group:

“I would like to live next door to refugees.”

“I would feel discomfort if I had to work with a teacher from the refugee group.”

To maintain consistency, items representing positive emotions and intentions were reverse-coded so that the overall scale measured negative emotional responses.

Table 1. Demographic data of teachers (N = 155)

Participant Characteristics		v	%
Gender	Female	137	88.4%
	Male	18	11.6%
Age	23-30 years old	30	19.4%
	31-40 years old	58	37.4%
	41-50 years old	39	25.2%
	51-60 years old	27	17.4%
	61 years and over	1	0.6%
Level of education	Bachelor's degree from a Pedagogical Academy	17	11.0%
	Pedagogical Academy degree with completed degree equivalence program	7	4.5%
	Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy	55	35.5%
	Second (additional) degree	5	3.2%
	Master's degree in Intercultural Education	5	3.2%
	Master's degree in another field	63	40.6%
	Doctoral degree	3	1.9%
Teaching experience	Up to 5 years	39	25.2%
	6 to 10 years	20	12.9%
	11 to 20 years	62	40.0%
	Over 21 years	34	21.9%
Have you had students from different ethno-cultural groups?	No	13	8.4%
	Yes	142	91.6%

The Acculturation Expectations Scale

In this study, the participating teachers clarified their expectations regarding the acculturation strategies that refugee students should adopt. As outlined in Berry's theoretical framework, teachers' expectations comprise two elements: their attitudes and their behaviors (Berry, 2017). In order to measure these expectations, the study used a scale reflecting

majority group expectations for minority group acculturation strategies, as employed in Berry's MIRIPS project (2017). This scale was translated and standardized into Greek – using the back-translation method – by Pavlopoulos and Motti-Stefanidi (2017). The only modification was replacing the word “migrant” with “refugee student.” The scale consists of 16 items (grouped into four subscales), rated on a 5-point Likert scale to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement. Items 1, 4, 8, and 14 assess separation; items 5, 9, 15, and 16 assess integration; items 6, 10, 11, and 12 assess assimilation; items 2, 3, 7, and 13 assess marginalization.

Reliability

The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α). The Multicultural Ideology scale demonstrated very high reliability ($\alpha = 0.887$). Similarly, the Prejudice scale also showed a very high level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.916$). However, unacceptable reliability values were observed for the dimensions of the Acculturation Expectations scale. Therefore, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted. To assess the suitability of the data, Bartlett's test and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy were used. According to Fabrigar and Wegener (2011), EFA is appropriate when the KMO value exceeds 0.7 and Bartlett's test is statistically significant ($p < \alpha = 0.05$).

Factor extraction was performed using Oblimin rotation, and the number of factors was determined based on the eigenvalue criterion. Items were assigned to factors using factor loadings; according to Thompson (2004), factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 are retained, and loadings above 0.3 are considered acceptable. The factor analysis revealed three factors for the Acculturation Expectations Scale: Separation (items: 2, 3, 4, 6); Assimilation (items: 7, 10, 12; all reverse-coded); Integration (items: 14, 15, 16; item 14 reverse-coded). The Separation subscale showed an acceptable level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.673$). The Assimilation subscale showed good reliability ($\alpha = 0.705$), and the Integration subscale also demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = 0.742$).

Results

Statistics and data analysis

Descriptive analysis results

The analysis revealed that the teachers who participated in the survey exhibited a moderate to high level of multicultural ideology ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.78$, $Mdn = 3.80$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, the results showed that the participating teachers demonstrated a low level of prejudice toward refugees ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 0.78$, $Mdn = 2.13$, $p < 0.05$). Similar findings were reported in the study by Zagefka et al. (2014), where the prejudice scale scores were 2.58 and 2.66 at two separate points of measurement. Therefore, it is expected that the mediating role of these positive emotions may positively influence teachers' preferences for the desired acculturation strategies for refugee students, as these emotions are known to be significant predictors of behavioral tendencies among majority group members (Lopez-Rodriguez et al., 2015).

Regarding teachers' acculturation expectations for refugee students, the findings showed the following mean values: separation ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.73$, $Mdn = 1.75$, $p < 0.05$), assimilation ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.75$, $Mdn = 4.33$, $p < 0.05$), and integration ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.62$, $Mdn = 4.67$, $p < 0.05$). These results suggest that teachers believe that refugee students should, to a large extent, be integrated and assimilated into the host culture and, to a lesser extent, remain separated from it. To determine whether the difference between the mean values of assimilation and integration was statistically significant, a paired-samples t-test was conducted, as the two samples are dependent. The results indicated that the difference between assimilation ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.75$) and integration ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.62$) was statistically significant ($t(N-1) = -5.38$, $p < 0.001$), with an effect size of Cohen's $d = 0.43$. Although the effect size was small-to-moderate, the results indicate a meaningful preference for integration over assimilation among teachers. However, this statistically significant yet small difference may reflect more complex underlying attitudes, as discussed below.

Variable correlation results

Due to non-normality in most variables and the presence of outliers, the use of Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was deemed more appropriate than Pearson's correlation coefficient. The analysis revealed that multicultural ideology was negatively associated with teachers' support for separation and positively associated with their support for both assimilation and integration of refugee students. Likewise, prejudice toward refugees was positively associated with support for separation and negatively associated with support for assimilation and integration. Full correlation results are presented in Table 2.

Regression analysis

This section presents the results of the regression analysis examining whether multicultural ideology significantly predicts teachers' prejudice toward refugees and their expectations regarding acculturation strategies for refugee students. First, key regression assumptions such as linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity – were tested. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to assess the normality of the residuals, and the results indicated that the data did not follow a normal distribution. However, this is less critical with a large sample size (>30 observations), in accordance with the Central Limit Theorem. Given the sample size of 155 participants, the deviation from normality is not considered a serious issue for linear regression, as the model remains stable. The Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.10, which is close to the ideal value of 2, indicating no problems with autocorrelation of residuals.

The analysis showed a violation of the assumption of homoscedasticity, as the Breusch-Pagan test yielded $p < 0.05$, indicating heteroscedasticity – i.e., the residuals do not have constant variance. This may affect the accuracy of estimates and statistical inferences. To address this issue, robust standard errors were applied. The results showed that teachers' multicultural ideology significantly predicted their prejudice toward refugees ($F = 130.0$, $p = 0.00$). Multicultural ideology explained 55.8% of the variance in teachers' prejudice ($R^2 = 0.558$). Specifically, a higher level of multicultural ideology was associated with lower levels

of prejudice toward refugees ($b = -0.74$, $t = -11.40$, $p = 0.00$). Regarding the dependent variable “integration,” the analysis showed that multicultural ideology was a significant predictor of teachers’ expectations of refugee integration ($F = 13.73$, $p = 0.00$). It accounted for 11.1% of the variance in these expectations ($R^2 = 0.111$). Higher multicultural ideology scores were associated with stronger support for refugee integration ($b = 0.26$, $t = 3.70$, $p = 0.00$).

For the dependent variable “separation,” the analysis showed that multicultural ideology also significantly predicted teachers’ expectations of refugee separation ($F = 8.59$, $p = 0.003$) and explained 8.1% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.081$). Higher multicultural ideology was associated with lower agreement with refugee separation ($b = -0.26$, $t = -2.93$, $p = 0.004$). Finally, the analysis demonstrated that multicultural ideology significantly predicted teachers’ expectations of refugee assimilation ($F = 19.53$, $p = 0.00$), accounting for 12.7% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.127$). Higher levels of multicultural ideology were associated with greater support for refugee assimilation ($b = 0.34$, $t = 4.41$, $p = 0.00$).

Table 2. Correlation between survey variables

		Separation	Assimilation	Integration	Multicultural Ideology	Prejudice
Separation	Spearman r	1.000	-.395**	-.366**	-.262**	.257**
	p	.	.000	.000	.001	.001
	v	155	155	155	155	155
Assimilation	Spearman r	-.395**	1.000	.491**	.371**	.316**
	p	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	v	155	155	155	155	155
Integration	Spearman r	-.366**	.491**	1.000	.314**	-.290**
	p	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	v	155	155	155	155	155
Multicultural Ideology	Spearman r	-.262**	.371**	.314**	1.000	-.750**
	p	.001	.000	.000	.	.000
	v	155	155	155	155	155

		Separation	Assimilation	Integration	Multicultural Ideology	Prejudice
Prejudice	Spearman r	.257**	-.316**	-.290**	-.750**	1.000
	p	.001	.000	.000	.000	.
	v	155	155	155	155	155

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level

Second, the issues of non-normality and heteroscedasticity identified in the previous set of variables are also present here. The Shapiro-Wilk test showed a non-normal distribution of the residuals ($p < 0.05$), while the Breusch-Pagan test revealed heteroscedasticity in some cases. To address these issues, robust standard errors were used to ensure the accuracy and validity of the results. The analysis showed that teachers' prejudice toward refugees was a significant predictor of their expectations regarding refugee integration ($F = 11.41$, $p < 0.001$). Teachers' prejudice explained 10.5% of the variability in their views on refugee integration ($R^2 = 0.105$). The results indicate that a higher level of teacher prejudice is associated with a lower level of agreement with refugee integration ($b = -0.25$, $t = -3.37$, $p < 0.001$).

Additionally, the analysis showed that teachers' prejudice toward refugees was a significant predictor of their views on refugee separation ($F = 8.89$, $p = 0.003$). Teacher prejudice explained 6.7% of the variability in their views on refugee separation ($R^2 = 0.067$). The results indicate that a higher level of prejudice is associated with greater agreement with refugee separation ($b = 0.24$, $t = 2.98$, $p = 0.003$). Furthermore, the analysis indicated that teachers' prejudice toward refugees was a significant predictor of their views on refugee assimilation ($F = 12.72$, $p < 0.001$). Teacher prejudice explained 7.6% of the variability in their views on refugee assimilation ($R^2 = 0.076$). The results indicate that a higher level of prejudice is associated with lower agreement with refugee assimilation ($b = -0.26$, $t = -3.56$, $p < 0.001$).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess teachers' attitudes regarding intercultural relations in the school context, focusing on the idea of multiculturalism, their prejudice toward refugees, and their expectations for refugee students' acculturation. Regarding the research question on multiculturalism within the framework of multicultural ideology, positive tendencies were identified. Teachers seem to recognize and accept cultural diversity in Greek society. Considering Murdock and Ferrings's (2016) research, which links high levels of acceptance of multiculturalism with high educational capital, this finding may be attributed to the high educational capital that teachers possess. The strong negative correlation between multiculturalism and prejudice suggests that the more teachers acknowledge cultural heterogeneity in society, the less prejudice they express toward members of other cultural groups. This is supported by the regression model, which showed that approximately 56% of the variance in prejudice is explained by multicultural ideology.

In the study by Pavlopoulos and Motti-Stefanidi (2017), intercultural contact was found to reduce prejudice and increase acceptance of multiculturalism. Similarly, in the present study, a large percentage of teachers (91.6%) reported having students from diverse cultural backgrounds, which indicates frequent contact with diversity. This may have contributed to more positive attitudes toward multiculturalism (contact hypothesis). Furthermore, the findings suggest that teachers who display positive attitudes toward students from different cultural backgrounds and toward cultural diversity are more likely to avoid the separation strategy and instead promote the strategies of integration and assimilation. In other words, advocates of multiculturalism are unlikely to favor the separation of cultural groups.

Regarding the research question about teachers' prejudice, the findings showed that teachers evaluated the refugee group quite positively. It is expected that teachers' positive emotions help resolve issues that arise within school and social systems by encouraging a desire for dialogue and constructive intergroup behavior (Lopez-Rodriguez et al.,

2015). Moreover, both the integration and assimilation strategies were negatively associated with prejudice – which means that the greater the prejudice, the more desirable the separation strategy becomes for members of the majority group. In contrast to multiculturalism, prejudice appears to have the opposite effect: it reinforces separation and discourages both assimilation and integration.

Given the ecological context during data collection – migration flows had decreased by up to 92%, the asylum process had accelerated, and the Ministry of Immigration had moved forward with returns and relocations – this could be interpreted as a period of increased cultural security. It is likely that participants did not feel threatened by migration flows, which may explain the coexistence of high acceptance of multiculturalism and low levels of prejudice. According to Pavlopoulos and Motti-Stefanidi (2017), cultural security is positively associated with multiculturalism and negatively associated with prejudice.

Concerning the research question related to teachers' expectations about refugee students' acculturation strategies, the present study showed that teachers prefer the integration strategy for refugee students. This finding is in line with the results of Pavlopoulos and Motti-Stefanidi (2017). However, with a slight difference, teachers also expressed support for the strategy of assimilation. This second preference, as shown here, is linked to ideologies that reflect assimilationist tendencies, whereas the integration strategy does not require refugee students to relinquish or reject their identities (Hoti et al., 2017; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006).

Although the assimilation strategy – often associated with the formation of a cultural melting pot – may seem like the most pragmatic approach, helping students from “other” backgrounds adapt more easily to the school environment and succeed academically by conforming to majority norms (Baysu et al., 2011), Berry's (2017) theoretical framework on the integration hypothesis suggests that integration is actually the most beneficial. It promotes both the psychosocial adjustment and academic achievement of culturally diverse students. Additionally, the moderately positive correlation between assimilation and integration ($r = 0.49$) suggests that these two acculturation strategies may coexist.

The statistically significant, though small, difference between preferences for integration and assimilation may indicate several possibilities:

- a) Teachers may not have a clear or consistent preference between the two strategies. While integration is favored overall, the small difference in preference could indicate that teachers are divided – perhaps preferring integration in some social domains and assimilation in others – or that they perceive the two strategies as relatively similar in certain respects. Alternatively, the minimal gap between integration and assimilation may underlie the production and/or reproduction of more implicit assimilation strategies (Bowskill et al., 2007). Alternatively,
- b) The preference for integration may be more symbolic or theoretical than practical. Teachers might express support for integration because it is viewed as the more socially acceptable position, yet in practice they may still lean toward assimilation, regarding it as a natural outcome of school life (see Figgou & Baka, 2018).
- c) The small difference may indicate the influence of cultural or social pressures (see Zembylas, 2010). Teachers may feel pressure to endorse integration while simultaneously experiencing social or institutional norms that favor assimilation. This could result in reluctance to clearly choose one approach over the other, or lead to adopting a middle ground.
- d) Finally, teachers might not view assimilation as the erasure of cultural identity, but rather as a form of integration that promotes social cohesion (see Sapountzis, 2013).

It is important to note that the integration hypothesis argues that the successful integration of minority groups is achieved through the maintenance of their cultural identity while actively participating in the new society (Berry, 2017). In the school environment, therefore, linguistic diversity should not be seen as a barrier, but rather as a valuable asset to learning. This implies that teaching should incorporate students' diverse linguistic experiences, using both the mother tongue of culturally diverse students and the school's language of instruction. Rather than treating this as

a simple transition from one language to another, schools should promote bilingualism and multilingualism as skills that enhance both cognitive development and communicative competence.

At the same time, education should preserve students' cultural identity without requiring them to abandon their cultural heritage. Through targeted teaching practices and cultural activities, schools can promote the social inclusion of all students, regardless of their linguistic or cultural background (Tsioli & Androulakis, 2024). Beyond language and cultural identity, and in accordance with Berry's model, the process of change also involves cognitive styles, personality traits, attitudes, and acculturation stress experienced by the parties involved (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). The importance of policy development that ensures equal representation of all groups in every dimension of daily life should be emphasized. As mentioned above, the measurement of multiculturalism through the multicultural ideology scale focuses mainly on cultural preservation and the recognition of diverse ethnic backgrounds, but does not sufficiently account for group equality or how it can be implemented in practice.

Overall, validating the idea of multiculturalism – when rooted in the school context and not applied in a vacuum – creates many opportunities for intercultural contact. More specifically, it fosters an environment in which intercultural interactions, and subsequently intercultural relationships, can develop between the involved parties (Stogianni & Murdock, 2018). Understanding acculturation expectations is crucial, as these expectations can influence the educational and psychological adjustment of refugee students in the school setting (Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2008). Teachers who adopt an integration strategy and demonstrate inclusive tendencies are more likely to prevent conflicts among students when they arise in multicultural classrooms (Makarova & Herzog, 2013).

Conclusion

It is important to note that the process of acculturation is grounded in two dynamic conditions. In this study, teachers' expectations regarding acculturation strategies for refugee students were identified. However,

what remains to be examined is the extent to which refugees are willing or able to choose or consent to a particular strategy – especially considering that they often lack the freedom of choice (Pavlopoulos & Motti-Stefanidi, 2017; Zagefka et al., 2014). Regardless of the strategy that refugee students adopt at any given time – and given that individuals may shift from one strategy to another depending on emerging needs or demands in intra-individual, interpersonal, intergroup, and intercultural contexts (Berry, 2017) – their consent (or lack thereof) to integration or assimilation should not be regarded as the only culturally legitimate approach.

The findings of this study raise two important questions: (a) How significant are these attitudes to teachers themselves? and (b) To what extent are teachers genuinely committed to these attitudes? More specifically, how willing are they to embrace and support the evolving culture of the group to which they belong?

Limit of the research and future prospective

One limitation, commonly associated with questionnaire-based data collection using Likert or Likert-type scales, is the potential for socially desirable responding, which may reduce the authenticity of participants' answers. Another significant limitation concerns the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader teacher population. Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable foundation for discussions about multiculturalism, prejudice toward refugees, and teachers' expectations regarding the acculturation strategies of refugee students within the Greek school system. It encourages further exploration of intercultural dynamics, educational policy, and classroom practice among key stakeholders.

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