
AVIOR CASE STUDY REPORT

- GREECE

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Introduction: The setting of the case study

According to research, parent participation and involvement have a positive effect on the cognitive development and performance of children.

However for some parents there might be barriers to participate. One of them might be that all the materials used in schools are in a language parents can't understand. And how to help your children with mathematic exercises or reading, when you don't understand the instruction language?!

AVIOR aims to encourage and provide the use of multilingual material. Also the development of the self-esteem of children through language development etc. through the use of multilingual materials is of great importance.

In addition, the successful collaboration between parents and schools to promote multilingualism through adequate materials is another important goal.

In this line, the ultimate goal of AVIOR material use was to involve parents with a migrant background more in their children's learning processes in schools, to create greater awareness of their children's learning process.

The schools' profile

The schools that we chose for this case study are the 64th Primary School of Thessaloniki and the 95th Kindergarten of Thessaloniki.

This case study took place from 10th October 2018, that was the first meeting with the teachers that were involved in the case study, until 28th February 2019, that was the last meeting.

In total, 6 main meetings took place, with the teachers and the parents that were involved in the case study. In addition, there were separate meetings for closer collaboration¹ with the teachers during the implementation of the case study. During the last meeting, discussions with the teachers and parents that participated about the whole project took place; all the involved parties shared their experiences.

These schools were chosen for the following reasons: first, the most important reason is that the Head Teacher and the teachers of these schools have shown a strong commitment and passion for their work, for continuous learning and progress; this was a strong motive for us to collaborate with these people. Secondly, these two schools are housed on the same building, which is located in the western part of Thessaloniki. This is an area near to the industrial zone of the city and the inhabitants of this area belong mostly to the working class and also in many different minority groups. Specifically, in this area of the city families with migrant and refugee background are installed. Thus, these schools have multicultural and multilingual populations. Given that these schools share the same building also with two Special Education schools, the educational personnel treats diversity in a very interesting way.

It's important to mention some things about the functioning of the 64th Primary School, which shows its very good relation with the migrant and refugee student population. As the Head Teacher of the Primary School, Mr. Georgos Kalfopoulos, told us since the first refugee children came to school, about three years ago, i.e. in 2016, a strong relationship was developed between them and the teachers. Most of the school employees felt responsible to give these children a second chance in life and tried their best to make them feel welcome to the new environment.

¹ On behalf of the University of Western Macedonia (UoWM), the Scientific Coordinator Dr. Nektaria Palaiologou would like to thank the Head Teacher of Primary School, Mr. Kalfopoulos, the teacher of the 95th Kindergarten School Mrs Galini Dermizoglou for the very good collaboration. In the frame of this collaboration, special permission was given to the student Miss Myrto Dina to use part of the AVIOR material in order to accomplish a final assignment to acquire her master degree.

Especially, the tragic stories that most of the children and the parents had to tell about their life in the battle fields in their home countries or the great difficulties they faced in their escape through the sea was something that really touched everybody's heart. As a result, the teachers along with the Head Teacher were trying to do their best to help them adjust to the new school environment. Whenever a family was accepted in another European country a small celebration was taking place in the class so that both teachers and schoolmates would have a chance to wish the best to the children that were leaving. All these actions that took place show the strong commitment that the school had to the refugee children and to their families.

Reception classes at the 64th Primary School of Thessaloniki

At the 64th Primary School of Thessaloniki during the school year 2018-19 two types of Reception Classes were functioning.

These Reception Classes aimed at reducing early school leavers from vulnerable social groups and students with cultural and religious differences, as well as improving learning outcomes, especially in literacy and numeracy. In this way, migrant students could be able to cope with the school curriculum, to remain within the education system by completing their studies.

Also, these Reception Classes aimed at educating and smoothly adapting refugee children. In particular, the teachers who hosted the Reception Classes had as their main aim the learning of the Greek language as well as the teaching support to other subjects. The main aim was to facilitate the smooth adaptation process for all those different pupils coming from various vulnerable social groups.

Especially for the education of pupils who do not have the necessary knowledge of the Greek language, i.e. Roma, Repatriates, Refugees, Vulnerable Social Groups etc., a flexible scheme of institutional and teaching intervention has been provided in the context of intercultural education, at each school unit, taking into consideration the actual educational needs of these pupils and their abilities to choose the scheme that can provide them with additional teaching support, to help them adjust and fully integrated into regular classes in which they are registered, according to the legislation.

Particularly:

The program of these Refugee Host Classes began in September 2017 and included two different types that were included in the school timetable:

- ▶ Reception Classes type I
- ▶ Reception Classes type II

Refugee students with little or no knowledge of the Greek language are studying at Reception Classes type I. There is an intensive program of learning the Greek language. Students at the same time attend some courses in the regular class, such as: Physical Education, Art Education, Music Education and another second language, according to the decision of the school's teachers committee. Attendance at type I class, lasts one academic year with the possibility of extension.

Students (Immigrants and Roma) with a medium level of Greek language are studying at TY II, which may cause difficulties in attending courses in the normal classroom; relevant support is provided in the Greek language.

The main purpose of the Reception Classes is to help students to keep some contact with the mainstream class. Unfortunately, during the school year, the student's participation in the Reception Class can be interrupted by a decision from the teachers' committee, after relevant recommendation from the mainstream teacher.

At the aforementioned two schools we collaborated with the teacher of the Reception Class of the 64th Primary School, Mrs. Natassa, also with the kindergarten teacher of the 95th Kindergarten, Mrs. Galini.

From these classes, four parents were involved; specifically, two parents from Albania, one from Iran and one Turkish speaking Roma. During our collaboration with the teachers and the parents of these schools, concerning the results of the case study, we used individual questionnaires which were different for the two groups and also we frequently did in situ observations in the two classrooms, by using observation sheets, where we could discuss and collaborate with the teachers more efficiently and also watch the children's progress throughout the implementation of the case study.

In fact, the implementation of the action research method as it was proposed couldn't work with the research groups in our case study, mostly because parents did not feel confident about their language awareness and skills in Greek; actually, when we started the case study, they were barely talking, because they felt shy and insecure about their language performance. Therefore, we gave them the material in their mother tongues, which was a great relief for them given that many of them cannot read and understand very well the Greek language, and we asked them to implement the activities that their children did at school by following the instructions of the classrooms' teachers.

The socio-economic background of schools' broader area

The 64th Primary School of Thessaloniki is located in the western part of the city and shares the same building with the 95th Kindergarten, the 4th Special Education Primary school, the 10th Special Education Kindergarten and the 30th Middle School. This area is near the industrial zone of Thessaloniki. As a result a great percentage of the inhabitants belong to the working class and to different minority groups. As far as the demographic profile of the student population is concerned the majority of the students come from diverse cultural and linguistic environments. In particular most of the students are immigrants, refugees and Turkish speaking Roma. Some of the students are second generation immigrants, quite competent in the use of Greek language when they enter primary school, while others, especially the refugees, do not speak Greek at all. There are 86 students attending the six grades of primary school and the composition of the student population is the following:

Nationality	Number of students	Percentage of student population
Syria	4	4%
Iraq	9	10%
India	1	1%
Iran	1	1%
Pakistan	1	1%
Roma	21	24%
Nigeria	5	5%
Bulgaria	4	4%
Albania	8	9%
Romania	1	1%
Russia	1	1%
Check	2	2%
Georgia	1	1%
Slovakia	1	1%

Total	60	64%
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The socioeconomic status of the students is quite low since the parents, in most cases, are not well educated and they are unemployed, counting on social benefits in order to survive. The Greek students are also in a low socioeconomic status and their parents are also facing economic difficulties.

The 95th Kindergarten of Thessaloniki has the same demographic profile as the 64th Primary School. There are 21 students attending the kindergarten. The children's age varies from 4 to 6 years of age since pre-kindergarten students are there along with the kindergarten ones and a few older kids that remain to the kindergarten in order to achieve school readiness. In most cases the school readiness is closely connected to their ability to use the Greek language. The composition of the student population is the following: a) 5 students are immigrants (23%), b) 3 are Turkish speaking Roma (14%) and c) 4 are refugees (19%), d) 9 children are Greek (44%).

Case study process

The AVIOR Materials that were used

At the beginning of our collaboration with the teachers we gave them all the materials that were prepared for implementation in the classroom. Firstly, we presented the posters and the word lists, in order to become familiar with this kind of bilingual process.

The bilingual form of the posters enabled the teachers to carry out their lesson through the translanguaging process and enhance an integrated communication with their students. According to the teachers, the posters helped the children to become *“familiar with vocabulary that is necessary in everyday life, gave them the ability to dramatize and exploit the material in a playful way. The illustration attracts the interest of children and contains intercultural elements, and also gave them the possibility to use children words of their mother tongue and connect them with the corresponding Greek”*.

Then, the teachers started using some of the language and math activities; specifically, in the kindergarten classroom they used the “Maths Naturally, Part 1” and “Comparisons” activities and also the language game “Finding the Words”. The Estonian material was very useful for this classroom, as the teacher of the reception class said *“the vocabulary was easy and the*

commands in Greek gave the students the ability to move in the classroom. The most important thing is that it gave the ability to connect phrases with movement, and also the possibility of participation of all children regardless of the level of comprehension in Greek language. Finally, this kind of activity helped to improve understanding of commands and enriching the vocabulary on everyday issues”.

In some cases minor adjustment to some parts of the material had to take place in order to meet the standards of the curriculum for the kindergarten in Greece, that requires the students not to be taught directly how to read and write but gradually to familiarize them to the basic rules of reading and writing.

In the Reception Class, only language lessons are carried out, since the children attend other classes that correspond to their age for all the other lessons. Therefore, we followed the same tactics and we started the Case Study by making the children familiar with the bilingual posters and the word lists. According to the teacher of the reception class *“it was very important that the children could correlate the words in their mother tongues with the Greek ones. It also facilitated our communication with the children that had a great difficulty in understanding even the simplest meanings”*. In this kind of classroom, the teacher is very familiar with the process of translanguaging and code-switching as they constantly try to correlate every new information with the children’s mother tongues. Then, in the Reception Class, they focused on Language Games, and specifically the “Finding the Words” and “Word Puzzles” activities, which were chosen due to the fact that they seemed to be very helpful for the enrichment of students' vocabulary in a playful way, but also there were simple words and meanings that are useful for children. This kind of activities is very easy to be integrated into the curriculum of the Reception Classroom. Finally, the teacher of the Reception Class gave to the students that had a better language awareness the “Chicken Story”. When she was asked why she chose this story, she answered that *“the first reason that I chose this story was the intercultural messages that emerged from that. It was very important for the kids to understand all these principles and meanings that this story offered. Concerning the other teaching objectives of the language lesson, it gave me the opportunity to give the children exercises about comprehension of texts, grammar and syntactic structures”*. The teacher used the story not only for its literary value and the meanings that she wanted to teach to her students, but she also used the text in order to teach grammar and syntactical structures in a natural context.

The materials were used at school by the teachers and they were taught in Greek language. The same activities that were done in school were given to the parents, including some special instructions, in order to do them with their children at home in their mother tongues (Albanian, Turkish and Farsi). What both teachers and parents indicated about the use of the material is that doing all these activities in a playful way was for their children the key to success. The parents referred that through this process their children started feeling more confident

for their skills in Greek language but also had a better understanding for their mother tongues. Something that they really enjoyed was the fact that their children were even able to “teach” them words and phrases in Greek and helped them improve their language performance respectively. It is very important to mention that this process enhanced the relationship not only between the parents with their children but also with the teachers of the schools, as they had very close collaboration. From the aspect of the teachers, this material helped the children to enrich their vocabulary but also improved very much the way that they expressed themselves. Concerning the students of the Reception Class, the students practiced in producing oral and written speech and they were helped to understand the language structures of the languages that they speak and also the meanings and principles that were offered in their classroom. As it has to do with the kindergarten classroom, the students enriched their vocabulary and were given the opportunity to understand the concepts of quantities and site orientation, they practiced their skills in simple operations and enumeration and finally they ended up with a better phonological awareness.

Teacher-parent relationships

It is a priority for the 64th Primary School of Thessaloniki so as for the 95th Kindergarten of Thessaloniki to achieve a close cooperation with the parents of the students, to support the refugee families in every possible way. Every year a number of meetings with the parents are taking place in order the teachers to inform them about the educational program of the school and the progress of their children. In addition the parents are always welcome to talk with the teachers and the head master about any problem or difficulty they face in their family. The school is systematically cooperating closely with social services and nongovernmental organizations in order to support the families in any possible way.

As far as the particular project is concerned, the teachers involved to the project have admitted that the experience was extremely helpful, as it gave them the chance to communicate and cooperate with the parents of the students. They discussed with parents about the application of the material at home, so they gained their trust about the work on acquiring both languages. During these discussions, parents said that the material was interesting and by involving themselves in homework they felt like contributing at children’s education. They also felt that their own children were acceptable within the school environment. In this way, they gave teachers a positive feedback about the material and their work as well.

However, communication with parents was not as frequent or easy as teachers wanted. This fact is attributed to their workload and the level of language awareness of the Greek language. Parents could not overcome these difficulties but they tried to co-operate as much as possible.

In general, both teachers and parents were extremely pleased at this project. Teachers had the opportunity to interact with families from different cultures and understand their way of thinking. On the other hand, parents felt more involved in their children's education.

Obstacles encountered

Since this has been the implementation for first time of a new material in practice, there were a few obstacles in many directions.

First of all, it is very important to mention the fact that the whose children attend this school have a refugee background, which means that they face some really difficult conditions in their lives, mostly concerning their survival. Therefore, it has been of prime importance to assure better living conditions for these families.

In addition, these refugee families feel that they are in a transitional phase and often do not have the motivation to learn the language or to invest in school here. As a result it was difficult to achieve a perfect communication and synergy with the teachers concerning the implementation of the material at home and additionally we could not have a sufficient feedback about what was done at home so that it could work supplementary to what was done at school by the teachers. Moreover, we have to mention that the educational profile combined with their low awareness of Greek language of some of the parents was a factor that was an obstacle for the synergy with the teachers, as they were not able to understand the instructions that were given from the teachers in order to work additionally for the improvement of their children performance at school. In other words, the home literacy of the children was incomplete. The fact that parents do not participate as much as we want is not something they do not want but actually something they cannot do. Although they cooperate with the school and they are supported in many different ways, their weakness in communicating with teachers in Greek concerning the educational procedure makes them ashamed and as a result they avoid coming to school or contacting with the teachers about the program.

Second, we would like to refer to the teachers and our cooperation with them. Teachers invited to implement these programs do not have a permanent link with the structures in which these programs are implemented. Cooperation is impermanent and there is no time for them to be properly trained so that they can work within these structures in the ways they have to. In addition, a great obstacle that occurred in the middle of the program was that the teacher of the Reception Class had to move out to another school and he had to be replaced by another teacher which had to get informed and trained about the AVIOR program from the beginning. This is a very common situation for the Greek school, as there are substitute teachers who are appointed after the start of the school year and they are taking up their duties delayed.

To sum up, in our implementation of this case study there were obstacles that complicated this procedure. Although, the failure to achieve some of our objectives may not be due to the inappropriateness of the material but to external factors that we cannot control or prevent. Due to these factors mentioned above, we had the result that the desired results could not be achieved, without being charged to the quality of the program, but to objective conditions that we cannot control or change, and as a result we had feedback with insufficient data.

Conclusions

The implementation of our case study took part in the 64th Primary School of Thessaloniki so as for the 95th Kindergarten of Thessaloniki, which are two schools that their main population is consisted by children with migrant or refugee background. The teachers and the headteacher of these schools work with great passion and strong commitment, since it is very important for them to support the children of their schools in any possible way.

According to the teachers, based on their experiences from their participation in this case study, the use of this material in cooperation with the parents of their students enforced their already existing cooperation. It is important to refer to their words as both teachers mention that *“communication with parents was a bit difficult due to their workload and the level of language awareness of the Greek language. They tried to co-operate as much as they could and they usually transferred their efforts through children. Given the circumstances, however, I liked the fact that the material brought the children closer to their parents and me and so I went into their own way of thinking”*. As a result of their cooperation the teachers achieved to better understand the ways that they interact with their families but most specifically they mentioned that parents particularly appreciated the extra work that was done with their children. They ultimately felt that their children in collaboration with their teachers are gaining a solid grounding for both languages and they felt even more acceptable within the school environment.

The students reacted to the material with great enthusiasm and that was helped by the fact that they were encouraged to use corresponding words in their native language, which brought great pleasure in their own and particular interest to their classmates. As the teachers mentioned *“the most powerful help of the material was to improve the children's psychology and certainly to the realization that their mother tongue is connected with the Greek and even managed to recognize to a certain extent the way in which these languages are structured, or just spot the differences between them”*.

The main advantage of the implementation of the AVIOR material is that it reinforced the relationship between the children and their parents. It could be concluded that implementing

the multilingual material provided by AVIOR acted as a very good motivation tool for the learning and inclusion of children with migrant or refugee background as well as for their parents' collaboration with the teachers.

APPENDIX: PHOTO GALLERY FROM THE SCHOOL









