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TEACHING LANGUAGES TO STUDENTS FROM REFUGEE AND MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS AROUND EUROPE: EXPLORING DIFFICULTIES AND TEACHERS' BELIEFS

Research Article

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Abstract

This paper presents and discusses the results of a study which investigated the needs, attitudes and beliefs of foreign language teachers of refugees in Greece and other countries of Europe. The research which was conducted in two phases, with the one being the pilot phase, involved approximately 120 teachers who commented on the difficulties that they face in contexts with students from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Students' trauma experiences, lack of schooling experience, behavioral problems, lack of specially designed materials catering for the needs of refugees, and of course the language barrier, were among the most frequently claimed problems. The paper ends with some empirically derived suggestions on how teachers could deal with the challenges related to this new reality.

Keywords: refugee teaching contexts, teacher beliefs, challenges

1. Introduction and motivation for the study

The recent flow of refugees and the urgent need for integration into the European educational context is the main motivation for this study. A report on the education of asylum seekers and refugees by the European Union Agency for Fundamental rights in May 2017 refers to certain challenges that affect the educational system in the European context (EUA for Fundamental Rights, 2017). Some of these challenges were the language barrier, the high turnover, the lack of well-trained teachers, and unmotivated students. Language teachers are usually called upon to act as mediators alleviating the aforementioned problems related to population movement without, however, being given the tools to be successful in their task. This paper discusses the results of a study which investigated the problems, needs and beliefs of foreign language teachers of refugees in Europe with an ultimate view to providing certain suggestions to teachers as to how to deal with the challenges related to multilingual classrooms. After presenting and discussing the data, the paper ends by suggesting ways of alleviating the problems that the teachers encounter in classrooms with students from refugee and migrant backgrounds and specifically in bridging the linguistic and social gaps.

The research has been conducted in two phases involving more than 120 participants. Phase 1, which was seen as a pilot phase, involved English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in public primary schools within the framework of the new Greek refugee schooling program (DYEP schools), teachers who participated in a programme of the Faculty of English Language and Literature of the University of Athens teaching adult refugees and teachers who taught at refugee camps and other non-formal structures in Greece. This paper presents the data derived solely from Phase 2, which involved language teachers in other European countries, as well. Participants responded to a number of closed and open questions

about the problems they face, their previous experience with refugees, the relevant training they have received and their attitudes towards teaching refugees, i.e., whether these have changed or not. The paper ultimately stresses the need to develop new pedagogies and language programmes taking into consideration the ‘mingling-of-languages idea’ (Author 1, 2015, 2018) thus promoting the ‘multi’ idea in a context where multiple languages coexist.

2. Teaching foreign languages to refugees

2.1. The situation nowadays

According to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, refugees are those who have fled their country and are unable to return due to a “fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”. Many of them are not educated at all, which makes the struggle even more difficult for the language teachers, who are in turn desperately trying to find common ground for communication. It seems that there has never been such a big relocation of masses in the modern history of the world and also that these masses come from ongoing war zones. A number of studies in the host countries, such as Turkey, that has also received a vast number of refugees, identify the problematic areas related to these mass relocations (Williams, 2016, Steele, 2017). As a matter of fact, according to the UNHCR (2017), the number of displaced Syrian refugees has surpassed 5.6 million, almost half of them are children –Syria remains the main producer of refugees worldwide because of the multi-year war.

It is estimated by the UN Refugee Agency¹ that in May 2018 more than 60.000 refugees stay in Greece. Various discussions have taken place as to what has caused this vast move of refugees to Greece. The International Rescue Committee, while reporting on the situation in Greece, has mentioned that “this is not a humanitarian crisis, but a political one”². The political analyses, though, do not seem to practically help teachers deal with the difficulties they face in class, in combination with the country’s economic crisis put teachers in the uncomfortable situation of trying to find a solution by themselves.

According to the Greek Government and the Hellenic Ministry of Migration policy report on the rights of international protection applicants and beneficiaries of international protection all asylum applicants’ children have the right in education. In order to meet the educational needs of these refugees, formal and informal educational structures and reception facilities have been created in Greece in different settings and funded by different sources. In April 2017 the Greek Ministry of Education published a report (Ministry of Education of Greece, 2017) on the efficiency of the formal educational structures that took place in public schools. Even though 111 formal educational structures were approved by the Ministry and were set up in public schools throughout Greece with afternoon programmes for young students from refugee backgrounds, the same report discusses a series of problems which came up during running these programmes.

One of the major problems mentioned was the teachers’ lack of experience and adequate training along with their constant change and reshuffling (Ministry of Education of Greece, 2017). In fact, this is the area that this study focuses on as it identifies the problems teachers faced, what was missing, what could have been done differently and ultimately what can be done from now on. According to the Eurydice report (European Commission, 2019, p. 9), it is not a surprise that migrant students generally “underperform and express a lower sense of well-being in school compared to native-born students in most European countries”.

¹<http://www.unhcr.org/greece.html>

²<https://www.rescue.org/country/greece#what-caused-the-crisis-in-greece>

Education does not always seem to be inclusive while the linguistic resources students bring in the classroom are not fully exploited by the teachers or the educational systems.

2.2. The challenges for teachers: relevant research

This section discusses certain problems teachers may face and presents the relevant literature on current teaching methods and approaches to teaching refugees. Given the aim of this research, this will be done with an emphasis on the actual problems teachers of refugees have reported in different studies, in combination with apt solutions provided by the respondents themselves.

2.2.1 Students' traumatic experiences and post-traumatic stress

Numerous problems that refugees have to face upon arrival in the host-country are mentioned in the literature (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Montgomery, 2008; O'Toole Thommessen and Todd, 2018). "Delays with the asylum claim, and prolonged waiting time leading to severe stress, financial difficulties, social isolation, stigmatisation and discrimination" (O'Toole Thommessen and Todd, 2018, p. 228), handling the stress of resettlement (Kirova, 2019), are only some of them. Taking into account that a large number of refugees have undergone "toxic stress" because of their exposure to adverse childhood events (ACE) (Murray, 2019) and a series of traumatic experiences before entering the classroom, a teacher should not neglect the fact that these traumatic experiences will somehow interfere with the lesson and the learning procedure itself. It is the teacher who can identify the early signs of post-traumatic stress in the classroom. As a further matter, even a slight raise of the voice or the sudden slam of the door can serve as triggers of stress and anxiety for young children or even adults.

As Murray (2019, p. 9) admits "the high prevalence of psychosocial issues experienced by child refugees impacts their ability to concentrate and learn as well as interact with classmates" (cf. de WalPastoor, 2015). It is reported that specific mental health issues are quite common in refugee populations, especially post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kirova, 2019; Murray, 2016), anxiety and depression (Kirova, 2019; Silove, et al., 1997), a generalized sense of fear, attention issues, irritability and agitation (Kirova, 2019) among others. These, in turn, can affect students' lives, their connections with the others and their environment, including the classroom and the teacher. O'Toole Thommessen and Todd (2018) highlight the fact that refugee children are emotionally and psychologically vulnerable because they may be affected by their own adverse experiences as well as those of their parents (see also Dalgaard et al., 2016). Besides, as claimed by De Haene, Grietens, and Verschueren (2007) and O'Toole Thommessen and Todd (2018) forced migration and all those traumatic experiences linked to this situation influence parental responsiveness. These issues, due to the tremendous effect they have on a refugees' overall performance, have been the subject of various studies in the past (Kanu, 2008).

In order to tackle any psychological problems successfully, apart from using mental health specialists, it is a common practice to encourage teachers to build strong connections and relations with their students and their families. A study by Vincent and Warren (1999) supports this idea and investigates the importance of refugee families to be connected with and involved in the school life of their kids an issue also discussed in the Eurydice report of the European Commission in 2019.

2.2.2. Students' non-school experiences and non-literacy

One of the major problems teachers of refugees are not prepared to face seems to be the issue of having a class full of illiterate students with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds. As also mentioned in relevant research (e.g., Yasin et al, 2018),

A key challenge for the mentors is the issue that the majority of the Rohingya refugees cannot read or write in their own language because they have not studied formally at school in their country. The mentors had to teach the refugees the alphabet and how to read and write at the same time as teaching simple English communication (Yasin et al, 2018, p. 9).

The issue of literacy is a fundamental one. In his works, Freire emphasizes the fact that literacy entails much more than learning skills and it can be a political action as well. In their report on theory and methods in and out of school settings, Hull and Schultz endorse the idea the literacy can be many more than just learning vocabulary and grammar (Hull & Schultz, 2001). They address the question: "What special skills are required by teachers of students whose critical consciousness has been oppressed and who cannot show their full potential" (ibid, p. 595), a question which is relevant to this study.

2.2.3. Dealing with 'singular pluralities'³ and diverse identities

As research suggests, dealing with different identities is another issue that teachers have to deal with (i.e., Van der Veer, 1998). Identity is a concept of great importance for teachers of refugees. Defining the term, Gutiérrez (2013, p. 45) states:

An individual's identity is partly in his or her control and partly in the hands of others who seek to define/create/act themselves. As an individual, I can project a particular image of myself by the things I say (to myself and others) and the ways I interact, but others also participate in my identity by interpreting (through their own lenses) the meanings of my words and actions.

Erickson (1995) also points out that people form but can also reform their identities in the course of their lives, from childhood and later on in adult life based on the social environment and context they live in, and the social and cognitive factors that affect them. Teachers should not only deal with all the different identities they may encounter in the classroom, but they will also have to help their students reinforce (Cummins, 2003), sustain and sometimes even shape their own identities. Besides that, the lack of family and forced relocation from their home country put at stake the identity of refugees and as a result the process of learning (Fullilove, 1996). The 'label' refugee seems to be difficult to carry and it does not help them clearly see and shape who they really are, who they used to be, combine the two and adapt to the new reality.

2.2.4. Dealing with linguistic and cultural diversity

Identity and language are inseparable, so another challenge for teachers of refugees, which is also confirmed through this study, is to be ready to handle the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds having as their ultimate goal the linguistic integration of refugees, as explained later in this section. The language barrier is a problem found in many studies regarding refugees. For instance, O'Toole Thommessen and Todd (2018, p. 229), who focus on the situation in England and Denmark, claim that "adapting to the school context in the asylum-country may pose difficulties for refugee children due to language challenges, social barriers, and challenges arising from gaps in education". According to Kirova (2019), the

³Term borrowed from García, Sylvan, and Witt (2011)

language was commonly seen as a barrier in an effort towards resettlement in Canada. In addition to this, Yasin et al. (2018) also found through interviews that the language barrier is a significant challenge faced by mentors who teach English to Rohingya people being sheltered in East Aceh, Indonesia and plan to resettle in Western countries. The same authors also mention that the different habits of refugees of which they were unaware.

3. Aim of the study

This study investigates the needs, beliefs and attitudes of foreign language teachers of refugees in Greece and Europe along with the difficulties they may face in the different teaching contexts. The research questions it addresses are:

- What difficulties are faced by teachers in classrooms with refugees?
- What are their beliefs and attitudes towards the teaching of refugees?

Given the crucial need in the field of language teacher preparation to address the needs of refugee students, the ultimate goal of the research was the development of a teacher training toolkit which would hopefully provide teachers with ideas on how to deal with the challenges related to this new (educational) reality. It is not within the scope of this paper to focus on the toolkit. However, at the end of the paper a number of suggestions and ideas as to how to deal with the claimed challenges are discussed.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research organization, procedures and data collection tools

As already stated in the Introduction, this study was conducted in two phases while this paper focuses on Phase 2. Pilot Phase 1, which initiated in 2016 and lasted for one (1) year, involved teachers of refugees in Greece, while Phase 2, on which this paper focuses, was conducted during 2017-2018 and its participants were teachers of refugees in various European contexts. In both phases, specially designed online questionnaires were used, with the second one being the extended and modified version of the first one used in Phase 1. In fact, certain questions were skipped, some others modified while more questions were added. Thus the questions were developed not only based on the relevant literature but also evidence during Phase 1 of the project (empirically-derived). After the design of the final draft of the questionnaire, it was uploaded to Google forms and completed by teachers working with refugees around Europe. State teachers around Greece received a message with the questionnaire link. Also, teachers working in other contexts downloaded it through electronic groups provided through the social media in which they are members. In addition to this, the questionnaire was forwarded to colleagues-instructors at the University of Athens, Faculty of English and graduates of other foreign faculties as well. Members of the committee of experts of the Council of Europe regarding the update of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language, which was then in progress, were also asked to forward it to interested members.

Regarding the content of the questionnaire (Appendix A), it consists of both open-ended and closed questions and it was organized into three parts, covering the three main research areas of this study. The first part consists of questions about teachers' background, studies, training and context in relation to students' needs with a view to profiling the participants. Questions about their experience with refugee students and their training were included here. The second part incorporates questions about the challenges and the problems teachers face every day in their classes with students from refugee backgrounds, while the

last part focuses on teachers' attitudes and beliefs and whether these have changed after their experience of teaching refugees.

This research was mainly quantitative although there were some open-ended questions that were seen separately. The data collected were analysed using the SPSS tool and descriptive statistics were provided. Particularly for the respondents' teaching style and how it was affected because of the experience with students from refugee backgrounds, a correlational analysis (Pearson Chi-Square Test) was conducted. In fact, it was investigated the degree to which the change in the teaching style correlates with the teachers' years of experience in contexts with refugee students. Another correlational analysis involved again the years of experience with refugees and the participants' intention to continue teaching in such contexts. On the basis of teachers' responses (i.e., what difficulties they face, how they overcome these difficulties, what strategies they use etc), some practical advice is provided (see Section 6) in order to help future teachers working with refugees.

4.2. Participants

The participants of the first phase (see Author 2, 2017) were twenty (20) teachers of refugees in Greece teaching a) in formal educational structures in public schools, known as DYEP, b) at programmes provided exclusively by the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and c) at informal educational structures funded by non-governmental organizations in camps and other contexts. At Phase 2, with which we are currently concerned, 94 teachers of refugees not only from Greece but also from other parts of Europe, participated in the survey. Almost half of the participants (44.7%) were between 22-35 years old, whereas above 46 only 23.4 %. More than 80% were women (see Table 1 below for details).

Table 1. Participants' profile

Country	Greece	53.2%
	Other	46.8%
Age	22-35	44.7%
	36-45	31.9%
	46+	23.4%
Gender	Male	19.1%
	Female	80.9%

A great number of the participants were teaching refugees at the time of the research. As for their working context, the majority of them (62%) were working in formal education contexts while only 34% in non-formal contexts (such as camps, lessons offered by non-governmental organizations). 4% were teachers of other contexts. The years of teaching experience of the respondents vary as can be seen in Chart 1 below, while a great percentage (63.4%) has very limited experience (0-1 years) in teaching refugees (Chart 2).

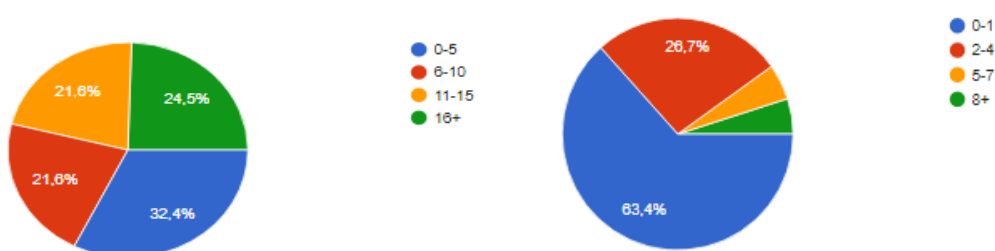


Chart 1. Overall teaching experience. Chart 2. Years of experience in teaching refugees

Despite the fact that the majority of the participants (57,8%) hold a Bachelor's and Master's degree in Education, they had not attended any training courses on the area of teaching refugees and only half of them (48,9%) claim that they had participated in certain relevant seminars (see Table 2 below).

Table 2. *Pre-service or in-service training of participants*

Did you attend any pre-service or in-service teacher training courses regarding the teaching of refugees?	Yes	40	42,6%
	No	54	57,4%
	Total	94	100,0%
Have you participated in special training seminars or events aiming at preparing teachers for teaching refugee students?	Yes	46	48,9%
	No	46	48,9%
	I don't remember	2	2,1%
	Total	94	100,0%

On the other hand, 42,2% of the respondents even though they indeed attended refugee teaching training seminars, they had not get the information they expected or no one had prepared them for the actual problems they were about to face in class.

Shifting our attention to the classes of the participants and focusing on their students' age (see Table 3 below), 54,3% of the respondents teach adults (19+) while the rest work with students under 18.

Table 3. *Profiling students*

What is the (mean) age range of your (refugee) students?	Under 12	21	22,3%
	12-18	22	23,4%
	19+	51	54,3%
	Total	94	100,0%
What is the mean number of students in your classroom(s)?	Under 10	30	31,9%
	10-15	35	37,2%
	16-20	12	12,8%
	More than 20	17	18,1%
	Total	94	100,0%
Have the majority of your students received any formal education in the country of origin?	Yes	56	59,6%
	No	26	27,7%
	I don't remember	12	12,8%
	Total	94	100,0%
How do your students feel about having classes? Do they have a positive or a negative attitude towards learning a foreign language?	Positive	76	85,4%
	Neutral	3	3,4%
	Negative	2	2,2%
	Both	8	9,0%
	Total	89	100,0%

In most cases, as claimed by 37.2% of the teachers, the number of the students per class did not exceed the 15. Only 17 (out of 94) participants had classes of more than 20 students. Regarding the formal education that students had received in their home countries, many participants (59.6%) claim that they did have some schooling experience. In relation to their attitudes and feelings towards having classes, the vast majority of the teachers (85.4%) claim that their students have positive feelings as Table 3 above indicates.

5. Presentation of findings

5.1. Most and least frequent challenges

This research aimed to shed light on teachers' problems and what their attitudes are after their involvement with students from refugee backgrounds. Chart 3 indicates the most frequently claimed problems. To start with, 36% of the respondents claim that adapting materials that can cater to their students' needs is a problem while many teachers (32%) also claim that the language barrier is a challenge to be faced. Trauma experiences (mentioned by 26% of teachers), low level of literacy or illiteracy (mentioned by 21% of teachers), students' lack of schooling experience (mentioned by 21% of teachers) and being able to deal with the different cultural backgrounds (mentioned by 17% of the participants) are some of the claimed challenges, challenges also confirmed by Gabriel, Kaczorowski and Berry (2017) in their study and extensively discussed by Murray (2019).

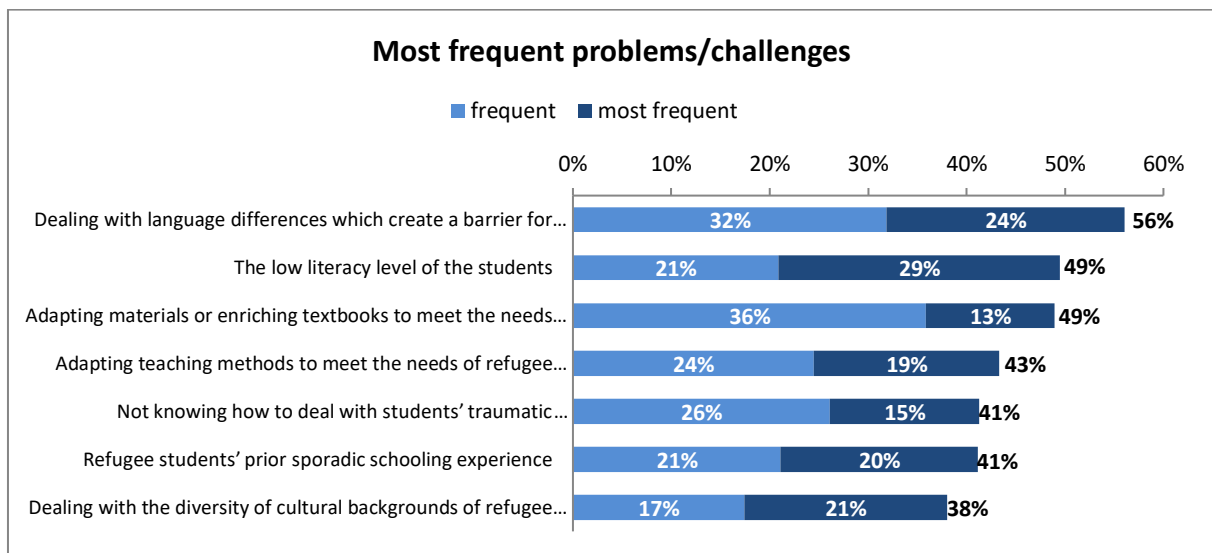


Chart 3. Most frequent problems

Among the least frequent problems as emerged through the particular survey were namely, the potential relations of the teacher with the family of the refugees (mentioned 12% of the teachers), issues of motivation (mentioned by 14% of teachers), large classes (mentioned 12% of teachers) among others (see Chart 4).

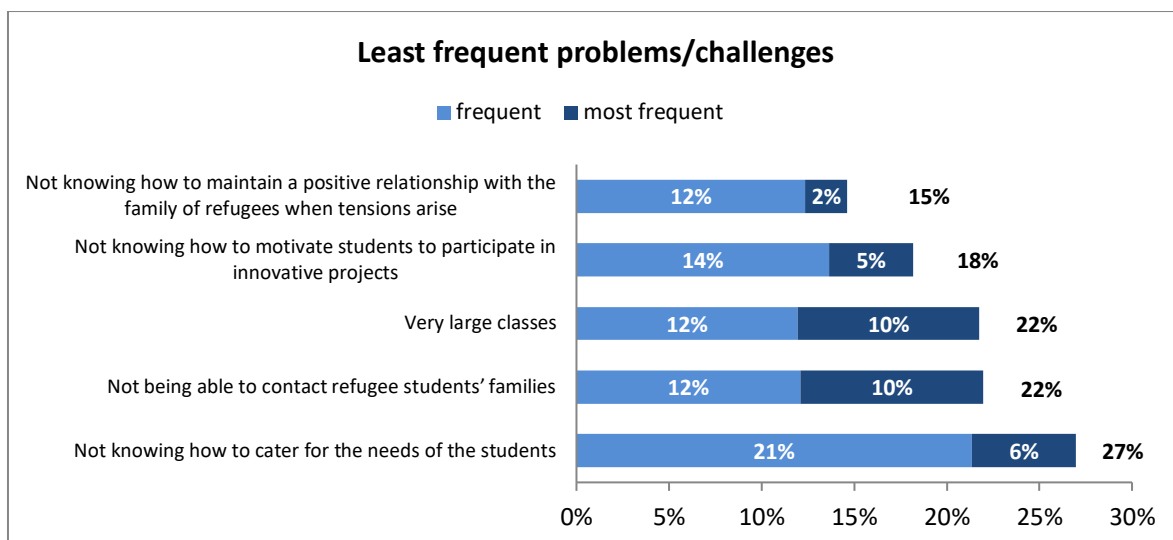


Chart 4. Least frequent problems

5.2. The use of materials

Another major finding is related to the materials used by the teachers. As shown in the chart below (Chart 5), almost half of the participants in Greece (48%) and 37% in other European countries, claim to prepare their own materials, even though in some cases there is certain material provided by Ministries all around Europe, targeting foreign language teaching to refugees. Although only 8% of the participants who work in Greece say that publishers or NGOs provide teachers with materials, this percentage becomes notably bigger (23%) if we shift our attention to their colleagues who work in other European countries. Some schools in European countries other than Greece seem to prepare their own material as claimed by 19% while in Greece this percentage drops at 4%. The organization of education and the Greek educational system which is actually highly centralized seem to account for this finding.

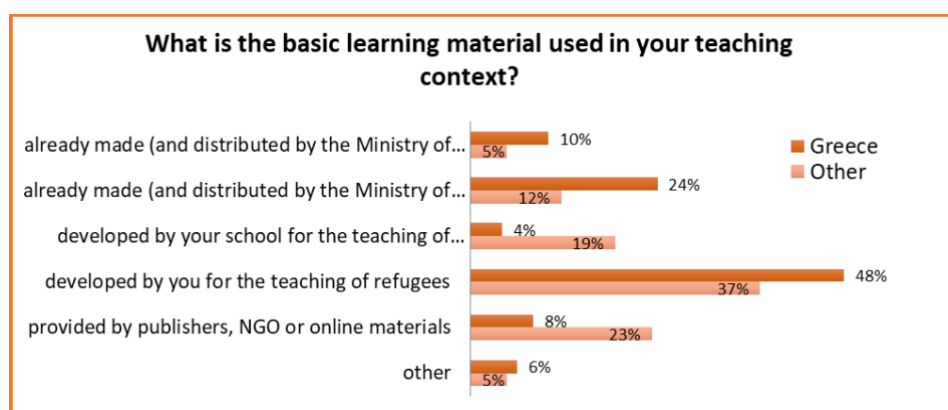


Chart 5. Materials

5.3. Teachers' attitudes

The participants also responded to questions regarding their attitudes. In fact, they were asked: if they have become more sensitive towards refugee crisis if their teaching style has changed if they intend on to continue teaching refugees, if they have conducted any sort of research on the topic and if they have implemented some of the findings of their research in their everyday teaching.

Surprisingly enough, as Table 4 indicates, most of the teachers (69.1%), despite the problems, intend to continue teaching refugees and to conduct their research on the field(79.8%) the results of which are to be exploited in their classrooms. As for the degree to which they have become more sensitive, the vast majority of them (82.8%) say ‘yes’.

Table 4. Attitudes towards teaching in refugee backgrounds

		Count	%
sensitive with refugee crisis issues?			
	extent		
teaching refugees?			
to learn how to implement practices for refugee students?			

Note that those participants who claimed that they wish to continue teaching refugees come from all age groups, proving that their willingness is irrespective of their age (see Table 5 below).

Table 5. Participants’ age and willingness to continue teaching students from refugee backgrounds

		Age					
		22-35		36-45		46+	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you intend to continue teaching refugees?	Yes	27	64,3%	23	76,7 %	15	68,2%
	No/ Maybe	15	35,7%	7	23,3 %	7	31,8%
	Total	42	100,0%	30	100,0%	22	100,0%

Regarding their teaching style and how it was affected because of the experience with students from refugee backgrounds, it was explored the extent to which the change in the teaching style correlates with the teachers’ years of experience with refugee students. As Chart 6 indicates, the more experienced the teacher, the more changes have occurred regarding his/her personal teaching style (see Chart 6 and Appendix B).

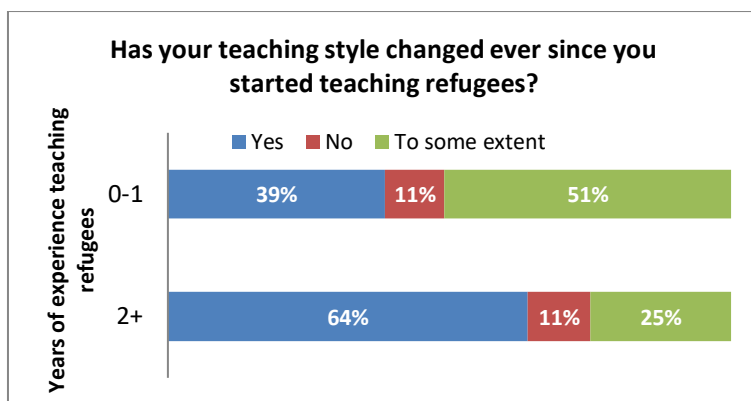


Chart 6. Teaching style and years of experience in teaching refugees

A second correlational analysis involved the years of experience with refugees and the participants’ intention to continue teaching in such contexts. Table 6 clearly shows that the Chi-square statistic is significant at the ,05 level which means that there is a significant difference between the two groups of teachers, i.e. those with much experience (more than 2 years) and those with less experience (0-1 years).

Table 6. *Intention to continue teaching refugees and years of experience of teaching refugees*

Intention to continue teaching refugees		Years of experience teaching refugees			
		0-1 years of experience		2+ years of experience	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Do you intend to continue teaching refugees?	Yes	35	61,4%	30	81,1%
	No/ Maybe	22	38,6%	7	18,9%

Pearson Chi-Square Tests

		Years of experience teaching refugees
Do you intend to continue teaching refugees?	Chi-square	4,072
	df	1
	Sig.	,044*

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the ,05 level.

Chart 7 demonstrates in percentages this interesting result. The more the experience, the greater the willingness to continue teaching in classes with students from refugee backgrounds.

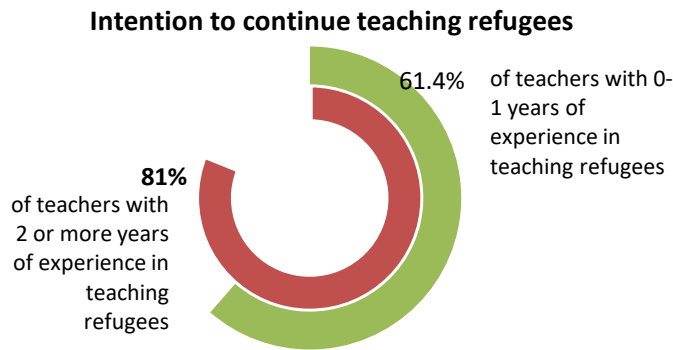


Chart 7. Intention to continue teaching refugees in relation to the years of experience of teaching refugees

As for the open-ended questions, interesting findings came up, which findings can be used as advice for future teachers to deal with students from refugee backgrounds. Some participants suggested that some core values a teacher of refugees should have is to be compassionate, patient and flexible to last-minute changes. A teacher said characteristically:

Extract 1: no two days are the same and you have to be ready to improvise

Another very important advice mentioned is to use non-verbal forms of communication such as visual realia and a lot of body language. This can also be done by combining multiple forms of activities such as art, theater and music in the process of learning. Moreover, teachers suggested that they have learnt to be respectful and create a warm and safe environment while at the same time emphasizing the selection of easy-to-follow activities and instructions. Straight forward rules are also important (see Extracts 2 and 3).

Extract 2: Learn as much as possible about the characteristics of a refugees class and try to create bonds with the students as this will boost motivation.

Extract 3: Have clear rules. Follow them. Show love and understanding

The participants also emphasized the fact that teachers should try to encourage dialogue and answer questions in detail while being analytical, empathetic and good listeners (see Extract 4).

Extract 4: Be really open-minded, listen to what they have to say and motivate them to speak in the language you're teaching also among themselves. Do not take anything for granted (notion of space, time, historical events, writing skills in the different styles) and follow their learning time.

Another teacher suggested:

Extract 5: [...] always ask for help for example you can have a meeting with an intercultural mediator who can give you information about each students needs and cultural/educational background.

This approach can actually create strong bonds with the students and make them be actively involved in the classroom.

6. Discussion of main findings

This research has aimed to shed light on teachers' problems when being involved with the demanding task of teaching students from refugee and migrant backgrounds, while at the end it attempts to present some empirical advice and suggestions as derived from the analysis of teachers' responses. This study has actually shown that teachers working in class of refugees

seem to have limited experience in teaching refugees, an aspect already noted by other researchers as well (e.g., Baldwin, 2015). Lack of training and some sort of non-preparedness on the part of the teachers has also been an important finding of this study which has also been confirmed by relevant research in the field (e.g., Nagasa, 2014; Yasar and Amac, 2018). Based on their study findings, Tösten, Toprak, and Kayan, (2017) claim that the teachers working with Syrian students were not supported and were not prepared to teach refugee-background students. Similarly, according to Yasar and Amac(2018), teachers note that they do not have adequate pedagogical skills to teach refugee or asylum-seeker students. Generally, although research has shown that the majority of teachers do not seem to have been prepared for such changes in their teaching (European Commission, 2019), according to the particular research findings teachers seem to be willing to continue teaching refugees despite the challenges.

Regarding the challenges related to the teaching, one major problem claimed by the respondents is their students' trauma experiences and how to deal with them. In fact, refugees' traumas constitute an area extensively investigated by researchers and it seems that they play an essential role in the students' academic achievement in the host country (cf. Rundell, Sheety and Negrea, 2018). This is the reason why it is important for teachers to be prepared to handle this difficulty and thus the issue of teacher training comes into play again. Illiteracy or students' lack of schooling experience is another significant challenge that teachers claim to face, a problem also investigated by other researchers in the field. Refugee students' prior sporadic schooling experience has been found to have an impact on their current education by Nagasa (2014) who investigated this issue in the context of the USA.

The language barrier problem and other cultural challenges seems to be another major problem stated. Gabriel, Kaczorowski and Berry (2017)'s study also confirms this while this has also been extensively discussed by Murray (2019), Nagasa (2014), Yasar and Amac (2018) and Dryden-Peterson (2015). Nofal (2017) also reports that Syrian students who arrived in Canada face problems related to language-related barriers in schools. The fact that refugees have to learn a new culture and language brings them additional stressors (Murray, 2019). Teachers need to be specially trained in order to deal with the different repertoires of their students. On this, Le Nevez et al.'s (2010, p. 9) comments:

A plurilingual repertoire encompasses all the language experiences of a person, irrespective of the level of competence attained in the different languages. This means that all the languages known by a person should be recognized and supported so that her various linguistic competences find their legitimate place within her life long learning experiences.

Behavioral problems and lack of relevant materials or the difficulty to create their own materials are other problems also mentioned by the participants. The creation of new materials catering to the needs of the refugee students is also related to the training factor mentioned above. It seems that the less the training, the more difficult for them to develop special materials.

Another problem seems to be the potential relations or the lack of such relations of the teacher with the family of the refugees. Lack of family support has also been found to be a problem by Yasar and Amac (2018). It is worth mentioning that according to the European Commission's Eurydice report (2019), the promotion of the involvement of parents in school and the provision of information focusing on the children's academic development is essential in an effort to help children from refugee backgrounds to become well-integrated into the education system and then into the society.

7. Pedagogical implications and recommendations

7.1. Making real integration possible

The goal for any educational planning nowadays is, among others, the integration of refugees and migrants, a concept relevant to any discussion about educating refugees. Linguistic integration is understood as their adjustment to the refugees' (new) communication environment, i.e., as a rearrangement of their repertoires and the integration of the languages that make up these repertoires.

In school settings, respecting students' mother tongues seems to be the key to integration although this is not always the case. For instance, Popov and Erik (2015) observe systemic problems in the education of immigrant children and express a feeling of a lack of practical intercultural competence to meet such children. Languages should not be kept separate but opportunities for translanguaging should be provided through curriculum planning and actual practice (Author 1, 2018, p. 441). In much the same vein, Canagarajah (2006, p. 603) states that mother tongue should be treated as a resource, rather than a problem and diverse literacy traditions should not be kept separate. Makoni and Pennycook (2007, p. 36) also argue for language policy in education which focuses on “translingual language practices rather than language entities”.

In the 21st century, with the creation of multilingual educational contexts, we can no longer afford to think about “monoglossic language policies” (García and Torres-Guevara, 2009). Teachers in this new context should be ready not to isolate languages, or limit instruction to one language thus following a 'repertoire-building approach' (Kalocsányiová, 2017). It is important for them to know how the language practices of a student are in motion through a variety of meaningful activities and are ready to "negotiate sense-making instructional practices (García, Sylvan and Witt, 2011) thus including rather than excluding students. Educators should be trained, in other words, to adjust their language and instructional practices to support students' linguistic and cultural diversity (ibid). To this direction, the framework of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) (Gay, 2010), can be extremely useful as it supports students in maintaining their cultural identity, native language, and connections to their culture; provides multiple opportunities to demonstrate what students learn; incorporates different perspectives; and empowers student sociopolitical consciousness (Civitillo, 2019: 342)

Translanguaging as a pedagogy which seems to be beneficial for integrating refugees, refers to building students' “language practices flexibly in order to develop new understandings and new language practices” (García, Flores and Woodley, 2012, p. 52). In the classroom, translanguaging tries to draw on all the linguistic resources of the child to maximise understanding and achievement. The section below explains the practical applications related to translanguaging and cross-linguistic mediation.⁴

7.2. Suggested strategies for teaching refugee students: towards integration

This section provides certain recommendations for the integration of refugees through teaching foreign languages based on the research findings presented herein and relevant literature. First of all, every effort towards the integration of refugees through teaching should reflect the following principles:

⁴As argued in Author 1 (2015, p. 47), being concerned with the purposeful transferring of information from one language to another, cross-language mediation can be seen as a form of translanguaging, a language practice which refers to the interplay of linguistic codes.

- a) all languages should be seen as equally valuable modes of communication and expressions of identity,
- b) acceptance of the ‘Other’, of cultural differences and mutual understanding,
- c) respect for the diverse linguistic resources as it can become useful in bridging the linguistic, cultural and social gaps.

Within this context, the teacher’s role is a central one being the one who coordinates the learning procedure in his/her classroom and is responsible for his/her students linguistic and cultural integration. The teacher is actually the one who should encourage his/her pupils to use knowledge and competences and exploit languages they are taught or know with a view to “revealing points of convergence”(Beacco, et al., 2016, p. 26). The framework of ‘culturally responsive teaching’ which addresses the differentiated needs of students from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds (Civitillo et al, 2019; Gay, 2010) should inform his/her choices given that language barrier is a major problem as manifested through this study. Within this framework, the teacher should also “manage the development of their plurilingual repertoires to optimum effect” (ibid) and “build up a system of (inter)cultural references” (ibid) linking cultural and intercultural knowledge and competences derived from the study of various languages and other subjects.

Through the cross-language mediation approach, i.e., transferring information from one language to another (Author 1, 2013, 2015), the aforementioned goals could have positive results. The teacher could actually encourage the use of mediation and translanguaging activities that can foster language awareness and openness to languages as well as comparison of phenomena specific to various languages and cultures. Stressing the importance of mediation activities, i.e., activities that ask for the transferring of information from one language to another, the CEFR Companion authors (Council of Europe 2018, p. 106) state, A person who engages in mediation activity needs to have a well-developed emotional intelligence, or an openness to develop it, in order to have sufficient empathy for the viewpoints and emotional states of other participants in the communicative situation.

Differentiated instruction strategies and the use of visual materials also constitute strategies that can prove useful as most of the time teachers are faced with the challenge of mixed-ability classes. A useful concept that could be successfully applied in the classroom is that of emotional literacy (Matthews, 2006; Sharp, 2001) closely related to the concept of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996) which involves the identifications, assessment and expression of ones’ feelings. Steiner indicated the importance of teaching children how to express their feelings and how this can contribute in their development (Steiner, 2003). A number of activities can be used such as drawing each feeling with different colors, use balloons and balls of colors to express discomfort or happiness among others, thus also addressing the issues of psychological traumas.

Finally, teachers’ positiveness and openness are essential tools towards creating a shared space and a warm atmosphere in the classroom. In fact, it is important for a teacher, in contexts with students from refugee backgrounds who do not share the same language, to create a shared space in which students will feel enthusiastic about the target culture(s) and safe. Defining the notion of ‘shared space’, North and Piccardo (2016, p. 24) say characteristically that the notion of creating a shared space between and among linguistically and culturally different interlocutors refers to “the capacity of dealing with ‘otherness’ to identify similarities and differences to build on known and unknown cultural features, etc. in order to enable communication and collaboration”. Li Wei (2018) also uses the term ‘translanguaging space’, a notion which refers to the capacity of using different languages and to the process of moving from one language to another thus facilitating the process of the

integration of social spaces (and thus ‘linguistic codes’). Given that refugee students spend a lot of their time in school, schools are important to “provide structure and restore a sense of normality to children's lives, particularly after war and forced migration” while the role of the teachers in creating these safe spaces which will support “positive integration” and a “sense of belonging” is fundamental (O'Toole Thommessen and Todd, 2018, p. 229).

8. Conclusions

This paper discussed the findings of a study which explored the needs, attitudes and beliefs of foreign language teachers of refugees in Greece and in other countries of Europe with an emphasis on the difficulties they face in contexts with students from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Summing up the main findings as presented herein, it seems that teachers of refugees who participated in the current research are not adequately trained as far as the teaching of this particular group of learners is concerned. Their limited experience in teaching refugees is also an important finding which reinforces European Commission's (2019) claim that teachers in Europe were not prepared for such changes. Other problems are related to the students and these are namely, their low literacy level, their traumas, their lack of schooling experience, which may induce behavioural problems, among others. Lack of relevant materials and relevant resources is among the most frequently claimed difficulties while teachers try hard to create their own materials catering to the particular needs of the students. The language barrier and the cultural differences are another serious issue which needs to be overcome, a finding confirmed by other researchers as well (see Kirova, 2019; O'Toole Thommessen and Todd, 2018). In some rare cases, large classes may hinder learning while the difficulty to contact the families of refugee students does not always facilitate their integration. Despite the problems, as this research suggests, teachers -especially the more experienced ones- seem to be willing to continue teaching in classes with students from refugee backgrounds. We hope that the knowledge gained from the participants in this study will lead to further investigation in the area of (language)/ education to refugees also informing policy decisions.

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Appendix A

Teaching Refugees: A European Survey

Demographics and Teachers' Profile

1.	Your email address (<i>optional</i>)						
2.	Country						
3.	Age	<input type="radio"/> 22-35	<input type="radio"/> 36-45	<input type="radio"/> 46+	4.	Gender:	<input type="radio"/> Male	<input type="radio"/> Female
5a.	Basic Studies:	<input type="radio"/> BA in Foreign Language Teaching Say in which language:			<input type="radio"/> OBA in an area other than teaching Say which			
5b.	Please specify the language or the area of your studies							
6a.	Additional studies (<i>more than one</i>)							
	<input type="checkbox"/> MA in Applied Linguistics and/or Foreign Language Didactics							
	<input type="checkbox"/> MA in another area (Say which)							
	<input type="checkbox"/> PhD in Applied Linguistics and/or Foreign Language Didactics							
	<input type="checkbox"/> PhD in another area: (Say which)							
6b.	Please specify the area of your MA or Phd							
7.	I am a teacher in (<i>you can tick more than one</i>): <input type="radio"/> primary schools (elementary education) <input type="radio"/> junior high school or high schools (secondary education) <input type="radio"/> university (tertiary education) <input type="radio"/> Other _____							
8.	Did you attend any pre-service or in-service teacher training courses regarding the teaching of refugees?					<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	
9.	Have you participated in special training seminars or events aiming at preparing teachers for teaching refugee students?					<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> I don't remember
10.	Years of overall teaching experience <input type="radio"/> 0-5 <input type="radio"/> 6-10 <input type="radio"/> 11-15 <input type="radio"/> 16+							
11.	Years of experience teaching refugees <input type="radio"/> 0-1 <input type="radio"/> 2-4 <input type="radio"/> 5-7 <input type="radio"/> 8+							

Your teaching context

12.	What is your teaching context this year?(e.g. public or private school, non-governmental organization, refugee center, other)
13.	If you are teaching refugees in more than one context, please refer to all contexts here:
14.	What is the (mean) age range of your (refugee) students? <input type="radio"/> under 11 <input type="radio"/> 12-18 <input type="radio"/> 19+
15.	What is the mean number of students in your classroom(s)? <input type="radio"/> under 10 <input type="radio"/> 10-15 <input type="radio"/> 16-20 <input type="radio"/> more than 20
16.	What is the mother tongue of your students (you may refer to more than one language in the case of classes



	with students from different countries)?			
17.	Have the majority of your students received any formal education in the country of origin?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> I do not know
18.	How do your students feel about having classes? Do they have a positive or a negative attitude towards learning the foreign language?			
19a.	What is the basic learning material (e.g., textbook) used in your teaching context? <input type="radio"/> already made (and distributed by the Ministry of Education or the government specially designed for refugees who are taught a foreign language) <input type="radio"/> already made (and distributed by the Ministry of Education or the government for students who learn a foreign language (and not necessarily refugees) <input type="radio"/> developed by your school for the teaching of refugees <input type="radio"/> developed by you for the teaching of refugees (explain what it is (book, notes, worksheets etc): <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify:)			
19b.	If you answered "other" in the previous question please specify			
20.	Are there any other facilities in your teaching context that help you when teaching? (tick more than one) <input type="radio"/> projector <input type="radio"/> interactive board <input type="radio"/> computer(s) <input type="radio"/> Internet connection <input type="radio"/> a foreign language classroom <input type="radio"/> CD players <input type="radio"/> flashcards			
21.	If your teaching context is different from past years, refer to all teaching contexts you have worked in (e.g. public or private school, non-governmental organization, refugee center, other) during your career as a teacher of <i>refugee</i> students.			

Problems Teachers face while teaching refugee students

This part of the questionnaire focuses on the actual problems teachers face in the classroom.

22.	Has it been difficult for you to teach refugees?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> To some extent				
23.	Rate from the most frequent (5) to the least frequent (1) the problems/challenges you faced while teaching refugees							
				1	2	3	4	5
a)	a	Dealing with the diversity of cultural backgrounds of refugee students		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b)		Dealing with language differences which create a barrier for communication		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c)		Adapting teaching methods to meet the needs of refugee students		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d)		Adapting materials or enriching textbooks to meet the needs of refugee students		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e)		The low literacy level of the students		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f)		Refugee students' prior sporadic schooling experience		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g)		Very large classes		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h)		Not knowing how to cater for the needs of the students		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
i)		Not knowing how to maintain a positive relationship with the family of refugees when tensions arise		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
j)		Not knowing how to motivate students to participate in innovative projects		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
k)		Not knowing how to deal with students' traumatic experiences that have occurred in their lives compared to other students		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
l)		Not being able to contact refugee students' families		<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24.	Were you prepared for the problems you eventually had to face in class?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> To some extent				
25.	What is the advice you would give to a new teacher who is about to take over a class of refugees? Can you provide any practical tips that have helped you cope with the problems in a refugee class?							

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Teachers' perceptions/ attitudes/ beliefs.

This final part of the survey aims at the investigation of how and if your beliefs have changed and how the teaching of refugees has shaped you as professional.

26.	Has your teaching style changed ever since you started teaching refugees?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> To some extent
27.	Have you become more sensitive with refugee crisis issues?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> To some extent
28.	Has your experience with teaching refugees been a starting point for further research on the issue?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	
29.	Do you intend to continue teaching refugees?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Maybe
30.	Do you intend to use research to learn how to implement practices for refugee students?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No	<input type="radio"/> Maybe

Comments

Feel free to share with us any further comments on the teaching of refugees in your country.

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End of the survey

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY!
YOUR TIME IS GREATLY APPRECIATED

Appendix B

		Years of experience teaching refugees			
		0-1		2+	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Has your teaching style changed ever since you started teaching refugees?	Yes	22	38,6%	23	63,9%
	No	6	10,5%	4	11,1%
	To some extent	29	50,9%	9	25,0%

Pearson Chi-Square Tests

		Years of experience teaching refugees
Has your teaching style changed ever since you started teaching refugees?	Chi-square	6,540
	df	2
	Sig.	,038*

Results are based on nonempty rows and columns in each innermost subtable.

*. The Chi-square statistic is significant at the ,05 level.

