



Spring 2020

## The implementation of child refugees' right to participation in Greek public Primary Schools:

A qualitative study on empowering and emancipatory pedagogy



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MASTER'S THESIS

## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the extent of refugee students' participation in public Primary schools in Greece, and how their right to be heard is supported. The research question is: To what extent the strategies implemented in Greek Primary schools permit and encourage the child's right to participation to be enjoyed by refugee students? The main contributors to the project are Lundy and her understanding of Article 12 in education, Rancière and emancipation in education as well as the Freirean critical pedagogy. I conducted my research in two Primary schools in a town in North-West of Greece, and I collected the data through interviews with six refugee students and their teachers, and observations. Many impressive outcomes have occurred, even though the time was limited. The thesis concludes that refugee students' participation in Greek public Primary schools is limited. Many challenges need to be resolved, such as communication due to children's low language skills, cases of discrimination and racist behavior between peers, as well as inappropriate pedagogical methods. The study goes further to suggest that reforms in the educational system are necessary to foster refugee students' right to be heard. Critical and emancipatory pedagogy would be a handy tool since it could change teachers' mindset into one that is more open and willing to support children's contribution to the teaching process. At the same time, students themselves could benefit and be empowered, taking over control, and gaining confidence. Human rights and multicultural education could also help in the promotion of equality and justice in classrooms, rendering the participation of all students possible, regardless of their needs and competence. Finally, according to the research findings, the conceptualization of the right to participation for refugee children in schools is different than our theory suggests. Lundy focuses on the children's contribution to decision-making, while in our study, this does not seem relevant. We recommend that participation for refugee students means to fully integrate into the new environment, creating healthy social relationships, and adjusting to the culture of the host country. Adaptation is the first step to the realization of their right to participate, namely, being able to feel accepted by their peers and included in the school activities.

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## **List of Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

HRE – Human Rights Education

UDHR – Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN – United Nations

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees

UNICEF – United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

ΔΣΔΠ - Διεθνής Σύμβαση για τα Δικαιώματα του Παιδιού

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## Acknowledgments

First of all, I would like to thank my partner in this process, my supervisor, professor Ådne Valen-Sendstad, from the bottom of my heart. His feedback and continuous encouragement during the writing of my thesis were valuable for me. He showed great interest in my work, and his deep insights on the field were truly inspiring.

I would also like to thank all faculty members working in the Master's program of Human Rights and Multiculturalism at the University of Southeastern Norway for allowing me to expand my knowledge. All lectures were very motivating, and being a student in this university will be a lifelong experience, plenty of valuable lessons.

I wish to express my appreciation to those who participated in my research. Their contribution was significant; without their help, this project would not be feasible.

Last but not least, I am grateful to my beautiful family and friends who supported me during this challenge. Their positive words and their credit animated me considerably throughout the writing process.

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1. Background/ Motivation**

Nowadays, Greece is one of the Southern European countries that suffer from the refugee crisis, since it has been a receiving country as well as a way to get into Europe for many desperate people (Figgou & Josselson, 2018, p. 120). Massive numbers of refugees and asylum seekers have been arriving at its shores fleeing from the dangers of their countries and searching for a better life. Nevertheless, when they come to Greece, many other problems should be handled regarding their integration. Many of them live in horrible conditions in the hosting centers sleeping in summer tents, in the cold, in the incredibly overcrowded facilities. A substantial percentage of these people are children, who in addition to the already unbearable experiences lived in their homeland, now risk their health, physically as well as mentally, since they cope with very stressful situations. Not to mention, many of them lack schooling. This factor could contribute not only to their education but also to their overall integration and wellbeing into the host country (Tilianaki, 2017).

All these facts played an essential role in my decision to work with child refugees and made me feel the need to help, in my way, to overcome these difficulties. However, personal experience during my bachelor studies in Primary School Education was the decisive point. The school I did my internship at was chosen to host refugees in its facilities, in the afternoon hours, for the reception classes that refugee children attend for their first year in the country to learn the language and adjust to the school environment. Then, a few outraged parents started to protest and complain about this decision, claiming that they would infect the school, and their children would become sick. This fact felt unfair and implausible since the authorities had already informed us that child refugees have gone through all necessary health tests and vaccinations. After this experience, I decided that I would like to focus on child refugees' quality education to help them with my contribution, though small, stand on their feet and have a better future in the society of settlement. Finally, I want to focus on Greek society, not only because of my origin and my inherent interest in it but also because I think that the country is currently facing many challenges regarding the integration of immense numbers of refugees present in its territory.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem/ Research Question**

It is my firm belief that education can make a difference in child refugee's future lives and be the first step for their social adaptation. Child refugees are a very distinct group with particular needs,



the ignorance of which may cause difficulties in their thorough integration (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, p. 42). They have experienced inhuman situations and bear many traumas and strong emotions with them. Education, and especially quality education, is imperative for them to be able to recover and feel secure.

Quality education is “the anchor that will keep children in the classroom, encouraging them to continue to the end of primary school and transition to the secondary and beyond” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016). Quality education can be understood in two different approaches: the “human capital” and the “human rights” approaches. The former suggests the significant implications that schools can have for the development of the economy, whereas the latter focuses on human development, promoting the principles of peace, respect, and security. The human rights framework is central to this approach, which also supports teaching methods that are student-oriented and entirely democratic (Tikly & Barrett, 2011, pp. 4-5). Regarding my study, I contend that what is primarily vital for child refugees is to recuperate in a safe environment that respects their rights. Thus, I support the “human rights” conceptualization of quality education.

As already mentioned, child refugees may experience trauma at the time of their placement in the classrooms. This fact could “affect a child’s ability to function effectively at school, from the point of view of attainment, attendance and maintaining effective relationships” (Dyregrov as cited in R. Hart, 2009, p. 359). In other words, it is more likely for a refugee to quit school because of a lack of motivation and trust in the people around them. Teachers should take measures to help children, but this is possible only if they know what is happening in their lives. However, sometimes the only way to find out is by asking children themselves and provide them with space to express their thoughts (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014, p. 7). Therefore, the reason I chose to work particularly with the right to participation is that it plays an important role in education, to accomplish empowerment for these children, and help them regain their self-esteem. It is a way to speak their thoughts, emotions, and experiences and raise awareness about what they need so that practices used in the classrooms can be adjusted that way to serve for a better education for them. In Greece, there are currently many child refugees attending public Primary schools, thus examining strategies appealing to this vulnerable group seems of great importance. In the light of this, the main research question of my study is the following:

*To what extent the strategies implemented in Greek Primary schools permit and encourage the child’s right to participation to be enjoyed by refugee students?*

Consequently, further inquiries arise, led by my main research question. It is important to realize that human rights can be perceived and interpreted differently from one person to another. The same is valid in my case, where I try to examine specifically the child's right to participate. Therefore, another interesting issue to be investigated is how students and teachers perceive this right. Further research objectives are:

- To understand the perceptions that child refugees, as well as their teachers in Greek Primary Schools, possess about the child's right to participation.
- To identify teachers' evaluation of current policies used by Greek Primary Schools regarding child refugees' participation, and try to make suggestions for reforms.
- To explore different understandings of participation and their implications.

### **1.3. Purpose and significance of the project**

The fact that my study takes place in just two Primary schools in a particular region in Greece makes generalization impossible. So, the purpose of my project is not to find the general rule valid for child refugees' participation in Greek Primary Schools. Instead, it just aims to be part of those studies investigating child refugees' lives in the country of settlement, and particularly in Greece, which is my country of interest. I hope that this research could work as an incentive for further elaboration with the topic.

The current situation in Greece is not unique. Many other countries face the challenge of integrating refugees into society. Besides, it is a phenomenon that most likely will go on for many years more, making our societies as well as our schools multicultural. Therefore, I think that my contribution, even that small as it is, can be valuable for this emerging social issue. My study is about participation, and participation is what minority groups need to feel included, especially children, who need to make a new start in the receiving country. Listening to their voice and respecting their rights at school is imperative to regain their self-esteem and be positive for their future. However, there is a further element that contributes to my study's significance. Not only does it assess to what extent refugee students enjoy the child's right to participation, but also it promotes participatory teaching methods in general. Having critical pedagogy and emancipation as core principles in my study can be beneficial not only for the group that focuses on but for all students, regardless of their nationality.

In the next chapters, I will present an overview of all theories related to the topic and the theoretical framework, on which I will base my analysis. Next, I will discuss the methodology I applied, and then, I will unfold the findings of the research. Last, discussion and conclusion about the outcomes of my project follow.

## 2. Literature review

“Without dreams there is no life, without dreams there is no human existence, without dreams there are no human beings” (Freire, Freire, & Oliveira, 2016, p. 27).

As the above sentence indicated, dreaming is vital for humans to feel fulfilled. It is something that everybody needs so that they can have hope for the future. What I address in this thesis is child refugees’ right to participation in the context of education and how this could challenge these children’s particular needs and equip them with confidence and the ability to dream; hope for improvement of their condition of life.

In this chapter, I will provide a review of the literature related to this topic, starting with a discussion about Article 12, and then narrowing down to child refugees’ rights. Next, I will outline the special needs of this group in education to further point out how quality education could be achieved under these circumstances and taking into consideration these needs. Finally, the concept of participation will be integrated into schooling, denoting how it could be supported and showing its connection to the notion of empowerment. This critical feature could be of great value for children’s self-protection and independency. However, the literature focused on child refugees’ participation in schools is limited. Yet, this, as well as the lack of insights in the Greek context, give our research a meaning. Therefore, our information will be more general and internationally oriented even though, at some points, there will be references to the case of Greece and refugee children.

### 2.1. The right to participation and refugee children

The rights of the child are protected by international texts about human rights protection, the most important of which is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CRC was adopted in 1989 and enforced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September in 1990. To date, 194 countries have ratified it. Greece approved it on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December in 1992 under the Law 2101/92 as the “International Convention on the Rights of the Child” («Διεθνής Σύμβαση για τα Δικαιώματα του Παιδιού» (εφεξής ΔΣΔΠ)). It is a national law with increased formal validity, which means that it takes precedence in the event of a contrary provision of law (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

The CRC regulates the states’ responsibilities for protection and promotion of the rights of the child. At the same time, there are also international obligations for member states, such as reporting to the competent bodies. The child is now identified as a subject of law in which individual,

political, economic, social and educational rights are recognized and distinguished in: protection rights (against all forms of abuse, exploitation, discrimination, etc.), benefit rights (in education, health, welfare, entertainment, etc.), participation rights (right to express an opinion, information, leisure time, etc.). Four principles govern the CRC: 1) the right to non-discrimination, 2) the right to life, survival, and development, 3) the right to participate, and 4) the best interests of the child sought in the event of a conflict of rights - always in the perspective of protecting the child's well-being for the future (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

### ***2.1.1. Article 12-The child's right to participation***

The present thesis will focus on the third principle, the child's right to participate, and, more specifically, on Article 12 about the right of the child to be heard. Article 12 of the CRC provides:

“1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.”

(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2009, p. 3)

According to the first paragraph of the article, State Parties should create a safe environment with opportunities for children to express their thoughts and needs, especially in issues that relate closely to them and have an impact on their lives (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2009, p.7). Their participation “must involve all levels of society, which can be interpreted to mean including every situation from family matters to issues of national interest” (Stern, 2006, p. 125).

Nevertheless, the article explicitly indicates that when children are heard, their opinions should be given due weight depending on their age and maturity (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2009, p.7). What is important to point out here, is that the latter does not depend necessarily on the former. “Age alone is not a sufficient criterion, since biological age is not a reliable indicator of an individual's capability and capacity to seek and analyze information and to understand the consequences of decisions made” (Stern, 2006, p. 163). That is to say that each case is unique; the maturity of a child is closely connected to their individual traits and experiences.

Furthermore, by using the word “freely”, it is meant that the child can choose if they want to express their right and that “the child must not be manipulated” but should speak their own voice, not others’ (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2009, p.7). In my opinion, that part of the article is worth examining further and this is because children are vulnerable and extremely susceptible to manipulation from adults. Even though children’s involvement in decision-making has been increased due to the promotion of their rights, still their participation is often regarded as “exploitative or frivolous” (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 4). That happens mainly because adults are not convinced about children’s capacity to contribute, due to the fact that children express themselves in a different way than they do (Lansdown, 2010, p. 15).

However, “although children can be powerful and effective advocates for their own rights, given appropriate access to information, space and opportunity, their youth and their relatively powerless status mean that they can only sustain this role where there are adults to facilitate the process” (Lansdown, 2010, p.16). Indeed, in some cases, adults organize events having children contributing to them. This could be beneficial for both adults and children even if the latter does not initiate these projects (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 9). R. A. Hart and Unicef (1992) described extensively the ways that children can participate in cooperation with adults, creating the “ladder of participation”. Starting from the lowest rung and going up to the top, we have the following steps: “Manipulation”, “Decoration”, “Tokenism”, “Assigned but informed”, “Consulted and informed”, “Adult initiated, shared decisions with children”, “Child initiated and directed” and “Child initiated, shared decisions with adults” (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, pp. 9-14). Each step, as we climb up in the ladder, gives more control and independence to children, permitting them to participate and enjoy their right to be heard to the fullest. “Simply mimicking adults is not always the most authentic, empowering or beneficial type of participation” (Malone & Hartung, 2009, p. 26). Unlike the first steps, the last two rungs are in contrast with mere mimicking; instead, children are given space to initiate their own projects and produce their own ideas.

In general, there has been a debate about the value of children’s right to participation, with many different standpoints involved. On the one hand, many support the idea that children should be exempted from participation in decision-making. The arguments in favor are children’s incompetence to conceive the purposes and consequences of their decisions, the fear that children would question the authority of their parents as well as the possibility of affecting their childhood by asking them to be too responsible in a very early stage of their lives (Stern, 2006, p. 171). On

the other hand, others maintain the view that involving children in decision-making affects them positively, since that way they comprehend deeply the concept of democracy and how this should be practiced. Also, the decisions made would be better and more harmonious if children's needs are considered. They become more tolerant and they can understand and fight for their own rights since participation leads to empowerment and protection (Stern, 2006, pp. 171-172).

What is supported in this thesis is that participation is truly beneficial for children's competence to deal with issues occurring in their lives. "The right of the child to participate in decision-making processes is argued to benefit the child in his or her development on the journey towards autonomy and responsibility" (Stern, 2006, p.125). That is why the child's right to participation is important and needs to be followed and implemented in any case. "Children need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults. [...] An understanding of democratic participation and the confidence and competence to participate can only be acquired gradually through practice; it cannot be taught as an abstraction" (Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 5). However, such an objective cannot be simple. Adults' real commitment is vital in order to make it practice, realizing that children are also citizens with their own needs and capable of contributing to their own development. "Entitlement to participate has to be embedded in legislation, policy and practice as the right of every child. This will all take time" (Lansdown, 2010, p. 21).

### ***2.1.2. Refugee youth's participation***

In the previous section, we discussed the child's right to participate as an ecumenical principle for all children irrespective of the circumstances. Next, our focus will especially be on the participation rights of those children who lack stability and opportunities to participate in the community. "UNICEF uses the term 'children in especially difficult circumstances' to describe those children with no family or who are from a family so traumatized by disaster, poverty, armed conflict, or family dissension that it cannot meet their basic needs" (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 24). Refugee children, which is the main interest of this thesis, could also be characterized like that since this group of children go through extremely difficult situations in their home countries due to war and persecution as well as in the transit process where many of their rights might be neglected and violated (Essomba, 2017, p. 213). Taking into consideration these adverse circumstances, "[...] the participation of children in decisions that affect their lives emerges not only as a right but as a

key strategy in enabling them to transform their relationships with adults, exercise their other rights and become active citizens” (Ray, 2009, p. 63).

Actually, finding meaning in their life and a role in society is challenging for these children. “As a result, the kind of participation they initially need is different. They need to be given the opportunity to reflect and act upon their own lives. This does not necessarily exclude them from extending their efforts soon afterwards to the benefit of the larger community of which they are a part” (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 24). Therefore, participation here means, at first, individual progress and contribution to their own development in order to be able to help the community they live in later on. That is because children in difficult situations initially need to realize their rights and fight for them. This is the very first objective they have to accomplish so that they can strive for a greater contribution to the macro-scale (Ray, 2009, p. 64). However, society has also the responsibility to support their participation. “Strategies need to be put in place to ensure that they do not come to further harm, and that are sensitive to the particular situation, context and experience not only of each group of children but, in many cases, of each child” (Ray, 2009, p. 66).

## **2.2.The context of education and the case of refugee children**

The following sections will be devoted to the context of education. First, I will focus on the group of child refugees, which is our main interest, discussing their special needs in relation to their education and development. Second, quality education for refugees and what this implies will be addressed and finally, participation rights in schooling and the concept of empowerment that is supposed to come after children’s involvement in their own learning. It is argued that participation and empowerment of child refugees is a fundamental component of what we characterize as quality education for them.

### ***2.2.1. Special needs of refugee students***

“All refugees are migrants, but not all migrants are refugees” (Essomba, 2017, p. 206). These two separate groups might have common characteristics, but there are significant differences in their transition process to the new country. Actually, refugees’ integration needs special care (Essomba, 2017, pp. 206-207). That is because, unlike most immigrants, “rather than immigrating with a goal of improving their lives, they do so simply to save their lives” (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, p. 21). In the current reality, many refugees have fled from their countries and they are looking for shelter



inside the European borders. Greece, in particular, “has seen the largest number of people arrive on its shores with Italy not far behind. Their refugee camps have been inundated and they have struggled to ‘process’ so many people seeking to enter Europe” (Essomba, 2017, p. 208).

Essomba (2017) argues that “the education systems in EU countries are hardly prepared for the challenging reality of refugees” (p.217). Refugee children are being denied their status and experiences and instead, they are treated like normal immigrants. As a consequence, apart from seeing their right to education less protected (Essomba, 2017, p. 217), the quality of the education they receive can also be affected. There are many factors that teachers should be acquainted with in order to be able to help to the maximum students with a refugee background, both learning and being smoothly integrated into their new environment.

First and extremely important, is the traumatic experience that refugee children most likely have, starting from the difficulties they faced in their homeland, to the migration process and their arrival to a new and unknown for them country. Most likely, this experience will follow them in every stage of their adjustment to the new environment and affect it probably in an undesirable way (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, p. 21). Therefore, teachers should be aware of their traumas and foresee how these experiences will impact children’s education (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, pp. 23-24).

“Broadly speaking, for healthy psychological development, a child or adolescent needs three things: a sense of security, a supportive social network and opportunities to flourish and develop” (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 12). Child refugees, however, face several difficulties as far as the feeling of safety is concerned. “Teachers have the potential to provide ongoing support for refugee students in a way that increases protective factors and fosters resilience” (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 33). So, it is important that teachers take into consideration all the previous experiences that refugee children have been undergone and try to adjust the classroom activities, aiming to overcome their trauma and suffering. The importance of providing teachers with specialized training on trauma and grief is great (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, pp. 33-34). By and large, “restoration of a sense of safety is a top priority for refugee children” and it is the school’s responsibility “to create a safe environment within the school and the individual classrooms” (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 34).

“Some refugee children are separated from their families and have witnessed humanity at its worst” (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006, p. 16). However, “it is worth noting that the experience of

trauma will not inevitably have adverse effects on a child refugee's emotional well-being, nor will all children be affected in the same way" (R. Hart, 2009, p. 355). Actually, each of them has a different history and a different personality, so refugee children cannot be considered as they all belong in the same category. These individual characteristics play a significant role in the way children deal with adverse conditions, making that way some more resilient and ready to adjust to new challenges, while others feel more stressed and overwhelmed (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 19). Under these conditions, what is valuable in respect with refugee children's education is that they "need schooling with a strong emotional and affective component" (Essomba, 2017, p. 213), one that could help them build up their sense of security and confidence once again and get away from the feelings of fear and distress.

It is very important that teachers get to know their students' needs and try to understand their situation. Yet, this can be a challenge given that refugee children and their parents might find it difficult to communicate in a foreign language or might be hesitant and unwilling to talk about what they have been through. One way to get over this issue is to be alarmed and conscious about children's reactions to different stimuli and topics addressed during the lesson. "Teachers' heightened sensitivity might be the first step to approach the child's world of hurting—a step to help him/her overcome the pain, a step to approach a better future for the child" (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, p. 22).

By the time that refugee children enter the host country, they have to modify their behavior and adjust their values to the ones that the new society teaches them. During the process of acculturation, refugees meet several barriers; one of them is discrimination. Nationals treat them differently because of their distinct cultures which seem bizarre and unknown. Unfortunately, "the experience of discrimination effects children's self-perception, motivation, and achievement in the long run" (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, p. 22). Another challenge that refugee children face is the formation of their identity. As for this, Strekalova and Hoot (2008) refer to Bash (2005), who asserts that trying to understand oneself and the interactions between them and the people around them is a difficult task for every child. Let alone for refugee children, whose transition to a new country requires to correlate previous knowledge to the new one. This makes it even more complicated, causing the formation of multiple identities, which means that "a child displays different identities depending on the context (school, home, community). Multiple identities

trigger psychological, social, and cultural conflicts which threaten the child's stability" (Bash as cited in Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, p. 22).

Due to the previous trauma that refugee children bear, there is every likelihood that they display some kind of problematic behavior. Blackwell and Melzak (2000) have introduced a list of how children might express the difficulties they have experienced. However, they clarify that none of them is categorical and it does not mean that each child will demonstrate these behaviors or that there are no other types that could occur. First, the 'Explosive anger' is a reaction of all the violence and war they experienced in their home country. Second, they show 'Problems with authority'. This is because they feel frustrated by the adults who surround them. They feel abused and unprotected. Third, refugee children often struggle with 'Disruptiveness and inability to concentrate'. They have many sorrowful memories and it is not easy to get away from them. They need to occupy themselves with interesting and exciting tasks, while sometimes at school this does not happen, and the activities are not always so engaging (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000, p. 6).

Fourth, 'Rule testing' is an outcome of the perception that children have for themselves. They often feel responsible for all the bad things that have happened to them, presuming that they had been bad, so they deserve it. Thus, they need to test the limits and the control around them so that they can see how bad they truly are. It is important that potential bad comportment is not encouraged. Fifth, 'Withdrawal' is common between refugee children who lack motivation due to what they have been through. In this case, there is the risk of being socially isolated or becoming victims of bullying. Sixth, 'Falling behind' at school is something that can occur even to children who make a big effort to adjust and cooperate. Yet, they find it difficult to advance their learning. Finally, 'Age inappropriate behavior' appears to many refugee children because of all the adversities they lived back home and the necessity to cope with them as responsible grown-ups. The case is that they feel their childhood taken away and they just grasp the opportunity to act like kids at school, having a childish behavior disanalogous to their actual one (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000, p. 7).

Last but not least, child refugees have to confront the language barrier which is of great importance to their adaptation to the new country, since it is a tool of communicating their needs. This issue requires attention and delicate handling, especially on these occasions where refugee children spend a very long time in the transitional environment. This is because, there is an issue of not knowing which the country those children will end up living in will be, making it difficult

to be prepared and learn the language of their future home. For this reason, refugee children should at least be educated in their mother tongue (Loewen, 2003, p. 37). That way they can gain their confidence again by participating with other children in educational activities and feel appreciated and comfortable speaking in their own language.

### ***2.2.2. Quality education for refugee children***

“In recent years there has been a growing recognition of the importance of education, and of its potential to provide protection to some of the most vulnerable members of communities” (Kirk & Cassity, 2007, p. 50). Education is a human right bestowed to all children, irrespective of the conditions they live in. The same is valid for those children who have experienced conflict and loss. Not only does schooling grants protection from violence, but also it is a means of conveyance of values and information, important for saving those children’s lives (Kirk & Cassity, 2007, p. 51).

Nowadays, more and more refugee children are enrolled in schools in the countries of arrival. At this point, “it is important to emphasize that adaptation is a mutual process” (Anderson, Hamilton, Moore, Loewen, & Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 10), which means that it is not only up to the children to adjust, but also schools have the responsibility to make amendments in the way they function so that child refugees can have the best and most suitable education.

Many authors have discussed the way that schools should manage refugee children’s better adaptation and provide them with quality education related to their needs. Even though Aguilar and Retamal (2009) talk specifically about those schools established in a humanitarian crisis to get over the situation, what they have indicated, in my view, is relevant for each school that fosters child refugees. According to them, schools should be seen as “Protective Environments” and “[...]the learning space needs to become a protected healing environment where pupils and teachers are given the opportunity for building resilience, reflection, healing and self-expression” (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009, pp. 3-4). Also, “quality education in complex emergencies in developing and transition societies requires a different emphasis on aspects related to “classroom climate”” (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009, p. 6). Their attention is focused on the values adopted in the classrooms, which provide children with a sense of safety and protection, giving them that way enough space and possibilities to remedy their traumas and feel more confident about the future.

There are three different groups of people involved in refugee children's education that could make a difference and play a great role. First, the principal of the school has a valuable task to complete. Their help is priceless since they are the ones who can support teachers to acquire better training on refugees' needs in education as well as they can facilitate the cooperation of the school with agency helping services, the contribution of which can be vital (Hamilton, 2003, p. 85). Also, parents and their interaction with the school is important. Schools should be responsible for providing parents with adequate education about the language of instruction and the curriculum's goals. That way parental participation in their children's education would be feasible, and they could help and support their children's learning and integration (Hamilton, 2003, p. 86).

Third, teachers, who spend an important amount of time with these children, have the difficult task of transmitting the knowledge as well as making the children's adaptation gentler. What a potential problem in the relationship between teachers and refugee students would be though, are the expectations that the former has towards the latter. They get low, maybe due to the fact that these children have undergone traumatic experiences and teachers do not want to put more pressure on them. For instance, Greek teachers, having this perception of deficiency of immigrant students, often treat them as students with special needs and they even give up the effort because they deem every didactic and educational intervention pointless (Nikolaou, 2011, p. 195). However, this "could act as a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to children performing poorly at school" (R. Hart, 2009, p. 360). Additionally, "given that refugees often come from very different cultures and possess different values and goals from those held by members of the country within which they are settling, the potential for conflicting stereotypes or biases to enter into teacher– student interactions is heightened" (Hamilton, 2003, p. 87). Teachers should renounce these stereotypes in order to better help children. They need to get to know better their students' experiences and needs and have faith in their abilities so that they can success (Hamilton, 2003, p. 93).

"Unless schools are safe environments in which children can flourish without being victimized, taunted, bullied, or at worst, physically harmed, then the children will be seriously hampered in their attempts to learn and develop" (Hamilton, 2003, p. 87). This means that maltreatment can also have a great impact on refugees' education. Refugee children have a great disadvantage as for being victims of bullying; they are not familiar with the "norms or values of the majority culture" (Hamilton, 2003, p. 88), which plays a crucial role in the emergence of racist behavior. However, the school should be able to prevent this by introducing "generic approaches targeted to support

all children and young people, such as whole school anti-bullying and anti-racism policies and initiatives” (R. Hart, 2009, p. 365).

Moreover, UNHCR has suggested some important factors for refugee education, which are worth mentioning. First, it is reckoned that “the quality of education for refugee children should be as high as that for nationals of the same age” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1994, p. 112). Their education should not be compromised and the effort that schools make should be equal to the one that is done for every other child that lives in the same country. What is being taught should be relevant to their distinct needs and experience. Care should be given to the language of instruction. “It should be in the children's own language – at least initially, reflect their own culture, while facilitating understanding of the asylum country and, as appropriate, enhance the refugee's ability to integrate into that country. It should provide practical knowledge and skills relevant to the economic life of their own communities” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1994, p. 113). ‘Peace education’ is important as well; especially to those children who have experienced war and conflict. It might be valuable to their recovery and help them be acquainted with different ways to dissolve potential collisions that could occur in the future (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1994, p. 113).

Furthermore, as Hamilton and Moore (2003) have stated, “teachers will need to acquire increased knowledge and skills related to multiculturalism, cultural responsiveness, traumatized children, and inclusive approaches to assessment and education [...]. This increased knowledge and skill will clearly impact on the nature of classroom environments and instruction” (Hamilton & Moore, 2003, p. 114). Indeed, intercultural understanding is essential. For this, a ‘theory of multicultural education’ needs to be adopted from the teachers. Gadotti (1996) has discussed extensively this theory and the elements that includes in the classroom. Multicultural education is one that respects each student’s culture. The principle of democracy is fundamental since it permits the establishment of equity and the prevention of all kinds of biases between teachers and students as well as between students themselves (Gadotti, 1996, p. 161). According to Gadotti (1996),

“Without this principle, one cannot talk about education for all nor of an improvement in the quality of teaching. Equity in education means equality of opportunity for everyone to develop individual potentials. [...] Multicultural education attempts to confront the challenge of maintaining the balance between the local or regional culture of a social group or ethnic minority, and a universal culture, which belongs to humanity. The school which takes on this

vision attempts to open up horizons for its pupils, so that they can understand other cultures, other languages, and other ways of being in a world that is becoming closer and closer. It attempts to build a pluralistic and independent society. It is, at the same time, an international education, which attempts to promote peace between peoples and nations, and a community education, which values the local roots of the culture— that is the most intimate daily life in which each person’s life takes place” (pp.161-162).

Therefore, given that the ‘theory of multicultural education’ can promote such beneficial for the children’s lives values in the school environment, it could be argued that it is a significantly efficient tool to be used for refugees’ education. As I already mentioned, what these children mostly need is the reestablishment of safety and confidence. This means that the school needs to be a place of support, acceptance, and respect. A way to achieve this is to integrate cross-cultural discussions and practices. Human rights are also supported within this context, giving that way refugee children a voice and opportunities to make their needs and experiences known to the rest of the pupils and the teachers. Participation and possibilities to express themselves are enhanced (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 34). Socialization and communication between students, nationals, and refugees, is vital as well. Schools play a significant role in this process (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 29). In order to create a safe environment for children to start socializing within the school, teachers in principle could use several practices, which boost positive emotional and social skills; such as “teach children about basic emotions [...]” and “display positive body language” (Szente et al., 2006, p. 17). Even though this might sound self-evident, these simple details are essential to children’s well-being in the classroom and could make a difference in creating a safe and positive climate in the school.

In general, what we have seen from the aforementioned is that “schools are a stabilizing feature in the unsettled lives of refugee students. They provide safe spaces for new encounters, interactions, and learning opportunities. They also deliver literacy, the key to educational success, post-school options, life choices, social participation and settlement” (Matthews, 2008, p. 31). Teachers who work with refugee children should make sure that they do their best to understand what their previous experiences were and what they need in order to achieve the best outcome. They need to feel dedicated to helping child refugees “transform their lives of past horror into lives of future promise” (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, p. 24). This implies that children are principally the agents of change. They should grab life with both hands and chase those opportunities that better

fit them. However, they need guidance so that they can achieve it. “Teachers of refugees play a central role in helping their students to conceptualize what that future might be and how to prepare for it” (Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 15).

### ***2.2.3. Participation and empowerment in schools***

“Schools, as an integral part of the community, should be an obvious venue for fostering young people’s understanding and experience of democratic participation” (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 37). In other words, education plays a fundamental role in the promotion and support of children’s participation as well as children’s rights in general. The right of the child to be heard is one that could bring great changes and make a difference in order to achieve “a culture of respect for children's rights, for their dignity and citizenship, and for their capacities to contribute significantly towards their own well-being” (Lansdown et al., 2014, p. 4).

A clarification on what Article 12 is all about is considered essential. When Article 12 is being implemented, children are given the opportunity to influence the decisions made for their own good. They collaborate with adults, who help them facilitate their participation as well as appreciate their contribution according to their age and maturity. There is no intention to give full control to the children neither complete autonomy (Lansdown et al., 2014, pp. 4-5). Such an attempt would be naïve. Children need adults’ guidance to collect all appropriate information that could help them construct their opinions. Seen that way, Article 12 is not that risky and does not challenge the authority of teachers and parents. In contrast, it could bring lots of benefits for both children and adults, as well as for the community they live in. “Through participation, children acquire skills, build competencies, extend aspirations, and gain confidence. A virtuous circle is created. The more children participate, the more effective their contributions, and the greater the impact on their development” (Lansdown et al., 2014, p. 6).

Henceforth, a presentation about how young people’s participation in education benefits everyone involved in the process follows. To begin with, it is unquestionable that each individual at some point in their life will have to confront some kind of injustice or threat. Unhappily, this is how the world works. Therefore, it is imperative that children are equipped with strength and confidence from an early age in order to be able to cope with difficult situations. Indeed, it is argued that their right to express their views could be extremely helpful for this cause. “The self-esteem and confidence acquired through participation empowers children to challenge abuses of



their rights” (Lansdown et al., 2014, p. 7). Also, it is essential to realize that by consulting children, adults can have a more integral perspective of how they can help and make the best decisions possible about their lives. Children are the ones who know better what exactly their needs and concerns are. “Decisions that are fully informed by children's own perspectives will be more relevant, more effective, and more sustainable” (Lansdown et al., 2014, p. 6).

Moreover, what is argued in the current thesis is that children’s participation, and especially participation in the school system, which is our main interest, can empower children and provide them with confidence to take over control of their lives. Stern (2006) has given a definition of the concept of empowerment. As she argues, empowerment is the “process of becoming someone who can exercise influence and control over one’s own situation, of going from “object” to “agent” (Stern, 2006, p. 129). What she also reckons is that empowerment has a deep connection with disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. It is these people who need support and reinforcement to become independent and alter their living conditions. In her view, “children could be seen as such a group. [...] The very acknowledgment of participation rights for certain groups could [...] be seen as an expression of empowerment of the individuals of which these groups consist” (Stern, 2006, p. 130). That is also a reason why a discussion about the relationship between children’s participation and empowerment is relevant. Children are mostly dependent on adults’ care and protection. “Adult power over children is considered as “the natural state of things” and is in general seldom contested [...]” (Stern, 2006, p. 151).

So, for empowerment to take place, the hierarchy between adults and children needs to be broken and instead, adults should recognize and uphold children’s right to participation. They should acknowledge the importance of providing young people with space to express their views and contribute to decision-making (Stern, 2006, p. 152). Likewise, children should be allowed to speak their words in the context of education. Teachers are the ones to ensure their participation. It is truly important that teachers “avoid tokenistic approaches” since they have the opposite outcome of the one pursued. They just perpetuate adults’ influence upon children depriving them of the authenticity of their voice (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 2009, p. 26). The content of education and the way the teaching process is held should be relevant to children’s reality so that they can recall from their experience and build on this to construct the knowledge. The benefit of this practice is significant. “Creating classroom opportunities for developing higher-order thinking is essential for helping students become the critical thinkers, problem solvers,

innovators, and change makers upon which every society thrives” (Himmele & Himmele, 2011, p. 13).

As a matter of fact, schools worldwide keep considering education as a process in which teachers transfer the knowledge to their students (Lansdown et al., 2014, p. 8). Indeed, “too much of today’s teaching is characterized by a stand-and-deliver approach to presenting content, in which teachers simply stand at the overhead or the front of the room and deliver the material to be learned” (Himmele & Himmele, 2011, p. 4). Nevertheless, “talk-intensive pedagogies are gaining in popularity” (Snell & Lefstein, 2018, p. 40). This happens because more and more people are convinced about their effectiveness in assisting children’s abilities to develop (Snell & Lefstein, 2018, pp. 40-41). “Through active participation, children can be helped to acquire skills in thinking, analyzing, investigating, creating, and applying knowledge to achieve their optimum potential” (Lansdown et al., 2014, p. 8).

Apart from all the above mentioned, De Winter, Baerveldt, and Kooistra (1999) claim that there is one more important benefit that participation can bring on children’s lives, namely health promotion and tackle of psychological issues. “Therefore, a serious dialogue with children in matters concerning their own quality of life, in other words, encouraging children’s participation, should both be considered as a basic right, and as a precondition for the promotion of health and well-being” (De Winter et al., 1999, p. 16). That is because when children are prompt to engage and participate actively in the school activities, they develop a “feeling of being important, being welcome and being appreciated” (De Winter et al., 1999, p. 20) as well as “self-confidence, self-respect and a sense of control over one’s own life” (De Winter et al., 1999, p. 21), which are vital for a person in order to feel complete and happy.

For all these reasons, the idea that child refugees’ participation rights should be upheld and respected in schools is supported. By allowing refugee children to be involved in decision-making and expressing their needs, we also allow them to feel empowered and get over their harsh past experiences. Participation rights could increase the quality of education for these children in relation to both their learning and their adaptation and cultivation of hope for the future.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

This chapter provides an overview of the theories on which I will base my research. At first, Lundy's model of conceptualizing Article 12 is of great value for my thesis. The elements that model suggests, namely, Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence, are relevant to my research question and could help me assess the results of the research during the process of analysis (Lundy, 2007).

Second, I will address Rancière's theory of emancipation in education. Arriving in Greece, life conditions do not become instantly better for refugee groups. In addition to their traumas caused by the terrible experiences throughout their voyage, they face problems with their settlement. I firmly believe that education, and especially empowering practices used for their education, are vital to recover and become autonomous so that they can emancipate from the oppressing situations they have been living in. Hence, I will evaluate the practices teachers in Greek schools use according to those that Rancière proposes (Bingham, Biesta, & Rancière, 2010).

Third, the evaluation of child refugees' participation in Greek Primary Schools is possible, bearing in mind Freire's theory. He has introduced the "problem-posing" model, the foundation of which is dialogue and critical thinking. This way, the teacher-student relationship and the opportunities given to the children to occupy themselves with problems relevant to their lives, could be observed and assessed (Freire & Ramos, 2000).

#### **3.1. 'Voice' is not enough: Conceptualizing Article 12**

As far as the implementation of the right in the context of education is concerned, Lundy suggests that we have to consider various barriers that occur, and she goes further to propose a new model of conceptualization of the Article 12 constituted of four key elements: Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence (Lundy, 2007, p. 927).

In detail, "space" means to create a safe environment for children that provides them with opportunities to express themselves. Teachers should look at children's participation as a necessity for the educational process and not as a challenge to their authority. Furthermore, she points out the importance for vulnerable groups of young people to participate, who, that way, could take over control of their lives and feel confident again (Lundy, 2007, pp. 933-935).

As for “voice,” Lundy addresses the part of Article 12 that talks about the age and maturity of the child and suggests that we often misunderstand its meaning. She clarifies that it applies just to the part that their views should be given due weight, but generally, the right to express themselves has nothing to do with their maturity. If children can form a view, it should be heard (Lundy, 2007, p. 935). In my study, I try to identify how child refugees are allowed to participate in Greek classrooms. So, “voice” is a central element to assess how the methods used by the teachers encourage children to speak their thoughts.

Besides, “audience” is considerably meaningful for education and schooling given that the whole process consists of the interaction between students and teachers. So, their relationship should be one of true communication, active listening, and respect. Lundy draws on the notion of due weight of Article 12, suggesting that it involves the responsibility of those who decide to listen to children’s views carefully. They also need to receive training to be able to realize what children say or show to them, since communication can come even without using any words (Lundy, 2007, p. 936). According to Motta, teachers should “cultivate a constant openness to openness in thought and practice and a willingness to feel uncomfortable and surprised” (Motta, 2012, p.94). In other words, educators shall be ready to listen carefully and receive all possible perspectives expressed by the students with patience and acceptance. That way, learners feel truly encouraged to be engaged with their education without second thoughts and fear for disapproval. Studying the facilitation of the right to participate in Greek Primary Schools, I am also very interested in identifying teachers’ attitudes about listening to their students, especially when the target group is child refugees, and verbal communication can sometimes be challenging.

Finally, “influence” is the final step of the process where results can be seen and evaluated. Children need to understand how their views were heard and influenced a decision. Listening to them is not enough; there is an imperative need to see change. An important point to be made is that by giving children the chance to contribute in decision-making, schools position them as ‘rights-holders entitled,’ and teachers, in turn, as ‘duty-bearers required’ to facilitate children’s participation (Lundy & Cook-Sather, 2016, p. 271). As mentioned before, “tokenistic or decorative participation” harms the procedure (Lundy, 2007, p. 938). Child refugees have distinct experiences and needs in comparison with their peers who belong to the majority population. Their contribution to the teaching process and decision-making can bring noticeable changes which are extremely

important for their development. At the same time, these changes could also work in favor of their classmates.

### **3.2. “Ignorance” as a means to emancipation**

In general, education is not just about teaching and assisting the students to acquire knowledge about the world in which they live. Education is also about contributing to children’s development in many aspects, such as intellectual, mental, social, and emotional. Pedagogy is this science involved in education and schooling, that guides minors’ behavior. It transmits values important for their lives, present, and future, as well as promotes “justice and respect for human rights and enhance peace, stability and interdependence” (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009, p. 5).

However, recent literature on education goes beyond that, presenting one more responsibility that teachers should undertake: work towards the emancipation of their students (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 25). It is indeed a precious task that, if achieved, could have very positive outcomes on children’s personalities. They could become independent adults, critical thinkers, and capable of escaping from oppressing situations appearing in their lives.

Rancière has drawn upon the concept of emancipation in the context of education extensively, suggesting that it can only be achieved if “the principle of the equality of all speaking beings” is respected (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 43). In other words, educators should not promote hierarchies of knowledge between them and their students. Instead, they should encourage children to believe in themselves and their capacities, which are not inferior to their teachers’ but equal. Not to say that there are no inequalities between people’s intelligence, but the importance of that is what a student can achieve, believing that their capacities are equal to any other (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 43).

According to Rancière, equality is not something to be reached, but a starting point of the educational process. Teachers shall not behave in the classrooms as they are the knowledgeable, who try to share their knowledge with the ignorant students. In contrast, students should be encouraged to seek knowledge on their own without teachers’ explanations, just their guidance. In fact, “the most important quality of a schoolmaster is the virtue of ignorance” (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 1). That is to say, being able to inspire students to capture knowledge without others’ assistance is more significant for an educator than simply transmitting their knowledge. Important

to realize that an ignorant educator is not the one who pretends to be a teacher, but the one who functions as a path to knowledge for the student (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 2).

With this in mind, the task that all emancipatory teachers should accomplish is that of ignorance, which means allowing the students to have a leading role in the teaching process. “When students become partners with teachers in this way, their personalities, talents and mental and physical abilities develop through constant engagement, and students develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms because they experience them and extend them to others in the learning environment” (Lundy & Cook-Sather, 2016, p. 273). This is what I want to evaluate conducting this study, namely, if the teaching strategies used aim to the emancipation and empowerment of child refugees and encourage them to contribute to their education and development.

### **3.3.Critical pedagogy: the key for the empowerment of the oppressed**

In a similar vein, I will reflect on Paulo Freire and his theory about critical pedagogy, which he considers as a means towards the liberation of the oppressed. His work has been influential, and his contribution to the critical pedagogy framework is significant. Likewise, his theory is fundamental for my study since I will assess the teaching methods in comparison with his “problem-posing” approach (Freire & Ramos, 2000).

His approach is opposed to the “banking” method and its narrative character, which aims to “fill” children’s minds with the content of education limiting their action and depriving them of creativity (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 71). Instead of allowing them to find the truth themselves, teachers merely provide them with the gift of knowledge and deposit the reality into them without any chance for interaction with the process of education (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 73). In this system, “the teacher would understand the curriculum as information and rules about how to learn this information. Society decides on the teaching content in each subject area and selects how this will be presented to learners (for example, in textbooks or other learning materials). Ultimately, this is what students should learn to be considered ‘educated’ persons” (López Melero, Mancila, & Soler García, 2016, pp. 206-207). This practice is the opposite of what Rancière (2010) regarded as emancipation in education. Emancipation is closely related to critical pedagogy, which means that students should be engaged “in self-and-societal reflections” (Wiggan, 2011, p. 2).

In contrast, the “problem-posing” approach promotes authentic communication between teachers and students consisted of mutual respect and trust. It implies reconciliation of the teacher-student relationship so that “both are simultaneously teachers and students” (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 72). In other words, the authority should be discarded and give way to dialogue to be consistent with “the principle of the equality of all speaking beings” that Rancière supported, so hierarchy no longer exists. Teachers and students can cooperate to construct knowledge (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 43).

Students should participate in decision-making related to their development, and they should also be involved in the teaching process as “critical thinkers” and not as “objects of assistance” (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 83). Therefore, in Lundy’s words, they should have a “voice” and an “audience” (Lundy, 2007); they should express themselves, and teachers should be there to listen and take them seriously. What is more, “the learning materials are no longer just information, they become generators of reflection and action. Teaching is no longer simple delivery of static and standardized information divided into fragments of isolated, unconnected and decontextualized disciplines, rather it builds the learning potential and higher thinking abilities (a logical thought process) of the learner” (López Melero et al., 2016, p. 207).

Freire appreciates the virtue of dialogue. It is crucial though, to be characterized by humility and faith in what a human being can create, as an individual but most importantly as a member of a group of people who cooperate and struggle together to make and re-make the world (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 90). Consequently, the “problem-posing” approach and dialogue are bound together with the child’s right to participation since they all promote children’s involvement in their education and cooperation with their teachers.

The main part of my research question and objectives is about children’s right to participate in Greek Primary schools, and especially the right of refugee children. As we have seen from the discussion above, there is a theoretical gap on refugee children’s participation in education; both in the understanding of the concept of participation and in the implications and practice of it in schools. Moreover, there is a lack of insights particularly on the context of Greek classrooms. Therefore, my goal is to contribute with my study and fill up this gap, addressing the aforementioned issues.

## 4. Methodology

To get started, before discussing the methods suitable for my study, I consider it necessary to present once again the main research question and research objectives to make explicit their relevance with my choice. The research question is:

*To what extent the strategies implemented in Greek Primary schools permit and encourage the child's right to participation to be enjoyed by refugee students?*

While the research objectives are the following:

- To understand the perceptions that child refugees, as well as their teachers in Greek Primary Schools, possess about the child's right to participation.
- To identify teachers' evaluation of current policies used by Greek Primary Schools regarding child refugees' participation, and try to make suggestions for reforms.
- To explore different understandings of participation and their implications.

In this chapter, I will present the research strategy and research design, the choices I made for the sites, and the data collection methods, my data analysis strategy, as well as the sampling approach. Also, I will deploy the ethical considerations and limitations of my project.

### 4.1. The choice of research strategy and research design

As discussed previously, my research question allows further elaboration with teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the topic. Thus, by answering the research objectives, we identify participants' perspectives on child refugees' participation in class. For this reason, I suggest that a qualitative research strategy is most suitable for the current project, which possesses an interpretivist approach and is based on words rather than numbers. "The stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants" (Bryman, 2016, p. 375).

What is most important in my research is to realize what the students' and teachers' opinions are about child refugees' participation in the classroom as well as what the meaning of their right to participation is. As Bryman states: "[...] many qualitative researchers express a commitment to viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the people that they study. The social



world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though they were incapable of their own reflections on the social world” (Bryman, 2016, p. 393). Therefore, the qualitative approach can assist my study in reaching the goal of identifying my participants’ perspectives on the issue of participation.

In addition to that, qualitative researchers are “concerned with explanation” and they mostly “provide a detailed account of what goes on in the setting being investigated [...]” (Bryman, 2016, p. 394). They also emphasize the specific context studied. The purpose of qualitative research is to gather information about a particular case and understand the behavior of the people involved in this social environment (Bryman, 2016, p. 395). Indeed, I anticipate that with the present study, I can offer a deep understanding of the context of Greek public Primary schools and the way teachers operating in it, support child refugees’ right to participate. I will try to provide as much information as possible to achieve a ‘thick description’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 394) of this particular setting.

The fact that my focus is on the specific case of child refugees in Greek public Primary Schools and an extensive explanation of it clarifies that I choose a case study design that emphasizes the complexity and unique nature of the selected environment (Bryman, 2016, p. 60). “Commonly, in case study design, no claim is made for generalizability. It is rather about the quality of theoretical analysis that is allowed by intensive investigation into one or a few cases, and how well theory can be generated and tested, using both inductive and deductive reasoning” (Walliman, 2006b, p. 45).

#### **4.2.Choosing the sites and the data collection methods**

The investigation took place in a town in the North-West of Greece. The reason for choosing this site was because it is my hometown. As a result, I was very interested in examining how local schools work concerning that specific topic. However, to be realistic, apart from this, there were reasons of convenience that contributed to my decision. The ease of finding schools that could agree to help me conduct my research played a huge role; the teachers would be more willing to cooperate with someone that they already know as well as help me securing contacts with other schools in the town.

The methods that I picked to collect the appropriate data were non-participant observations and semi-structured interviews with six students and six teachers. Both observations and interviews took place in January 2020. Consequently, a detailed description of these two methods follows.

#### ***4.2.1. Non-Participant observation***

To answer my research question and evaluate the pedagogical methods used in Greek classrooms, I conducted observations. “This is a method of recording conditions, events and activities through looking rather than asking” (Walliman, 2006a, p. 95). That way, I can identify whether teaching methods permit and encourage child refugees’ participation and empowerment. I used guidelines prepared in advance so that I could focus on my target, and took notes about teachers' and students’ behavior in class and conversations between them.

My observations were non-participant ones, which means that I was not involved in the activities taking place in the classrooms. As Gold (1958) indicates, my role will be as a “complete observer”. In that case, “the observer takes a detached stance by not getting involved in the events, and uses unobtrusive observation techniques and remains ‘invisible’ either in fact or in effect (i.e. by being ignored)” (Gold (1958) as cited in Walliman, 2006a, p. 96). I conducted six observations in the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> grades of 2 different public Primary schools in Greece. Each observation lasted 1-2 teaching hours.

#### ***4.2.2. Semi-structured interviews***

In my attempt to have a deeper understanding of the pedagogical strategies that teachers use in their class, I also proceeded with qualitative semi-structured interviews with both refugee students and teachers. When using semi-structured interviewing as a research method, the researcher has prepared in advance the questions to fulfill the research objectives. However, “the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply” (Bryman, 2016, p. 468). As a result, there is every likelihood that unexpected data can emerge relevant to the research question. An interesting outcome of this method is to examine what teachers and students think about the way their class is structured and how they interpret students’ participation and inclusion.

The form I used was face-to-face interviews, an advantage of which is that “as the interviewer, you are in a good position to judge the quality of the responses, to notice if a question has not been properly understood and to encourage the respondent to be full in his/her answers” (Walliman, 2006a, p. 93). I interviewed six students and six teachers to identify their perceptions about children’s right to participation as well as the specific situations they are involved, and how child refugees are supported to participate in the classrooms. I had prepared the guidelines on the interview questions in advance so that I can stay focused on the purposes of the study. I attributed

pseudonyms to each participant, and the schools are called School A and School B. Also, I used random country names in the transcriptions, when interviewees refer to the children's country of origin. I recorded all interviews. I saved the files in a separate encrypted device for transcription and analysis.

### **4.3.Data analysis and interpretation**

As for data analysis, I started coding as soon as I finished with data collection. I first read through my transcripts and notes taken during observations to get an idea of the main concepts. Then, I repeated the process, but this time I took notes of what seemed significant and relevant to my research question. I jotted down as many 'keywords' as I could. "When you do this you are coding-generating an index of terms that will help you to interpret and theorize in relation to your data" (Bryman, 2016, p.581). I once again checked the codes generated, and I began to find connections between them and create 'general theoretical ideas' related to my literature. Some codes often occurred more than once in the transcripts (Bryman, 2016, p. 582). For example, the keyword 'language'. Finally, I created four distinct categories, which include many concepts produced during the coding process and are linked with theories that guide my research.

The whole project is based on an interpretative stance. This means that participants' views are the most important element, leading the process of analysis, and eventually, the findings of the research. Interpretivism is an epistemology which "respects the difference between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman, 2016, p. 26). Indeed, in this study, we investigate the implementation of refugee children's right to participation in Greek Primary schools founded upon the interviewees' statements. An interesting outcome that interpretivism might bring to my project is that the final results might be surprising (Bryman, 2016, p.27) since participants are likely to develop unexpected perspectives. However, it is important to point out that when adopting an interpretative stance, it is also the researcher's interpretations that need to be considered. It is actually a 'double interpretation', where the researcher interprets the interviewees' interpretations. Besides, "there is a third level of interpretation going on, because the researcher's interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of a discipline" (Bryman, 2016, p. 28). Interpretivism, thus, is a big part of my research. It is based on my

interpretations of the students' and teachers' words, while ultimately, all findings are interpreted according to the theories I used.

#### **4.4. Sample**

As conducting qualitative research, the focus of which is on the deep understanding of a specific context, I decided to choose the purposive sampling method. "Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling. The researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions that are posed" (Bryman, 2016, p. 408).

Having my research question in mind, and the goals of my study well established, I tried to find participants who could help me answer these questions and achieve my goals. Therefore, I contacted students who have a refugee background and their teachers, making sure that their contribution is surely relevant to the topic. I decided to conduct interviews with pupils whose age is between 9 to 12 years old. The reason for doing so was because that would provide me with more possibilities to develop a deeper and more complete conversation. Also, the barrier of the language played a key role. Older students are more likely to have developed a greater competence in the Greek language, and this would permit interviews to be more fluent. My purpose is not to generalize to a wider population, and that is why the sample is a non-random one.

The approach I selected was the snowball sampling. "Snowball sampling is where the researcher contacts a small number of members of the target population and gets them to introduce him/her to others" (Walliman, 2006c, p. 79). Indeed, I primarily contacted the first school, which fulfilled my research objectives, and then the principal and teachers of this school helped me contacting more schools that could help me with my study. It is not always easy to get access to schools, and the truth is that approach is often used when obstacles occur in finding participants (Bryman, 2016, p. 415).

In the following tables, I present the list of the participants and a few information about them.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Years living in Greece</b>	<b>Attended school in the home country</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
<b>1</b>	Sofia	11	F	A	2	Yes	20/01/2020
<b>2</b>	Maria	12	F	B	2	Yes	21/01/2020
<b>3</b>	Filippos	11	M	A	2	Yes	22/01/2020
<b>4</b>	Lambros	9	M	A	2	No	23/01/2020
<b>5</b>	Nefeli	12	F	A	2,5	No	23/01/2020
<b>6</b>	Anthi	11	F	A	-*	No	24/01/2020

*Table 1-Students interviewees overview*

\*She does not remember exactly how long she has been living in the country.

<b>No.</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Years of employment as a teacher</b>	<b>Years of working experience with refugees</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
<b>1</b>	Petros	M	Greek	A	28	2	20/01/2020
<b>2</b>	Fotis	M	Greek	B	32	20	21/01/2020
<b>3</b>	Nora	F	Greek	A	17	1	22/01/2020
<b>4</b>	Kostas	M	Greek	A	20	1	23/01/2020
<b>5</b>	Evelina	F	Greek/Polish	A	20	1	23/01/2020
<b>6</b>	Thomas	M	Greek	A	30	2	24/01/2020

*Table 2-Teacher interviewees overview*

#### **4.5.Ethical considerations**

According to Diener and Crandall (1978), potential ethical issues in social research can be divided into four main areas: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deception (Bryman, 2016, p. 125). Regarding my study, several concerns could occur concerning these principles; however, I tried to eliminate the possibilities of ethical issues to appear.

First, as far as harm to participants is concerned, a clarification of what is meant by “harm” is needed. “Harm can entail a number of facets: physical harm; harm to participants’ development; loss of self-esteem; stress; and ‘inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts’” (Diener and Crandall as cited in Bryman, 2016, p.126). In our case, conducting the research might create possibilities of unintentional cause of stress for both teachers and students with my presence in class or by interviewing them. Another concern is bringing about loss of self-esteem to some teachers if they feel criticized for their way of working. To avoid these situations, I tried to introduce myself and get to know all students. I was there to answer all potential questions that arose, and I intended to create a relationship of trust between us. As for teachers, I reduced the chances to bring them in an awkward position by cooperating with them throughout my research. I showed my respect by consulting them for each step of the process and explaining in detail what I was doing.

In addition to these concerns, it is my responsibility to ensure the confidentiality of records. The whole process should be conducted “in a way that will prevent people and places from being identified” (Bryman, 2016, p. 127). For this reason, I used pseudonyms for both the people involved and the schools. Furthermore, issues about discrimination between students in the classroom were likely to occur since my research is about a particular group of individuals. Once again, this was solved by consulting teachers and finding together the best way to approach child refugees so as they do not feel targeted. Also, it is crucial to “avoid using classifications or designations that give rise to unreasonable generalization, resulting in practice in the stigmatization of particular groups” (NESH, 2006, p. 24).

To make sure that all participants were fully informed about the content of my study, I provided them with an informed consent form. This form was given to the participants to sign, before I proceeded with classroom observation and interviews, and familiarize them with the nature of my

research and the outcomes their contribution would bring (Bryman, 2016, p. 131). The whole process was voluntary, which means that they could choose if they wanted to participate or not, and if accepting, they could withdraw their decision and refuse to continue at any stage of the research.

Finally, as a researcher, I must respect the right to privacy of all respondents. Personal information gathered throughout my study will be kept confidential, as mentioned before, maintaining their anonymity. “In some case it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate to record certain kinds of sensitive information” (BSA Statement as cited in Bryman, 2006, p.133). In light of this statement, it was not my intention to gather personal experiences and sensitive information about participants’ lives, but only their general opinions and comments regarding teaching processes and school environment. However, I did not use confidential information that came out during observation and interviews for my research. As for the last principle of deception, there is no concern about misleading the participants. I provided them with all the necessary information so as they did not feel uncertain for any step of my study.

#### **4.6.Limitations**

The fact that I conducted my research in two Greek Primary schools and in a short time frame renders the possibility of generalization impossible. My study focuses on the specific context of refugee children’s participation in these particular schools. Instead of attempting to generalize for all Primary schools’ situation in Greece, I am just trying to contribute and motivate for further investigations in the field of refugee children’s quality of education in Greece.

One significant difficulty I faced was to find participants. I had initial contact with one of the schools, and the principal was willing to help me. Yet, although at the beginning there were at least fourteen students, who would potentially participate in the study, this number was gradually decreased. This happened because some children either left the town or were absent from school at the time I conducted the interviews. Furthermore, I found it challenging to gain access to more schools. Teachers who I talked to told me that their refugee students speak neither Greek nor English, and thus, our communication would be impossible. The second school, which accepted to participate in my study, had only one refugee student enrolled between the age of 9 and 12, which was my target group.

The teachers, as well as the principals of the schools, warned me about the low Greek language skills of these students, and indeed they were right. Even though we managed to have a conversation, our communication was not effortless. I had to prompt them several times to receive an answer to my questions, and sometimes I would explain to them the meaning of the words I used. Notably, one of the student participants struggled a lot. However, except for this case, I did have interesting talks with the rest, and the research was eventually feasible.

Finally, I am aware of the challenge of translating all the transcripts from the Greek language to English. Since I was the one who translated the interviewees' words, there might be some deviations from what they initially wanted to say. There were several expressions in Greek, which would not make sense in English; therefore, the emotional aspect of their responses is often lost. I tried hard to be as objective as I can. Nevertheless, I recognize that the final result is a presentation of my own interpretations.



## 5. Data analysis

This chapter will be devoted to analyzing and interpret the data gathered from the interview sessions I had with teachers and refugee students in Greek Primary schools. During that time, I used one more method to complement my findings, which was non-participant observations. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, I spent one or two schooling hours observing how the lesson is held in the classroom of each participant.

I decided to split the data that occurred out of the transcripts in four core categories that I reckon most fundamental, each of them consisting of several concepts. These are Interpersonal Relations and School Life, Participation and Inclusion of child refugees in Greek classrooms, Schooling, Educational System, and Structure, and The Rights of the Child. The following perceptions come from the participants, my interpretation of their words, being as objective as I can, as well as my own observations and conclusions. Furthermore, what I present here are texts taken out of the transcripts that were originally in Greek. Therefore, I am fully aware of the fact that slight differences might exist after my own translation of the participants' words. I will try to present local expressions and particularities of the Greek language as close as I can to English, to achieve adequate comprehension of what is said.

### 5.1. Interpersonal Relations and School Life

It is widely known that education and especially schooling play an immense role in the socialization of the children. As Adderley et al. (2015) stated, “[...] school is an important time for children to start building independent social relationships. However, for some, this process is more problematic than for others. Being lonely, or feeling left out, is an emotionally painful experience for some children” (p. 114). In this section, I will examine the perceptions that refugee students and their teachers possess about the teacher-student and student-student relationships taking place in their school as well as how these should preferably be.

#### 5.1.1. *Peer relationships*

In general, what I noticed from my conversations with refugee students is that many of them are struggling a lot to create friendships with their classmates. At the same time, they often face discrimination and exclusion due to their differences. When I asked the students if they feel comfortable to speak and share their ideas in the classroom, their responses were:

“Yes, I speak! Yes, I speak with one girl, who is my best friend at school, and the other girls make fun of me, and I don’t speak, I don’t hear what they say...I think ‘let it be. It’s ok.’” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

Another student said:

“It’s just the boys. They tease me” (Maria, 21/01/2020).

And she continues:

“What can I do...with all girls is like this. The boys tease them” (Maria, 21/01/2020).

However, when I asked about the relationship with her classmates, she was positive, claiming that “we are friends” and “we take care of each other” (Maria, 21/01/2020).

Therefore, it is apparent that she is not facing significant difficulties in integrating into her peer groups. Even though boys tease her, she is not affected by that, since she believes that it is something that happens between boys and girls in her classroom; that this is the norm and she is one of them, in contrast with Sofia, who feels excluded from the group of the girls in her class.

One more example of a student who thinks that he is doing well with his peers is Filippos. As he stated:

“They all talk to me” (22/01/2020).

Also, when I tried to ask him if he believes that children could help in some things, like making changes at school, he interrupted me, and as misunderstood the question, he stated:

“One friend of mine helps me a lot,”

and he added:

“Yes, he does! Everyone helps me! But some of them no. Some yes, some no” (Filippos, 22/01/2020).

It can be seen that he has achieved to build healthy and caring relationships with his classmates, ones that are based on reciprocity, helping each other in class, and being friendly. Indeed, this is what I also noticed when I observed the class. What I wrote in my notebook was:

“It seems that he has a good relationship with his classmates. He asked them questions about the lesson, and they responded and helped him. [...] A student that sits in front of Filippos looked back to him and explained something to him. The student next to him did the same. It looks like they cooperate well with each other. [...] The teacher tells Filippos to go up to the board. He finds it a bit difficult to solve the exercise, but the teacher is there and is helping him in different ways. Filippos went back to his desk, and his

classmate that sits with him said that he would help him, he cuddled his head and told him not to feel sad, and they would try to solve the exercises together. His classmate is guiding and making questions to Filippos. As soon as they finished with the exercise, he said ‘well done’ to him, and he encouraged him to keep trying. He gave him his hand, saying, ‘high five’ and ‘well done’” (Classroom observation, 22/01/2020).

Unfortunately, it is not the same for the rest of the student participants. For instance, when I asked Nefeli how she gets along with her classmates and if they have a good relationship, she answered yes. But when I further asked if they are friends, her response was:

“During the fifth grade, I used to have a friend, and then my friend said, ‘we don’t want to play with you anymore’” (Nefeli, 23/01/2020).

Anthi, in the same question, was more straightforward, stating:

“No, they are not nice with me” (Anthi, 24/01/2020).

They both have a hard time creating friendships, since, according to their words, their classmates seem reluctant to interact with them, although they, themselves, want to have a better relationship.

However, when I asked them if there is something that they would like to change regarding the lesson and the activities, almost all of them, no matter if they have made friends in school or not, deemed as most crucial to have a better relationship with their peers. They focus more on this issue instead of the lesson and the activities they do in class. Some of their responses were:

“That the girls talk to us. Just that. To talk to me” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

“That they listen to me, not making fun of me...things like that. To play with me, and that I play with them” (Filippos, 22/01/2020).

“Just that the other children say, ‘you will not play’ and ‘you are not playing.’ Alice and Zoe, they are friends, and they say ‘no, Anthi will not play.’ And I don’t play. I don’t know why they are acting like this” (Anthi, 24/01/2020).

### ***5.1.2. Teacher-student relationship***

There are two different topics to be unfolded in this section, based on the interviews held with both teachers and students. One is the relationship between teachers and students in general, regardless of the social group they belong to, according to teachers’ opinions. The other focuses more on the relationship that particularly those teachers and refugee students, who participated in the research,

have. Then, when I asked the teachers which the ideal relationship between teachers and students is, I received the following answers:

“I would say that the student should be liberated in front of the teacher, not feeling that the teacher is...not feeling the fear of the teacher, like a strict judge. To be liberated, to release themselves thoroughly, to release everything they have to give. To give it, not being afraid, not having...two critical things that students have in front of the teacher are the fear of error and the awe of the grade [...]” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

“They should be friends. They should be friends, have limits, the child should understand when they should respect, when they should tell a joke, when to have fun, when to work and write their test. The child should distinguish these, but this can be realized through friendship. A friendship where one respects the other” (Fotis, 21/01/2020).

“The ideal relationship between teacher and student for sure is not that teacher-centered that existed the old times, namely, where the teachers are the only ones talking, and the students listen. Certainly, it should be an interaction; the teacher guides, but the teacher provides initiatives as well. The student says their opinion, express themselves, freely, democratically, up to a point because there should be respectful towards the teacher...and not only towards the teacher but also towards their classmates and the whole school environment. And well, since the student respects the teacher, says their opinion democratically, they can have a good relationship with their teacher. On the other hand, the teacher, for sure, gives the student freedom, but they should also respect the child, respect the student. It is a completely dependent relationship; it is interaction. And myself, with the children, I’m talking at least about myself, I try to release their tension, that is, when we do our basic lessons, when we are there, I bring them back in order when it is necessary. Certainly, this will happen as well, but when we say that now we can relax, we will relax, we will tell a joke, this means that there will be intimacy, there is always a familiarity between the student and the teacher. I mean, I don’t want that the children are afraid of me and call me ‘the fear and the terror’ when they see me, but I don’t want that they don’t count me either. Therefore, I want that this situation is somewhere in the middle [...] (Nora, 22/01/2020).

“I consider that there should be some distance between the teacher; that is, we are not buddies. But neither this that existed the old times where the child is afraid of the teacher. Thus, you should find a balance; having the chance to tell a joke and discuss, and that the child is not afraid of approaching you to tell you a secret or some problem that would have, but they should also know and respect a teacher; in general an older person. To know how to abide by the rules and the teacher their own rules and the child...you should mitigate somewhere, neither being too strict nor letting children completely out of control, not too relaxed so as lose control of the things” (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

Teachers repeated many words when they talked about the relationship between them and their students and how it should be. Some of them are ‘respect,’ ‘being afraid of the teacher,’ ‘friends and buddies,’ ‘telling a joke,’ ‘relax,’ as well as ‘old times.’ They all agree that students should respect the teachers but also, they should not be afraid like it used to be before. They consider how things used to be in the past were not appropriate, and the ideal relationship should deviate from this. Telling a joke and giving students some time to let off steam is important, but according to Evelina’s words, they should not exaggerate. While Fotis believes that teachers and students should be friends, Evelina disagrees with that, claiming that there should be some distance between them and not consider themselves as buddies.

Next, it is important to reveal how the relationships between teachers and the minority group of refugee students are in the specific context of the schools of my research. Overall, what I realized from the discussions I had with the students is that they are all fairly satisfied with the relationship with their teachers. Take Sofia’s statement as an example:

“My teacher is very nice, but the students are not nice, they are not nice.”

When I asked her if she feels the teacher close to her, her response was:

“Yes! He takes care of me. He says to the girls to talk to me, that I’m a refugee, that I’ve come from Iran, and that kind of things. But the girls don’t listen to him. They don’t talk to me, whatever our teacher says, the girls won’t listen because...the girls do whatever they want” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

Sofia claims that her teacher is close to her and helps her integrate into her peer groups. However, besides the effort that he does, it is still difficult for her to make friends. On the other hand, when I made the same question to Maria, she replied:

“Yes, he listens to me...hmm...he listens to me, yes, a bit” (Maria, 21/01/2020).

I tried to understand what ‘a bit’ means for her by asking if it has happened that she talked to him and he did not listen, and she said:

“Not much. It was just one day,”

and later, she added:

“He doesn’t listen!” (Maria, 21/01/2020).

I asked her if she wanted to tell me what happened that day and she replied that she does not remember, but she wanted to tell him something specific and he did not listen to her. However, she made clear that this was the case just for one day, whereas in general terms, she feels well with him and comfortable to talk (Maria, 21/01/2020).

In order to see what teachers think about their relationship with their refugee students, I tried to understand how close they are to each other by asking if children have ever shared any previous experiences or thoughts with them. The responses I received were the following:

“No. She hasn’t done it. Neither have I intended something...nor have I done it. Probably now... I don’t know. Perhaps because she is a girl and I’m a man; if there were a woman inside the classroom [...], she might have said a problem of hers from her previous life [...]. But the relationship is not that...I would say, to tell me a problem she encountered, either there or a problem she encounters here at home” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

“Something similar to this, no, Filippas hasn’t shared with me anything. Like, let’s say ‘I did that last year,’ no, he hasn’t shared this with me. I think that all these children don’t open themselves that much, they don’t talk with...they don’t speak much, they don’t speak openly. They maybe keep things for themselves [...].” (Nora, 22/01/2020).

“No, he can’t use the language, so he hasn’t told us anything. Sometimes I’ve asked him about games they play; I couldn’t get any response in the question that I made” (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

“No, the specific girl is very close. That is, even when I ask her many times what happen, not what happened and she left, but...in general let’s say she’s been absent for three days, ‘what happened? Why were you absent? What was wrong? What happened?’ she doesn’t tell me. She doesn’t open herself easily” (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

It seems that it is pretty challenging to communicate and come closer to these students. All the teachers above believe that refugee children are not open to discussing their experiences.

Sometimes though, some challenges may occur, such as the lack of language skills. Even if they wanted to talk and share their thoughts, it would be impossible since they are not confident to speak in Greek or English. One of the teachers also mentioned that gender might play a role in this, making it more difficult for his student to open herself to him since she is a girl. Overall, there was only one teacher who said that his students had shared their experiences with him. What he said was:

“Yes! Many children have told me about their experiences from the wars. Let’s not talk about these...they have told me about many things, and I felt emotional...because they are children of the war” (Fotis, 21/01/2020).

### ***5.1.3. Cases of discrimination, racism, and nationalism in Greek schools***

An interesting and critical topic that occurred during the interview sessions was discrimination and nationalism in school. Both students and teachers made references on these, and it is something that significantly affects the integration of refugee children in the community as well as their wellbeing in school. One response I received from a student when I asked her if she would like to share anything else with me regarding her participation in school caught my attention. What she replied was:

“I’m having a terrible time. I would prefer that the girls wanted to talk to me. And when I go out during the break not looking at me because...I’m not something...I don’t have...one eye, I have two eyes, I don’t have four eyes, I don’t have one ear...they shouldn’t stare at me. Everyone stares at me, the whole school. I would like that they don’t stare at me and talk to me instead” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

According to what I noted in my diary during the observation in Sofia’s class, the desks were arranged in a horseshoe shape (like the Greek letter Π). Boys and girls were separated, girls were sitting in one line and boys in the other two lines. Sofia was sitting in the corner. There were a few moments when the teacher made a pause, so students took advantage of it and started talking to each other, whispering. However, Sofia was not communicating with anyone, and she looked a bit distracted (Classroom observation, 22/01/2020).

Nora’s reply, when I asked her about the advantages and the challenges she faces when she works with refugee children, was about nationalism in Greece. She specifically mentioned that:

“[...] The positive thing is that it helps a lot his classmates as well, to integrate a child, foreigner, because generally the Greeks have this bias, and because children are harsh, they often say ‘Ah! They will leave’ or ‘Ah! They are from another country’, ‘Ah! They are from Syria’, ‘A! They are from Albania’, ‘They don’t belong here.’ Therefore, since children are harsh, they don’t always accept it. They, however, accepted Filippos quickly, but he also made his own efforts. He was trying to speak Greek, he was trying to integrate into the social set and the school environment, that is, the positives are unfortunately less, and it’s not valid for all children, the negatives are a bit more [...]” (Nora, 23/01/2020).

She further explained why she thinks this happens:

“Why does this happen? Because in general, the Greeks are a bit nationalists; that is, they have this vanity, that beyond Greece... they used to say ‘home is where I hang my hat,’ but it’s not the same when someone comes to their country, entering into their school, getting into their lives. People do not always like this, and unfortunately, this starts from home. This thing starts with the parents. The parents will say that, let’s say... ‘well, it’s ok, don’t you bother that much, no worries, they will hang out with the rest Syrian children’. Unfortunately, this is the mentality that prevails in Greece. While in other European countries it doesn’t. In some yes, in some no, right...but there are exemptions like ours, where he is well-received, and we don’t have notably that kind of case. Namely, during these 5-6 months that have passed now that we are in school, never, no one, Filippos didn’t come to me to complain that ‘they cursed, they talked bad about my origin’, no. We didn’t have stuff like that, but it happens to other children” (Nora, 23/01/2020).

Kostas as well, referred to racist behavior when I asked about the advantages of working with refugee children. As he stated:

“Ok, as for advantages, I could say...that you get to know some people from another country, with different habits, with another mentality...And this racist mentality that we all have let’s say, in the beginning, starts to go away a bit, the fear for the stranger, you get to understand that these people have the same needs like us, that they have not come here to take our jobs or to create problems, but because the need made them to do so [...]” (Kostas, 23/01/2020).



Another teacher that I got to talk with, had an extreme view of the Greek people in general, one that suggests that the Greek society does not care about the rights of the foreigners, that there is discrimination and things are very different between nationals and minorities. He even used the words ‘purity of the race’, to describe how Greek people think about foreigners and themselves. He specifically claimed that:

“[...] it is different because our society is like this. Even though we consider ourselves, like a community, not being racists or anything else, I have the impression that profoundly...we don’t care, we are interested only in the Greek children, and we just leave the rest kids aside, wherever they come from, whichever minority group they belong. We have a bit this view, I imagine...hm, should I say it [laugh]...about the purity of the race, I mean...this is a bit annoying” (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

#### **5.1.4. Summary**

By and large, what I realized from my conversations with refugee students is that they all, irrespective of whether they have managed to make friends or not yet, consider having good relationships with their peers essential for their wellbeing in school. They feel their teachers being close to them. However, one of the students talked about an instance where her teacher did not listen to her. Even though this happened just one day, it seems that it is something that she does remember and cares about it.

Teachers’ answers about the ideal relationship between them and their students consisted of similar elements. The most important ones were the respect that students should show in front of their teachers, whether teachers and students should be friends or not, letting children relax a bit during the teaching process and not being afraid of their teachers, as it used to be before. According to the teachers’ opinions, refugee students are reluctant to open themselves and talk about their experiences. However, the teachers themselves did not intend to speak with them about personal issues, except for one of the interviewees who said that he had had discussions with his refugee students about their lives.

Finally, cases of discrimination and racism have occurred between students. What should be pointed out here is the importance of teachers’ management of diversity as well as parents’ attitudes towards foreign children. Teachers could help create a climate of solidarity and inclusion in the class by not discriminating any student and promoting the creation of groups and teamwork.

Many teachers talked about the Greeks' nationalism, and it seems that this derives from home. It is the parents of the students who reinforce it and encourage their children to avoid refugees.

## **5.2.Participation and Inclusion of child refugees in Greek classrooms**

Education, apart from providing students with the knowledge, also “gives shape and structure to children’s lives and can instill community values, promote justice and respect for human rights and enhance peace, stability and interdependence” (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009, p. 5). These functions of education are particularly important for the case of refugee children, who left their country due to extremely difficult situations. Therefore, they need to reestablish their feelings of security and belonging. Arriving in the host country and entering schools, they face more obstacles, such as communicating in a foreign for them language and adapting to the new norms. Under these circumstances, child refugees’ participation in the schooling process seems more challenging. “For this reason, in attempting to facilitate the participation of children who seem less competent than might be expected, one must identify situations which will maximize a child’s opportunities to demonstrate her competence” (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 31). Thus, in this section I will examine how the situation in Greek Primary schools is, what the reality is, and how schools approach this challenge and support refugee students to participate, according to the words of our participants.

### ***5.2.1. Teachers’ understanding of participatory pedagogy***

A big part of what I am trying to elaborate with is participatory pedagogical methods. During the interview sessions, I asked the teachers how they perceive and understand participatory pedagogy. I did this because I would like to see what this technique means in their opinion and what they think about it; if it is a strategy they know and use in their class. These are some of the answers I received:

“I set the children in teams. I have placed Maria as well in teams, especially in the subject of Math, and I saw that one exercise that she couldn’t do, she was checking it out from the girl that was sitting next to her. All the children participate actively in the class, so does Maria. As for the subject of Language, I don’t discriminate her, she normally reads every day, as the rest do, she also reads the part that she will get. No discrimination. Everyone is the same. And I think that she got accepted by her classmates as well. They accepted her. [...] If there is no discrimination from the teacher, these children will make

sense of the conditions fast, and they will become Greeks at some point” (Fotis, 21/01/2020).

Fotis’s conception of participatory methods was to include in the teaching process all the students, with no exemption. He focused on the case of refugee students, and he assumed that what is important here is that teachers treat all students the same, and this is how refugee children will be integrated into the Greek schools eventually. He also pointed out that he sets teams and lets students collaborate.

When I asked Petros the same question, he first misinterpreted it, and his answer was about the benefit that participation would have to the students. But soon, I remade the question to ask him what it means for him, what the practice of participatory pedagogy is. He said:

“What participatory means...it means that what we want to give, what I want to give to the children, not giving it myself, but students discover it themselves. That’s what participatory means, participation means that alone, the student discovers what I want to give them. All this process of participation will stick much more in their minds and their subconscious than presenting it myself with a ten-minute presentation on the board or writing it myself and giving it to them, then it won’t stick anything in their mind. But when they participate in the process themselves, with my help because they can’t do it alone, with my help, I give them some stimuli, and they discover with those stimuli. I know till which point I reach, I provide them with some stimuli, and step by step, they discover all this process themselves. For sure, it is much better for them, they feel better themselves, but it’s also what we’re saying, that more things stick in their mind from this participatory procedure rather than being presented from an educator or be given simply like this to them, written and so on” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

For him, participatory pedagogy is more about providing children with initiatives, with opportunities to create knowledge themselves with the guidance of the teacher and not be simply given to them. Moreover, Evelina’s respond was the following:

“It’s this interaction that the student has with the teacher, the teacher with the student. Students will say their opinion. Even in the curriculum, there is this interaction, that children participate in the lesson, that in some way they lead it where they want, of course with the guidance and the suggestions of the teacher so as we keep to the point, we stick to our topic. Hm, it’s good. It’s good, but of course, it has to do with the material that

you've got, who the children in your class are, if the group is appropriate for it; because sometimes it's not appropriate to let the children participate too much in the lesson, that is you should limit them a bit if they go off topic" (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

Evelina's opinion then is somehow close to what Petros suggested. Children should be given space to lead and get where they want, always with the assistance of the teacher. However, what she also pointed out was that it sometimes depends on the group of students that you have in the classroom. You cannot let children participate a lot if they do not behave appropriately; if they miss the point of what they are doing. Nora agreed with controlling their participation so that there is an order in class. She also reckons that participation is that children are encouraged to express their views without hesitating or being afraid of making mistakes. She clarifies that mistakes are part of the educational process, that everyone makes mistakes, even the teachers, and this is what they try to do at school, namely, trying to find the correct answer, what fits the most. She supports participation in different ways, beyond the normal process of having the student lift their hand if they wish to talk, and the teacher gives them permission. She suggests that children are welcome to express their opinions in whichever way they wish (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Finally, Thomas added that participatory practice is also about doing things and organizing activities at school that go beyond the syllabus's guidelines. These activities should be organized from more than one teacher, and parents should participate as well. He considers it important to be able to be more flexible in how the lesson is held so that children can be free to contribute, participate, and work in teams. That way, they can acquire more experiences as well as avoid getting bored with the static lesson (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

### ***5.2.2. Teachers' perceptions regarding their refugee students' needs***

In this thesis, we support that teachers should do their best to realize their refugee students' needs and acquire as much information as possible about them so that they can better assist their development (Hamilton, 2003, pp. 91-92). This is why I was interested to understand how teachers in Greek Primary schools think about the refugee students integrated into their classrooms. The question I asked for this purpose was if they believe that refugee students are different from their Greek peers. The responses I received indicate that most of the teachers do not see any significant difference.

“No, great differences, no, I don’t think they have great differences from their peers” (Petros, 20/01/2020),

and he further adds:

“These differences that they have, I think that they have to do with their way of life, with the culture of the country they come from, their level, their quality of life, their standard of living. When you are in a country like Iran, and then you come to Greece, there is another culture, another level, another... This is the difference. As for maturity, like a child and so on, I don’t think that there are differences. It’s just the way of life they had there that is way different than our way of life. And especially for girls, girls receive a completely different approach than boys in Iran, Irak, let’s say in these countries. Because I’ve seen the boys who have come here, that they don’t have such a big problem to adapt and so on, girls are a more particular... you would see that with Sofia’s brother as well, if you would talk to him, he is different” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

“From my experience, yes, from my experience this year, I haven’t realized any difference; namely, they also want to play, they also want to participate in the whole, they want you to approach them like all the children, they don’t have, I haven’t seen any particular difference, at least Filippos, who is in my classroom and I can talk about him, he is a kid that is into everything, and because, as I told you the other day, he tried a lot to integrate into the whole because it’s his second year in this school, and he achieved to be included, his classmates also accepted him, so apart from the language, in which for example, he is not that fluent, he wouldn’t speak like us, I don’t think there is another difference. He is a child like all the rest. With the same needs, the same wills” (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Kostas also agrees with the rest. He suggests that the needs of these children are the same. He only points out the challenge they face with the Greek language, and he is convinced that this is a great burden since he cannot communicate, and understand what his student needs and wants from them (23/01/2020). Thomas reckons that they just have different habits and traditions, but apart from these, there are no differences between them (24/01/2020). However, Evelina was the only one who said that they are different, and she referred to gender differences as well, as Petros did. What she stated was:

“They can’t easily play with the rest of the children, they don’t comprehend some terms that we use or, for example, the sense of humor that you use when you speak to the children. Sometimes because, in this case, she is a girl in prepubescence, she pulls herself a bit away from boys; she doesn’t want to be so close to them; she doesn’t want to play as a group that much. Now, in all the rest, she is a kid, I don’t think that she differentiates that much. Mostly in customs and those things they are taught at home” (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

### ***5.2.3. Teachers’ perspectives about refugee students’ participation in Greek classrooms***

What is next, after we saw what teachers in Greek schools think about participatory pedagogy and their refugee students’ needs, I consider fundamental to examine the actual participation that refugee children have. Which is the reality? Do refugee students participate the same as their Greek peers do? Do they feel supported by their teachers and classmates to participate, or are they excluded? First, I wanted to see what teachers believe about the impact of using participatory methods on refugee children’s quality of future life.

“Yes, it would certainly have an impact if it would happen more organized and differently. Yes, for sure it would” (Petros, 20/01/2020),

and he further added:

“It would help them at first, in the quality of life, in their way of life, in the way they behave, in the way they are treated and they feel towards the rest. Generally, in their whole life, for sure it would have in their whole life” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

“They should participate! Of course! It would help them a lot. The thing is that for this to happen, children should be given this role, to be active and be on a level that they can cope with it. That is, before Filippos, we used to have a child, who left, now he is in Thessaloniki, he came for the first semester, his name is Nikos, who was also a refugee from Syria. Unfortunately, this kid couldn’t do things. Unfortunately, he couldn’t do anything, even though he had attended the reception classes last year, he couldn’t make it, and it’s not that this was the reason...this specific kid, since he knew that he would leave, didn’t have the will to learn, didn’t want to learn because his mind knew that he would go back, if not to his country, to some other neighboring country. While Filippos, in this phase that he finds himself, is a child that lives in a house, not in a camp, has

connections with his classmates, with the environment of the [names the town] town; he is a child that can and tries to make it, and for sure he should be given initiatives, and it's good if all this participatory process is upheld from the teachers, and from the child himself and his classmates. I believe that it's certainly good pedagogically" (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Nora's opinion was that it would help him a lot, but she did not go deeper to it. She instead indicated another aspect of refugee children's condition in schools. The fact that many of them know already that their stay is temporary makes them feel less motivated to try to integrate and participate completely in the educational process. Kostas pointed out the language barrier and that it would not be feasible. As he mentioned:

"Ok, it would have an impact, but something like this can't happen under these circumstances. They can't communicate with the other children. Very difficult. Now...with body language...it could be, but it's difficult. In physical education and some other activities, beyond the regular lesson, through music, like...through computer science..." (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

And he further added:

"They would feel as well that they are part of the class, that they can do some things, even if they can't read, write, but at least they could participate in activities that the class does beyond these" (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

Moreover, Evelina's answer to this question was:

"Yes, I think that only this could help, namely, to be able to find ways with which this child could enter into the group of the children. Not being isolated, not considering her different from the others...and I'm trying somehow to do it [laughs], but ok..." (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

Thomas talked about their integration into the social group and school environment, stating that it would help them a lot with that and their adaptation (24/01/2020).

One more question I asked the teachers was if they think that refugee children participate the same as the rest of the students. Almost all teachers replied negatively. There were many reasons for it:

"No, they don't participate the same. They can't participate. They can't participate and talking about the current times because I imagine that we're talking about now...because

as I mentioned to you, it is a higher grade, fifth grade is a preparation grade for secondary school, it is a difficult grade, with difficult Math, difficult History...so, unfortunately, international students, refugee students cannot keep up. Perhaps in a lower grade, yes, but no, he doesn't participate the same in no case" (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Nora remarks on the difficulty that refugee children face being on the same level as their Greek peers in this stage. Being an international student in a high grade cannot be easy. They have missed many steps in the schooling process. Furthermore, Kostas talked about the language barrier.

"De facto, they cannot participate the same. Because there are so many things they don't know about the Greek language, they are behind in what we do here. My student doesn't participate at all, I mean the least, if I ask him a question and still it's challenging" (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

And when I asked him if he would say that his student tries to participate, he further added:

"Ok, he also wants to do something. However, the only thing he can do is to copy from the board and still not so well. Just for the sake of doing something, to keep himself occupied for that time, nothing else" (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

Indeed, I witnessed this myself when I spent time observing their class. In particular, what I noted was:

"Meanwhile, Lambros is not doing anything. He is looking at the board, and the book, and he is not solving the exercises" (Classroom observation, 28/01/2020).

Thomas claims that they participate according to their capacities. However, he agrees that language is something that makes it harder for them since they cannot understand what is said in class (24/01/2020). Evelina talked about the cultural aspects that deter them from participating. What she said was:

"They can't participate the same. Many years must pass to participate the same. Apart from...I think it has to do a bit about their origin. They haven't learned the same things. They don't want to participate in particular things; they fend off things when they think that...perhaps there are religious reasons; they don't like to play the same, the same games like the others, I don't think it's the same, I don't know" (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

On the other hand, Petros was the only one to suggest that they do participate the same and sometimes even more.



“Yes! This little we have seen, yes. Exactly the same! The same interest, she participates, she is interested, and not just the same, but I would say more than some of her classmates. She shows interest, and her family, a lot of interest, they want her to adapt, to learn the language, and in general the way of life, to make friendships, to be loved by the other children and so on, yes” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

To see what the level of their participation is, I asked the teachers if they have received any proposals about the teaching process or changes in the curriculum from their refugee students. They all said no, without any exemption. One of the reasons they gave was the lack of language skills.

“No. because most of the time, they find it difficult to comprehend what we are doing and how we are doing it. Many times, my student asks me ‘madam, what should I do?’ or ‘give me something to write,’ that is, she wants to participate, but she can’t because she has a lot of gaps, both in language and writing and doesn’t understand the words, she often doesn’t know what we tell her...” (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

From my observation in their classroom, it seems indeed very difficult for Nefeli to understand what they are doing and to keep up. She was trying to read, but she did not know how to solve the exercises. Her teacher was approaching her often, trying to help her read and write. However, she could not follow the rest of the students (Classroom observation, 28/01/2020).

Thomas added another element to the discussion, suggesting that for children at that age, it is difficult to comprehend this kind of procedure. What he exactly said was:

“No, it hasn’t happened to me. I think children themselves cannot; it is complicated; they are kids at an age where...at this age where they cannot easily have this kind of conception of things. Asking to change things is difficult; I don’t think that it’s easy to comprehend and ask for it” (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

Finally, when I asked Kostas if he would like to share anything else regarding the participation of refugee students in the Greek Primary schools, I received a moving reply, showing that the situation for them is not so favorable. They are at a high risk of exclusion under the current circumstances. What he exactly stated was:

“That I feel bad that I cannot do anything [laughs nervously]. Absolutely anything. I mean, I mostly make spasmodic moves. Sometimes, many times, I forget the child [laughs nervously]. I forget that he exists in the classroom, that’s how it is, to be honest...and this

makes me feel sad when...when I realize, let's say that I've forgotten him for a long time. But I don't find anything I could do with him. Sometimes, when I have time, I might go there, for example, let him read some words, but still, in essence, I do nothing in here for this kid, I don't do anything...”,

and he further adds:

“Perhaps...ah! ok, sometimes let's say, some of the games they play here, where they hide, he also participates in that; namely, he hides from me, I look for him, and I find him, I act like I can't find him...I don't know this kind of things, and ok, I see him, he feels nice as well, he is part of the class. Apart from this, I feel guilty for all that...”  
(Kostas, 23/01/2020).

#### ***5.2.4. Refugee students' perceptions about their participation in Greek schools***

In my effort to comprehend what refugee students think about their participation in school, I asked several questions. For instance, if they feel comfortable talking in the classroom, how they feel when they work in teams with their peers, as well as if they would like to change anything about their participation in the school activities.

Sofia said that she would like to participate more, and she would like things to change regarding her participation (20/01/2020). I asked if she thinks that she doesn't participate in class now, and she replied:

“No! it doesn't happen at all! In this school, in this class. It doesn't happen”,  
she further added:

“Because if the... [she implies students] in our class do like this, it cannot happen” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

It seems then that her classmates' behavior towards her prevents her from completely participate in the activities. She had previously mentioned that her classmates make fun of her when she speaks, and she does not like this (Sofia, 20/01/2020). Furthermore, both Maria and Lambros stated that they do not talk that much in the classroom because they are shy. However, they did not clarify the reason for feeling that way, and they said that they do feel comfortable with their classmates (Maria, 21/01/2020, Lambros, 23/01/2020).

Another student said that he speaks in class and feels comfortable with his classmates and his teacher. When I asked him if he would like to participate more, and if he thinks that he participates enough, he replied:

“Hm...I’m trying, I’m a good student. Yes, I am” (Filippos, 22/01/2020).

His response reveals that he conceives participation as something that he has to work on, that he should try his best to be able to participate and be included in the activities that the rest of the students do.

Nefeli’s response was interesting. Although she said that she feels comfortable to speak and talks, when necessary, without being shy or hesitating, she also stated:

“I don’t do schoolwork in class. I don’t speak, only during the break”,  
and she adds:

“Because I only write during class, I simply do not speak. I do not make noise during the lesson” (Nefeli, 23/01/2020).

Later, I asked her if she would like to change anything about her participation, and she gave an example of what happened during the subject of Art.

“If we have Art...I...yesterday we had Art, but I didn’t do, the teacher only gave the class to the other children” (Nefeli, 23/01/2020).

I asked her why she did not participate.

“Because I don’t want to. I like it, but I do not have colors and all this stuff” (Nefeli, 23/01/2020).

Even though she would like to participate in the school activities, Nefeli faces some limitations that prevent her from doing it, such as language skills and material necessary to attend the class. Anthi as well was clear about the language barrier and how much of what they are doing in class she understands. When I asked her if she speaks in class, she responded:

“No. Because my teacher says not to speak, so we don’t” (Anthi, 24/01/2020).

Most likely, she perceived the question as speaking and making noise during the lesson. I asked her afterward if she speaks when her teacher asks her something in class, and she said no because she doesn’t know the answer (Anthi, 24/01/2020). When I asked her if she would like to participate more, her response was again no. I asked her why. She laughed, and she replied:

“Because I don’t want to. I don’t want to talk a lot in class”,

I further tried to get some information about it, asking her why once again.

“Because I don’t like to say...what you are talking about. I don’t want to. Hm...because I can’t say these things, I can’t, because I don’t have an idea to say” (Anthi, 24/01/2020). It seems that she finds it difficult to understand and express herself in the Greek language. However, she later stated that she would like to talk more, but she does not do it because her classmates do not let her, especially during the breaks (24/01/2020).

As for cooperation with their classmates, I asked refugee children if they work in teams, as well as if their peers help them when needed.

“Hm...no. We haven’t done anything like that until now. But one day, some of my classmates told me to go to their place, and I went once. I was waiting for them for long, two hours, in a park, and nobody came to pick me up. I went back home, and then once again, I went on a Sunday, and they said that they didn’t want to do the assignment today, and I had been waiting for long again, and they didn’t do the assignment with me. And whatever I don’t know I ask my friend next to me, I ask ‘can you tell me, can you help me a bit with this?’, and they reply ‘no, why? Don’t you know how to do it yourself?’” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

In this case, students have never been asked to work together as a team. However, Sofia had arranged to do an assignment with some of her classmates, but they did not show up. She was very upset about this fact. Sofia also mentioned that even when she asks for help, her peers are not willing to help her.

Maria, on the other hand, said that they do work in teams often and that she feels very well about it (21/01/2020). Filippos replied that he has worked with his classmates as a group a few times, and he enjoys working in teams, but he does not know how to do the assignments (22/01/2020).

Nefeli mentioned that she has been working in teams with her classmates, and she likes it a lot (23/01/2020), while Anthi has never done it. She always tries to do the assignments alone (24/01/2020).

### **5.2.5. Summary**

The teachers’ views about participatory pedagogy were different, but not unrelated to each other. They talked about setting up children in teams, not discriminating, and treating every child the same, giving them opportunities to lead the lesson where they want but always under the

supervision of the teacher, organizing activities out of school, and being flexible on the teaching practice. Some of them also indicated the importance of having students in the class that behave properly to let them participate thoroughly as well as controlling them so as they do not get off the subject.

As for the needs of their refugee students, almost all teachers agreed that there are no significant differences between them and their Greek peers. However, some of these small differences that they pointed out were the cultural aspects, the language barrier, and the distinction between genders. They claim that it is more difficult for girls to integrate and adapt. Also, sometimes they are not willing to play in groups and be part of a group. One of the teachers talked about stability, as well. She thinks that refugees lack motivation since they know that they will leave the country soon.

Teachers said that refugee students do not participate like the rest, and they cannot do it. This is because of the high level of the grade they attend, their lack of Greek language skills as well as their cultural background, which often prevents them from participating in activities. They have not expressed any wish about changes in the schooling process. The reasons might be that they do not understand the language, and they are too young to conceive this procedure. One interviewee confessed that he feels guilty for forgetting the presence of his refugee student in the class and for not being able to help him participate more.

Some pupils think that they cannot participate because of their classmates' disapproval. Another child perceives participation as something on which he should work, making efforts in class to follow the lesson and keep up with his classmates. Others stated that they do not speak in the classroom; they just write. Also, an example was given by a student who could not participate in the subject of Art because she did not have the material needed. Generally, it was fascinating to see how each of them, teachers, and students perceive the concept of participation and the different interpretations they made.

### **5.3.Schooling, Educational System, and Structure**

During the interview sessions, I also discussed with the students how they like school and the subjects and activities in which they take part. Besides, teachers told me their opinion about how their refugee students do in the lessons. They also talked about the educational system and how the structure does not support the full participation of these children in Greek schools. They further

suggested some amendments, according to what they believe could be done better, and how, in their opinion, the system should be organized to integrate refugee students fully.

### ***5.3.1. Refugee students' views about schooling***

By and large, all students said that they are satisfied with the classes they attend and the activities they do. However, they are aware of the difficulties they face. Take Sofia's response as an example when I asked her if she likes the subjects she participates in at school:

“I like them. Yes! But whatever I don't know, I cannot do it” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

Maria said that she likes school activities and courses, and she would not like to change anything about them (21/01/2020). On the other hand, although Filippos enjoys the subjects and the school in general and he is satisfied, he mentioned one thing he would like to change.

“Ah! I'm bored when the class is too long, and I sit inside the class for too much time!

That's all. I would like it to be less time” (Filippos, 22/01/2020).

Lambros and Nefeli did not have anything specific to comment on the school subjects and the way the class is held. They stated that they like everything and do not want it to be done differently (Lambros, Nefeli, 23/01/2020). Anthi also enjoys school. When I asked her if she likes school activities, her response was:

“Yes, I like them a lot. I like to write, to read, to talk, to make a new friend” (Anthi, 24/01/2020).

So, apart from what they regularly do during the class, she also includes social relationships as part of the schooling process.

### ***5.3.2. Teachers' views about refugee students' performance in school***

Almost all teachers I interviewed agreed that refugee students face many difficulties in the subject of Language.

“They have a big problem in Language. They have a huge problem in Math. Many of these children haven't done anything; they haven't even attended school, they haven't even attended a class because they are children of the war. It's normal. I remember a few cases, like let's say Anna's, who attends Secondary school now...she had never attended school back in Syria. Because there are always wars, wars, wars. And she told me about some situations that she went through that ok...let's continue...” (Fotis, 21/01/2020).

Fotis believes that refugee children have many issues not only in the Language but in Math as well. Generally, he attributes these difficulties to the adversities they have undergone and the fact that some of them have never participated in schools before. However, he later added that he is satisfied and happy not as a teacher but as a person because he sees their performance getting better.

“[...] I see how the child was in September and how she is now” (Fotis, 21/01/2020).

Therefore, he makes clear that they try hard and have significant improvement as time goes by. Nora pointed out the challenge to integrate a child in a high grade and help them to keep up with the rest of the students while having so many gaps.

“[...] When a refugee child is...because we have in our school children who attend the first and second grades; it is easier because they are almost at the same level as the rest since they don't know reading and writing yet. While in our class, it is more difficult, because not only they know how to read and write, but they are also at a very satisfying level; thus, a refugee child cannot make it and reach this level” (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Thomas agrees about the language barrier, but he thinks that they do better in other subjects like Math. As he stated:

“[...] What challenges them most is mainly the language. The big problem for their participation is that; that they come...they don't start an educational program from the beginning, a language program, with the result to find it challenging to comprehend what we say and read inside the classroom. So, their participation cannot be exactly the same. Where they can, in subjects that they can, such as let's say in Math, where it can be easier, there, they participate. I can see that with the student I have in class this year. She finds language subjects very difficult, but she writes, she reads, she wants to participate in Math. And also, in every other school activity that can happen inside and outside the classroom” (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

### ***5.3.3. The structure of the Greek educational system and proposals for reforms***

This section reveals how the system is currently organized to integrate refugee students in education as well as what teachers think about it and what they propose to make it more efficient.

Petros referred to the reception classes operating in schools. There is a teacher who takes refugee children out of the mainstream class and then provides them with extra help in different subjects, mainly in language. His concern about it was the following:

“[...] the thing is, we don’t know if we will have the reception classes if they will keep operating, what will happen; if the number of the students will increase in the classroom...now, in the whole school, there are around 250 students, there are 1-2 refugees in each class. If this number increases, if you have 4-5 refugees out of 25 students, perhaps then they need special treatment. The thing is that for now it’s controlled, but we don’t know what will happen later, we can’t...because the number will increase. It’s said that next year more refugees will come here; that is, they will split into each class. So, we won’t have 1-2, we will have, I will have 3-4. Now that I have Sofia, I can take care of her myself, to spend time, go to her desk, talk with her while the others do an assignment for 5 minutes. If I have four students in the class, what will I...and if these four students are at different levels, then this will be the issue; that if they are at different levels...others don’t know at all the language like it was with Sofia last year. Now you can speak with Sofia, you can communicate, she can write some things, I tell her to write, and she does it. It is a bit...the topic is a bit subtle... [...]” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

For Petros, the way how the system works is not so efficient. The situation can be handled for now, but he wonders what will happen if more refugee students come to the schools. More sustainable solutions should be found. Nora highlights the importance of preparing these children before integrating them into the mainstream classes, and she told me that this happened in Filippos’ case.

“[...] these children who entered into the school life, this year, had been taught Greek from last year. You cannot take a kid and just ‘throw’ them into a school without knowing the language, without knowing anything related to what they are going to experience. There should be some preparation. Filippos did this preparation last year, and therefore, he can participate somehow [...]” (Nora, 22/01/2020).

She further added that refugees need safety and security; to assure them that this will be their future home. According to her words, finding effective solutions for their smooth integration into the school system as well as the Greek society, in general, is vital.

“[...] I want to say that perhaps, it would be nice if these children when they enter a classroom, know that they will stay, they will be here, they will try. It’s a pity for the children themselves to place them in a school environment, integrate them, and after three months, one year, place them somewhere else, where they must restart from the



beginning. I mean, this is something that the state itself should take care of, I can't do anything about it [...]. So, on the other hand, I think that what refugees need the most is safety, but this will come from the state itself, from its structures. As for me, I will try to provide the kid with safety, but I don't know if what I will give is enough. And if they take the child after one year, six months, three months, I won't have done anything ultimately. I will have provided them with knowledge, but this knowledge will be lost because the child will change their environment once again and start from zero. This...this is not something I say like a complaint; I'm just saying what I see" (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Kostas feels that at the moment, he does not do anything to help his refugee student with his learning; he just attends the reception classes. He said that Lambros does not participate at all in class, and he often forgets him. He is concerned about how the system handles the issue of educating refugee students. What he suggested was:

"I...I don't know what could happen...ok, I'm also under pressure by the lesson, by the rest of the people. I should complete the syllabus. I should do something; I don't know what could be done...let's say, having another teacher in the classroom as lateral support, but a teacher who knows his language and works with him for a long time. Maybe it is necessary to include all refugee children together in a classroom for some time...until they learn the language [...]. I do a few things here, and I don't know, the situation is a bit difficult. Having a child in here and not being able to help him in something" (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

Evelina agrees with Kostas. She is concerned about the gaps that refugee students have in the Greek language. She suggests that there should be more teachers in schools to support these children, either inside the classroom, helping them at the same time while they are having a lesson, or outside during the reception classes. She reckons that the current system is not appropriate for refugee children to keep up with their peers. Therefore, what she proposed is that the way Greek schools try to help refugees should change; more educators and specialized teachers, with adequate proficiency in refugee education, should be employed (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

Finally, Thomas addressed many issues occurring in refugee children's education, such as the language barrier, the way these children are placed into different grades, as well as social structures that could assist refugee students and their families out of school. Specifically, he stated:

“First of all, I don’t know if the way all this has been structured, I mean to place these children randomly into a grade, randomly in quotation marks...then, I don’t think to place them in a grade according to their age helps. Of course, on the other hand, if you make a class that consisted only of refugee children could be deemed as exclusion and a bit racist, I don’t know how...but I think it would help them if they attend a program focused on their age and needs as for the language, and then to participate normally in the schedule of the rest of the class. Because as it is now, as they go to the reception classes, or I don’t know where else, and they have one hour of language lessons, it doesn’t help them. At all. And apart from this, I think that the existing social structures, the structures established for helping refugees and schools, should find a way to take care a little bit more of their families and children themselves, out of school if possible, as well. At home, or wherever. At least, to be able to learn the language. It would be much easier for them to integrate. In essence, how things are now, we exclude them. We exclude them from education, from the whole educational system. I don’t think that any of these children will progress in this way, except if they get assistance from someone, I don’t know if this can happen at home. If there are, for instance, some people who could help them learn the language and be able to keep up. The way things are right now, at least how I see them here, in our school, I don’t think these children can be supported. There is a lack of time from our side as well. When you have a class with lots of children, let’s talk about the particular class that I have, which is very problematic, there is no time left to spend with these children, no time at all. So, in essence, it is like, you know...like they don’t exist in the class. That’s what I see. And ok...it is sad as a fact, that’s what I feel, but...unfortunately, this is the reality as well. I don’t know...” (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

#### ***5.3.4. Teaching methods currently used in Greek Primary school classrooms***

A fundamental objective of this thesis is to investigate the pedagogical strategies and methods applied in Greek Primary schools. For this, I decided to do observations, to identify how teachers manage and organize the class. I prepared guidelines for my observation, which would help me keep track of what I see, while at the same time, I focus on my target.

Almost in all my observations, the teaching process involved exercise solving and a question-answer approach. The teacher would assign students an exercise to solve, and then they would

check it all together. They would ask close-ended questions to their students and wait a few seconds to get the correct response. If the student does not answer, the teacher asks someone else. Refugee students did not have many opportunities to participate in this teaching model (Classroom observation, 22/01/2020, 28/01/2020).

The only exemption was the class of Maria and her teacher, Fotis. In this class, the teacher assigned students to prepare a report as homework. As Fotis told me, this is something they do every week. Each student should write a report about current news and facts or a topic they are interested in and catches their attention. Then, they present it in class. The teacher writes on the board the titles of their work and then starts a small discussion with the students about each topic presented. All students participated in this and got the chance to learn and discuss new topics chosen by them. Maria, as well, presented her work in class, which was a small part of the holy book of her religion. Students were the ones who spoke the most, and the teacher was there to guide and held them when they had questions (Classroom observation, 30/01/2020).

As for the classroom climate, I noticed that some teachers were remote, either sitting in their desk far from the students or writing on the board. Also, they were a bit strict with their students, mostly trying to calm them down when they were making noise, and they did not speak casually and friendly to them. They mostly focused on the teaching process (Classroom observation, 22/01/2020, 28/01/2020). Others, though, were very close to their students, walking around their desks, leaning next to them to be in the same height, and talking to them in a calm and friendly manner. They made jokes, and the environment was lighter. Students were feeling comfortable to talk and ask questions, and they showed interest and respect (Classroom observation, 22/01/2020, 28/01/2020, 30/01/2020).

### **5.3.5. Summary**

In general, refugee students like school activities and the subjects they do. However, they are aware of the difficulties they face to keep up. It was only one boy who said that he is bored because the lesson is too long. Teachers as well believe that it is hard for these children to progress in school since they have been through difficult situations in their lives and need good preparation to be at a satisfying level. Nevertheless, they are making an impressive effort, and they are willing to work hard.

Teachers think that how the system is organized does not favor these children to participate in Greek schools, and they made some proposals to change this situation. They assume that things would work better if more educators were recruited. Perhaps specialized educators who have the competence to work with refugee children. Others suggested that refugee students should have extensive language tutorials before entering school, or they should be allocated to grades according to their needs, making the lesson relevant to them. Finally, a teacher recommended to put these children together in a class and provide social assistance at home.

#### **5.4.The Rights of the Child**

As indicated before, the research question and objectives of this thesis are strongly related to the rights of the child. What I am investigating in particular, is how Greek schools support the refugee children's right to participation. I am also trying to identify which the opinions of both teachers and students are about children's rights and Article 12. Therefore, in this section, our attention will be on what refugee children think about their rights, what teachers think about CRC, and how, in their perspective, Greek schools uphold them.

##### ***5.4.1. Refugee children's perceptions of their rights and their right to participation***

Almost all students, when I asked their opinion on whether children should have rights, replied with the question: 'What is this?'. Therefore, I had to explain using my own words what the rights of the child mean. Afterward, they all agreed that it is something good, and they should have rights and be protected. For instance, Filippos said:

“Yes! Yes, they should do that because if they don't, I would be alone, and then what would I do...” (Filippos, 22/01/2020).

It was just Maria, who stated that she knows about the rights of the child. Here is what she knows about it, how she perceives it:

“It is about how to have fun, to do well...how to talk with my friends...” (Maria, 21/01/2020).

Next, I asked them what they think about having the right to participate and how they feel they could use it in schools. They all think it is a good idea to be able to do it; they want to talk about their thoughts. They had some suggestions about what they would like to change if they could participate in making amendments.

“Yes! I would like to talk and that they hear what I say, to do as the girls do, everyone talks, the girls talk, I would like to do it as well. Sure, yes. I should have the right to participate” (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

Sofia added that if she had the chance to speak to someone about her ideas, she would talk to the girls in her class, her teacher, as well as the principal (Sofia, 20/01/2020).

Maria also believes that it is good to have the right to participate. She said that if she was given the opportunity, she would talk to her teacher, her mother, and her friends about her suggestions (Maria, 21/01/2020). Anthi thinks that it would be perfect if children have the right to participate. She stated for herself that if she had the chance to speak about her ideas, she would appeal to her teacher and her classmates at school. However, when I further asked if she would like to talk to the principal of the school as well, her answer was:

“No [breathes out]. No, because the principal is very loud. He shouts to us and says, ‘I don’t want you to behave like this.’ I don’t want this” (Anthi, 24/01/2020).

Therefore, it seems that these children need a different approach to feel comfortable and talk about their thoughts and ideas. Loud voices and authoritarian behavior make them feel insecure and want to avoid people who act like this.

#### ***5.4.2. Teachers’ opinions about CRC and its role in Greek schools***

As for the rights of the child, I started the conversation by asking teachers what they think about CRC and next, what its purpose is in Greek schools.

“I think the rights of the child are like responsibilities; these two things go together; responsibilities and rights. Yet, the rights of the child should be regardless of the level, the school, the city, village, etc., to be everywhere the same. There should be no distinction due to financial, family, school reasons...The rights of the child should be exactly the same in all levels; there should be no distinction” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

He further added on the role of the Convention in schools that:

“The role that it has in Greek schools, I think, is huge, huge, and vital, especially now with these situations, with numbers of refugees, aliens, immigrants, who come here. It is tremendous; its role is huge in school. And it needs a lot of attention from educators, parents, and children themselves, as well as the stakeholders, the Ministries, everyone; those involved in this topic. It is a very subtle topic, and especially now, I’m telling you

that we have...that all these have happened that we see, every school has a number... of 10-15% of foreign students, aliens, immigrants, refugees, etc., of course, it is, it is crucial” (Petros, 20/01/2020).

I asked him if there are subjects that talk about the rights of the child, and he replied that there are just some units in the subject of Social and Political Education. So, they might have some discussions about the topic, but there is nothing special about that, nothing specific and organized (Petros, 20/01/2020).

Nora agrees with what the Convention promotes, namely that all children should have equal opportunities in knowledge, learning, education. As far as its role in Greek schools is concerned, she suggests that:

“The Convention, because we teach about this in Religious Studies; I can tell you that the place it has is satisfying. That is to say, educators try hard to abide by this framework and want to integrate these [refugee] children, not only these, but all these children who are at the same level, and to be treated equally from everyone. In our school, here, I believe that this role is well supported. I mean, we try, all educators, from all the specialties, as well as us, the teachers, everyone. We all try to promote this thing; namely, we want all children to feel secure at school, to feel equal, to be provided with the same knowledge, that is, I won’t say something different and show something to a child and not to the other. Right? It’s just that we all know that each child has their own capacities. You will be able to help this child reach the level that they can” (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Kostas perceives CRC as a protective measure for extreme cases.

“Ok, surely there is a legal framework that fortifies you in case that something happens. Now, I don’t know if it can be implemented in practice. I don’t know...a suitable environment should be created so that refugees can be accepted, and beyond this, everything will happen. The legal framework, ok, in a way, helps in the case of extremities. Not that much in everyday life and inside the classroom” (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

When I asked him about its role in Greek schools, he responded if I mean to use it as bugaboo. After explaining what I expected, namely, if children are taught and know about their rights and if they are used somehow at school, he stated that they make some references to their rights. But for refugee children is difficult to understand since they do not speak the language and cannot

understand what is valid. However, since their Greek peers know about them, it might help by eliminating maltreatment and prevent problem occurrence (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

Evelina separated the implementation of the rights between Greek children and refugees. She suggested that she is not sure if they are applied completely, but for Greek children, she thinks that they even have more rights than the responsibilities they should have. In general, though, she is in favor of this Convention. She supports that they should be respected everywhere and always. Especially for those children who have been through much trouble (Evelina, 23/01/2020). About the role that the Convention possess in Greek schools, she said:

“I think that CRC is respected in Greek schools. That is, we, the teachers, try to respect and implement this. Generally, in Secondary and High schools as well. This is what I understand from what I hear from other children. I believe that it is applied to our system here. Even this fact, that we accepted refugees in most places, without problems, because in our school, apart from 2-3 voices that we had at the beginning like, ‘why should they come, and how?’, it was smooth. The process of including these children in the Greek school operation was smooth” (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

Thomas suggested that each country should approach this Convention from its own perspective and according to its own challenges.

“I think that it is a [breathes out] good Convention, but each country should see some things from its own perspective regarding how they could better integrate children [refugee] in the social environment, the children and their families as well. In Greece, we have a great problem with that, with the integration of children in the school and social environment. I imagine that some changes are needed because most children now come from countries that are in a war, and the experiences of these children are traumatic. They should be supported in many ways, with psychologists in schools, with a new syllabus, in order to integrate into the whole, and first of all the society itself to be able to integrate their families, so that children can integrate at the same time” (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

Next, I asked him what he thinks is the role that this Convention has in Greek schools, and he said none. He further explained:

“Actually, I think it appeals to the goodwill of each colleague, namely how each of them wants to help every child. I don’t know if anyone has been involved in this thing much. In this Convention, I mean. If anyone knows about it, if they know it. Which the rights of

these children are and which our responsibilities are towards them. I don't think that this is a topic we talk so much about in Greece, and we have left it a bit aside. I mean it is more convenient that these children come and go from school, that the time passes, that's what I mean, and they leave school than helping these children somehow. They have let luck handle everything, and I think the state itself does not show any interest. Whatever it does is pretty fragmentary, this is my impression" (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

He seemed a bit disappointed with the current situation in Greece. He reckons that nobody cares that much about helping refugees integrate and have their rights respected, not even the state itself. Therefore, in his opinion, CRC has no place in Greek Primary schools.

#### *5.4.3. Teachers' perspectives on Article 12 and its place in Greek classrooms*

What I asked the teachers in order to identify their opinion on the right to participation in the Greek educational context was if there is a relationship between Article 12 and the pedagogical methods and practices used in Greek classrooms. Almost all interviewees had trouble understanding the question, or they did not know what Article 12 is about and what the right to participation means. Therefore, I had to repeat the question and explain what this right indicates.

First, Petros suggested that surely there is a relationship. For him, the goal of each educator is to encourage the student to say their opinion freely, express themselves openly, and not being afraid of speaking their mind in front of their classmates and teachers (Petros, 20/01/2020). Fotis agrees as well, suggesting that all children can say their opinion even if it is wrong. He gave the example of his student, Maria, who, as he said, is brave, she speaks in class and does not care about what her classmates say, even if she makes mistakes. He thinks that this Article is very good, even though he does not know a lot about it (Fotis, 21/02/2020). Moreover, Nora suggests that it depends on each educator, but in general, it is upheld, and teachers try to include it in the teaching process. She also suggests that the current books used in Greek Primary schools promote the participation of the students a lot (Nora, 22/01/2020).

Kostas spoke particularly about refugee students and said that it is complicated to do that. In his opinion, even for the children themselves, this is not so important at this stage.

"Hm...now this...I don't know. It is difficult for these children to participate in the learning process. It is the environment where they live in, from their home; it is that most of them come from another continent. Their mentality, their habits, all these are



completely different. They are children of the war who lived in difficult conditions and perhaps now, integrating here in our school is the least they care about. This needs time; it demands time to happen. It can't happen overnight, and knowing the language is a necessary condition. Since they don't know the language, things get more difficult. Of course, it is the other children as well, who often do not treat them in a good way. On the one hand, they accept them, but on the other, they don't include them into their groups easily" (Kostas, 23/01/2020).

Evelina believes that now it is applied; it is not how it used to be before. Younger teachers do it.

"I think that in most classes and especially younger teachers and generally younger people implement it. That is, we are not anymore in this old system where the teacher was the king of the classroom, and children used to do and say whatever their teachers wanted them to... Yes, I think it is applied. In most classes and with most educators. At least in my class, yes, they can say their opinion even if I disagree with it, yes" (Evelina, 23/01/2020).

Finally, Thomas was not sure about what to answer. He does not have many insights on the topic. However, he agrees with Nora, suggesting that it depends on each educator separately, and their will to encourage children to speak their minds and accept them. Like Evelina, he also referred to the old system, claiming that now things have changed a bit, and while it was not so much supported a few years ago, now in general, it happens (Thomas, 24/01/2020).

#### **5.4.4. Summary**

Almost all teachers agreed that CRC is good and should be respected. They think that it is about equality. Making each child feel like they are the same as all the rest, and there is no distinction. Some teachers stated that the Convention has a substantial role in Greek schools, especially now with the integration of many foreign children into the classrooms. Yet, there is no organized plan about teaching the rights of the child or any guidelines from the educational system promoting their use and making references to them. It is only in some parts of the subjects of Social and Political Education and Religious Studies that they talk a bit about them. While some advocate that all educators try to implement it, others say that it depends on each educator; if they include it in their practice or not. One of the teachers was very pessimistic about its role in Greek schools.

He suggested that it has no place in them and that Greece does not try enough to protect foreigners' rights.

In the discussion we had about Article 12, at first, almost all teachers did not know what this right indicates. After I explained to them, many different views were unfolded. Some said that the pedagogical methods implemented in Greek classrooms are related to this right since children are encouraged to express themselves freely and not to be afraid of doing it. Others suggest that it depends on the teacher, but in general, they all try a lot to use it. One of the teachers believes that it is difficult to do it. That is because refugee children have different cultures and habits, they have been through difficult situations, and this would be the least they care about at this point. They also suggested that now it is not like it used to be a few years ago. Teachers let students say their opinion and promote their participation.

## 6. Discussion

In this part, I will discuss the findings of my research, using theories already unfolded in the chapters of Literature review and Theoretical framework. The main contributors are Lundy, Freire, and Rancière. I will divide the sections according to three dominant issues disclosed from the collected data, followed by suggestions that could potentially help to tackle these problems, based on the leading theories of this study.

### 6.1. Emerging challenges and creation of a protective environment

Teachers, when I asked them if they think that refugee children have different needs than their Greek peers, stated that there are no significant differences apart from a few exceptions. Yet, many elements were revealed during our interview sessions about the particularities of being a refugee student in Greek schools. They are aware of their painful and traumatic experiences, calling them ‘children of the war’, and suggest that for this reason, they need special treatment to feel safe again, such as psychological support. Strekalova and Hoot (2008) have emphasized the importance of realizing these children’s traumas and trying to adjust their education according to these (pp.23-24).

However, not all children have the same reaction to the difficulties they face. Each of them is unique, and their ability to get over their traumas and adjust in the new circumstances is different (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 19). One of the teachers referred to this, adding gender as a decisive factor in the capacity to adjust in the new environment. What he reckoned was that boys accommodate the school norms, make friends, and feel more confident more easily than girls do. In his opinion, the way people perceive the role of the woman in their home countries is the cause. At this point, I consider relevant to remember what Hamilton (2003) indicated; that teachers often have stereotypes and biases because of the cultural differences between refugee students’ countries of origin and their home country, and that they should get over them and believe in their students’ capacities in order to help in their development (p.87, 93). Therefore, in that case, it is important that the teacher renounces the thoughts about gender differences and not use them as excuses. Instead, he should focus more on how girls could also be supported and encouraged to participate and find ways to make them feel confident and appreciated.

Teachers also acknowledge the challenge that refugee children face to form good relationships with their peers and be accepted in their groups. The students themselves talked about the way

their peers treat them, and most times, it is improper. They experience discrimination and maltreatment. As they confessed, their classmates stare at them like they are different, do not talk with them, and do not let them play and participate in the activities. This fact needs extensive attention from the school. Teachers seem to be aware of the situation since they addressed the topic of nationalism and racism in our interviews. According to their statements, Greek people have a hint of nationalism. They do not care much about the foreigners as they do for nationals. Teachers believe that this attitude passes to the children through their parents and makes it extremely difficult for refugee children to be accepted by their peers.

Having healthy social relations is of great importance for these children. They need to interact with their peers in order to feel secure and integrated. Being marginalized is what concerns them the most, and they need to feel part of the social groups. “Peer relationships are a very important source of well-being and resilience for children, and they can help reduce, mediate and prevent the effects of stress and adversity” (Doll et al. as cited in Cefai et al., 2015, p. 129). Therefore, schools should take action and organize activities targeted to overcome as well as prevent bullying and racism (R. Hart, 2009, p. 365). In this, I would add the importance of parents’ involvement in such activities since their influence on their children is immense, and they should be the paradigm to eliminate racism.

Furthermore, some of the difficulties that Blackwell and Melzak (2000) introduced were evident in my research. ‘Disruptiveness and inability to concentrate’ was observed in most of the cases. During the lesson, some refugee children were either copying from the board what the rest were writing or doing nothing at all, such as this student who, as his teacher confessed, is often forgotten in class. These children need to be assigned interesting tasks so that they can feel engaged and get away from disturbing thoughts (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000, p. 6), while in most cases of my study, this did not happen. ‘Falling behind’ was another challenge that refugee children face according to their own words. They said that they are trying hard to be good students, but sometimes they cannot do some of the activities. Indeed, this can happen to refugee children, who, although they make big efforts to keep up and adapt, still they cannot see significant progress (Blackwell & Melzak, 2000, p. 7).

The fact that refugee students lack Greek language skills is a prevalent challenge that emerges in all topics discussed, and all teachers repeated it in our interviews. It is related to the whole schooling process. The language barrier was dominant, either we talked about socialization or

learning procedures. Refugee children are placed in Greek classrooms with a minimum level of Greek knowledge. Alongside mainstream teaching, they attend reception classes, which supposedly provide them with extra help to learn the language. Teachers have expressed their disenchantment for this procedure, stating that it does not help if children attend these classes for a few hours. After some informal conversations I had with teachers during the breaks, I asked them if at least the teacher responsible for the reception classes speaks their mother tongue, and their answer was no. Thus, it appears dubious and almost impossible that this short-time assistance, the instruction of which is in Greek, could be sufficient. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (1994) has been straightforward, claiming that the language of instruction that refugee children need, at least at first, in order to progress in the host country is their mother tongue. At the same time, they should be provided with direct knowledge about the culture and the skills necessary to adapt to the new country smoothly (UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 1994, p.113).

By any means, the significance of having a teacher to realize their refugee students' needs and create space for them to talk and express themselves is great, even though it is a demanding process. Sometimes the language barrier interferes and makes it difficult for children themselves as well as their parents to communicate. Therefore, teachers cannot become aware of their needs. In addition to that, they might be reluctant to discuss their experiences. Teachers then should undertake the responsibility to be close to these children and be alarmed for whatever reactions they might have to sensitive topics discussed in class (Strekalova & Hoot, 2008, p. 22).

In my study, teachers had similar experiences, highlighting the challenge of communicating with their students in order to understand what they need, along with the tendency of refugee children to be close and unwilling to talk about personal experiences. Consequently, perhaps teachers could overcome this by trying themselves to approach these children and be more conscious of their responses and attitudes in class. It was only one teacher that claimed that his students had shared their experiences with him. He was the one who had the most experience working with refugee students. As he stated, he had been working with immigrant children for at least twenty years. I believe that possibly the fact that students talk to him is related to his competence. Having this extensive experience probably renders him capable of finding ways to approach refugee children and make them feel comfortable.

Certainly, schools' role in support of refugee children is one that creates a sense of security and protection. They should be regarded as "Protective Environments," which help their students heal their traumas. Teachers should take over to create a positive classroom climate, where teachers and students respect each other (Aguilar & Retamal, 2009, pp. 3, 6). In my observations, I noticed that teachers had different ways to interact with their students. Some of them were more distant, while others were close to their students, walking around their desks and talking to them in a warm and polite tone. Taking the example of Filippos, it was apparent that he managed very well to be integrated and have good cooperation with his peers. He feels included and is, in general satisfied. In my opinion, the fact that his teacher promotes values of respect in class, and she shows herself respect and affection to her students has an incredible impact on Filippos's adaptation. As Szente et al. (2006) stated, encouraging children to advance positive emotional and social skills, for instance, by displaying "positive body language," prepares the ground for feeling safe and ready to socialize (p.17).

Also, the way Sofia's and Petros's classroom was arranged caught my attention. The fact of separating boys and girls and letting Sofia sitting in the corner, in my perspective, reinforces discrimination and behaviors of exclusion. Refugee children must be given opportunities to interact and socialize with their national peers in order to feel confident again (Frater-Mathieson, 2003, p. 29), and sitting in the edge deprives Sofia of chances to communicate with her classmates. Therefore, this class arrangement model cannot help in the creation of a protective environment.

## **6.2.Negligence of the right to participation and ways towards empowerment**

It is interesting to point out the fact that all participants had different conceptions of the word 'participation.' Indeed, one of my research objectives was to identify the ways our participants understand the notion of participation. What we mean in this study by using this concept, is that children become agents of their development, always in cooperation with adults, who are responsible for facilitating their participation in the process according to their capacities (Lansdown et al., 2014, pp. 4-5). In this case, teachers should adjust their pedagogical methods to uphold their students' right to participate and create opportunities for them to take over control and share their thoughts.

Some students perceived participation in school as having good social relationships and being accepted from their peers, some as something they need to work on in order to be able to keep up

with the lessons, and others even as being able to take part in the school activities, since they confessed that they lack the required material, such as color markers, or they are excluded from their peers who do not let them participate. At this point, I want to remark that I think schools need to reform their classes and make them accessible to everyone, not only to those who can afford the required material.

Teachers as well had distinct perceptions of participation. Some think of it as a more flexible method that implies that children take initiatives and lead the learning process under the teachers' supervision. Also, as a technique that promotes the collaboration of the students, making teams and letting them work as groups. A teacher perceived the concept as a general involvement in the school activities and mentioned the lack of motivation that refugee students have because of their lives' instability. Children are not always willing to participate since they know that their stay in the host country is temporary, and thus, everything they learn will go to waste. Others, though, perceive it as the ability to keep up with the lessons. They consider participation as the effort that students should make to do well at school and progress in the different subjects taught. From my experience, since I was myself a Primary school student in Greece, this is the prevalent conception of participation. When teachers and students talk about participation, the first thing that comes to mind is if students try to attend classes, do well in tests and be diligent with homework or other activities that teachers assign them. In my perspective, this viewpoint is inappropriate. As I already mentioned, in this study, participation is not an effort that students alone should make. Both teachers and students should work on facilitating children's contribution to the teaching process. Teachers are the ones responsible for creating opportunities for students to express themselves and find ways to include all, regardless of their capacities.

As for the right to participation and its implementation in Greek classrooms, Lundy's theory will guide us to explore how child refugees see their right upheld. First comes providing children with "space," which means creating opportunities for them to share their thoughts in a safe environment (Lundy, 2007, p. 933). The extent to which this was applied in the case of my study is unsure. Children lack Greek language skills, and as a result, they cannot follow the rest of the students, neither form and express their ideas. For many teachers, this is why refugee students cannot participate the same as their Greek peers. Teachers then, seem to have lower expectations from these students. Nikolaou (2011) indicated that Greek teachers treat immigrant students as they have a deficiency, and they feel disappointed, giving up any effort to help them advance

(p.195). Just like this statement, the teachers I spoke with appeared to set their expectations so far as merely awaiting their refugee students to copy from the board what they write and read a few words during the lesson. Some teachers also confessed that they feel guilty for not being able to do anything to help these children and often forget their presence in class.

Next, “voice” means that every child who can form a view, regardless of their capacities, should be heard (Lundy, 2007, p. 935). Again, the opinion of the teachers was that it is difficult to understand what their needs and ideas are since they cannot communicate. Furthermore, one of the teachers, in our talk about suggestions that refugee children might have made for changes in school, spoke about age and maturity, suggesting that they are too young to conceive the purposes of this process and the outcomes of their contribution. This is similar to what Stern (2006) showed in her work when discussing the views of those who are against the participation of children in decision-making, namely that they are unable to understand the whole procedure (p. 171). Then, teachers do not seem completely convinced about the competence of these children to participate to the fullest.

The relationship between teachers and students is essential for the facilitation of the right to participation. “Audience” is a fundamental element, which marks that teachers are to be close to their students and feel responsible for finding ways to actively listen to them, even if it is not possible to realize their views with words. Teachers should seek training and techniques to advance their skills in order to receive and interpret all signals their students emit (Lundy, 2007, p. 936). In our case, teachers were apparently discouraged from the fact that refugee children’s language capacities are not adequate to communicate freely. In one of our informal talks, they also said that they do not receive any special training to help those children better. Some of them seemed to try hard to approach these children, asking them questions for their lives and devote time during the class to guide them, while others stated that children do not share with them, but neither do they intend to find out more information.

Last but not least, “influence” implies that after receiving children’s views, teachers should find ways to apply them and show how their opinions bring changes (Lundy, 2007, p. 938). Since the previous steps had a minimum implementation in the classrooms of our study, this step de facto cannot be achieved. Refugee children do not see their participation rights facilitated since their participation in class is shallow; they have never made any suggestions, or been asked to make



some changes in the school. Therefore, they cannot see themselves influence their education and the schooling process.

Nevertheless, it has been previously suggested that child refugees' participation is a different process. At first, "they need to be given the opportunity to reflect and act upon their own lives. This does not necessarily exclude them from extending their efforts soon afterward to the benefit of the larger community of which they are a part" (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 24). Therefore, it is likely that these children are still in this initial phase of integration, and the focus of their participation should be in their personal development and improvement of their conditions, not on how they could contribute to the decision-making of the school. This could be done at a later stage. Indeed, one teacher participant reckons that perhaps for these children, how to integrate and participate in the school is the least important now. He suggests that this needs time; they first need to learn the language and the values as well as be accepted from their peers, who sometimes exclude them from their groups.

Thus, I presume that although Lundy's theory for the conceptualization of Article 12 in education could be beneficial for children who are well integrated into Greek society, it seems irrelevant for refugee students. Lundy talks particularly about students' involvement in decision-making in school and how to facilitate their contribution to that. However, what my research shows is that refugee students in Greek schools need to complete a few initial steps in their adaptation to the new environment to be able to participate in decision-making. Therefore, my conception of refugee students' right to participation in education focuses on children's socialization, adjustment, stability, and the implementation of child-centered, empowering pedagogical methods. These are the core elements that, according to my research findings, could enable refugee students to enjoy their right to participate in classrooms. My interviewees consider these as the most essential, whereas contributions in school changes are deemed irrelevant to the situation that these students currently find themselves. So, theories about the right to participation in education should include more concepts to cover the needs of a wider group of students, such as, in our case, refugees. Here, different understandings of the concept of participation appear, just as the third objective of my research indicates, and each of them has its own application and outcomes.

### **6.3.Lack of critical pedagogy and adoption of emancipatory teaching methods**

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (1994) has introduced guidelines on refugee children's protection and care. Especially for their education, UNCHR noted that the quality "should be as high as that for nationals of the same age" (p. 112). As I witnessed during my research in Greek Primary schools, this is not happening. Discussions with teachers and refugee students, as well as my observations reveal that education for refugees is a different process than education for their Greek peers. The former are often neglected, even forgotten in class. In this section, I will examine the teaching methods and practices implemented in Greek Primary classrooms, and I will make comparisons with the theories of Freire and Ramos (2000) and Bingham et al. (2010), which form a fundamental part of my study.

What I realized from class observations is that most teachers used similar teaching strategies. Students were assigned exercises and were supposed to solve them and then say out loud the findings. The process consisted of a question-answer approach, where teachers asked close-ended questions related to the assignments to guide students to find the correct results. They would give students a few seconds, and if they did not know the answer, they would immediately ask someone else. Sometimes they would even give the correct answer themselves. This process, according to Freire, is counterproductive. It assimilates the "banking approach," as he calls it, where teachers fill students' minds with the knowledge without providing them with opportunities to interact with the learning material (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 71). They lead the lesson, and children just follow what the teachers say; no initiatives are taken.

Teachers were the ones talking the most. They focused on the teaching material; this is why sometimes they would merely provide students with their knowledge without giving them chances for reflection. According to Bingham et al. (2010), this is inappropriate. Teachers must possess the "virtue of ignorance," which means encouraging their students to discover the knowledge themselves. Teachers should guide, but not deprive them of initiatives (p. 1). Moreover, teachers should make sure that "the principle of the equality of all speaking beings" (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 43) is upheld in class to reach emancipation, which is a goal that all teachers should set for their students (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 25). Especially for refugee children, emancipation would be salvation. After all these adversities they have been through, they need to be encouraged to take over control of their lives and feel confident to deal with future challenges.

However, some of the teachers, who used this teaching model, were more flexible than others. They would offer time for students to make questions and have dialogues to find the correct answers together. There was an exemption as well, where the teacher let children have control over the learning process. He assigned students to gather information about current news or general topics they find interesting and present them in class. Then, they would discuss and ask questions about each one of them. All students participated, including Maria, the refugee student. So, students had full control of the learning material, which was relevant to both their interests and reality. The teacher would guide the discussion after the presentations asking both close-ended and open-ended questions but also giving a chance for students to resolve their queries.

This teaching method was closer to what Freire calls the “problem-posing” approach. In this model of education, teachers and students are equal. They work together to create knowledge (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 72). Just like Bingham et al. (2010) suggest, the starting point of the teaching process is “the principle of equality” (p. 43). Students have the opportunity to be the leaders of their learning. They are encouraged to become “critical thinkers” instead of mere “objects of assistance” (Freire & Ramos, 2000, p. 83). Taking my theoretical framework into consideration, I would suggest that the teaching process that many teachers in Greek Primary schools choose to use is inappropriate. Given that the current situation, according to the participants, does not help refugee children to participate in and develop their education, perhaps a potential solution would be changing the way the lesson is held. Instead, teachers should adopt methods that promote the critical consciousness, emancipation, and empowerment of the students. This would make “the job of the teacher more creative and original, but also more challenging and demanding, to ensure that all children have equivalent opportunities to participate in the construction of knowledge and develop the confidence to achieve this through cooperation with others” (López Melero et al., 2016, p. 208).

## **7. Conclusion**

As discussed above, Greek Primary schools seem to face several challenges regarding the implementation of refugee children's right to participation. This fact can be evident from our participants' testimonies, who revealed that refugee students cannot truly participate since they lack Greek language skills and often face discrimination and exclusion from their Greek peers. Therefore, participation for them is difficult if they do not have understanding and acceptance from the rest. Also, the teaching methods currently used are inappropriate and of minimum help for the promotion of their participation. Besides, it appears that teachers lack human rights knowledge. Most of them admitted that the Convention does not become visible in the curriculum, and especially the provision of Article 12 is unknown in schools.

I have already mentioned that my goal in this study is not to generalize, but examine the situation in the specific context I am researching and provide motivation for further investigations of the topic. Following my research objectives, I would also like to humbly propose a few reforms on refugee children's education in Greece, based on the theories I consider relevant to this case, as well as on ideas that teachers themselves expressed during our interview sessions.

### **7.1. Inspirations for educational amendments in Greece**

What I have revealed in my study until now, is that several issues need to be solved so that refugee children can participate in Greek Primary schools. One of these issues, which I consider essential, is the fact that most of the refugee students struggle a lot to make friends and their peers marginalize them. Schools need to take measures to tackle this problem and find ways to create a warm and inclusive climate.

In this thesis, we consider human rights to be a tangible tool in order to reduce discrimination and achieve equality and justice. The main purpose of HRE is "to enable students to claim their entitlement to equal justice and dignity as well as empower both teachers and students to become agents of change, exploring rights as means of realizing these goals" (Osler, 2016, p. 10). However, "international human rights cannot merely be taught as a set of ideal norms or juridical concepts, but must serve as critical devices for students to explore the ways in which truths about rights have been created in their society" (Ely-Yamin, 1993, p. 665). In this case, when students learn about human rights, it is imperative to be given chances to "examine and practice human rights in their own worlds" as well as to know that their rights are respected during the education

process (Osler, 2016, p. 28). Thus, teachers could use HRE to help refugee children challenge cases of maltreatment, protecting their rights, as well as teach their peers about the value of equality. That way, they would learn how to show kindness to people who live under difficult conditions.

What almost all teachers pointed out about the educational system and how refugee students' integration in schools is currently structured is that it is inappropriate and unsustainable. Their main proposals were either hiring more teachers to assist refugees during the class or, more importantly, hiring specialized educators qualified to work with traumatized children. Educators who speak their native language so that communication can be easier and students can have more chances to progress their learning.

Since I realize that this might be hard to achieve since it demands lots of resources, I suggest that providing training to those educators already employed may be a more feasible form of improving refugee children's education. "Teacher education is the cornerstone of any educational innovation. The search for the best pedagogical approaches for all students to learn benefits the teachers themselves first" (López Melero et al., 2016, p. 206).

For instance, "in addition to the acquisition of skills for teaching potentially traumatized children, teachers need to acquire more knowledge about the different cultures represented by refugees and the refugee experiences [...]" (Hamilton, 2003, p. 95). Indeed, one important responsibility "in education is the quality of getting or creating the ability to answer different challenges with the same speed that things change. This is one of the demands of contemporary education" (Freire et al., 2016, p. 37). Currently, many refugees have entered Greece seeking asylum, and refugee children have integrated into schools. Therefore, the need for gaining knowledge on their cultures and experiences is imperative in order to adjust the teaching process for the sake of refugee children but also their Greek peers, who need to learn to accept them and live all together peacefully.

In the same vein, teachers need to receive training on how to manage cultural diversity in the class. That is to say, "[...] the school needs to show the pupils that there are other cultures besides their own. Because of this, the school needs to be local as a starting point, but it must be international and intercultural as a point of arrival" (Gadotti, 1996, pp. 162-163). This can be achieved by letting students collaborate, work in teams, and share their thoughts and experiences. "Collaboration for the completion of mutually responsive tasks not only stimulates academic

development, but may also promote prejudice reduction. It enhances opportunities for communication between culturally diverse children, allowing them to build understanding of their intercultural differences and commonalities” (Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2015, pp. 123-124).

A possible way of training professionals would be cooperation between colleagues. Teachers who have experience in working with refugees could be used as a benefit, providing the rest with their knowledge. For instance, in our case, this teacher who has been working with refugees for several years, and as I interpreted it, his ways of approaching refugee children were more efficient than others, could be the one to help his colleagues.

Finally, teaching strategies like the ones currently used in the Primary schools of our research are considered insufficient to engage refugee students in the learning process completely. The fast pace, the question-answer approach, and the “banking method,” using Freire’s words, deprive them of opportunities to participate. Education, in general, aims to stimulate students’ critical thinking (Keet, 2017, p. 3). Teachers should encourage their “[...] students to be aware and not to be sleeping, that is, to have voice instead of receiving the voice of the teachers, to develop their autonomy, to be themselves and not to be the reflex of the teachers” (Freire et al., 2016, p. 39). This can be attainable by applying the “problem-posing method” (Freire & Ramos, 2000), where “the student is a seeker,” and the teacher is the one standing by their side trying to mobilize and inspire them to continue the “intellectual journey” (Bingham et al., 2010, p. 6). Refugee students that way, could reflect on their own situation and contribute to their learning, instead of being forgotten and marginalized.

## **7.2. Concluding remarks**

At this point, I consider it appropriate to deploy the results of my research question and objectives, starting with the interviewees’ perceptions about the child’s right to participation. In general, they all suggested that it would be an excellent tool for refugee students to better integrate into society. The students themselves as well would like to benefit from its practice, as they consider having the opportunity to speak their voice very important. What my research also uncovered was that participation has different meanings for each of them. The concept of participation was related to several elements, such as social relationships, learning capacities, stability and engagement with school activities, and language skills.

As for the current policies used by Greek Primary schools regarding refugee students' right to participation, my research showed a disenchantment from the teachers. Even though they think that things have improved in comparison to the old practices, there is still a long way forward. In their perspective, how the system works is inappropriate, and in essence, it excludes refugee children from the educational process. López Melero et al. (2016) refer to this as "together in the same classroom, but separated by the curriculum" (p.204). They are placed in grades irrelevant to their learning needs, without any additional support. They lack Greek language skills, and this renders them incapable of actively participate in class.

The project reveals that there are different conceptualizations of participation in education, each of them having clear implications on the process. I started my study by having the theory of Lundy as a primary contributor, an approach that regards participation as involvement in decision-making. However, it seems that the notion of participation includes many more elements. In the case of refugee children, the concept adds inclusion and acceptance, social relations, cultural adaptation, stability and engagement, language as well as empowering and emancipatory pedagogy in its components. All these factors play a major role in the promotion and respect of this group's right to be heard. At the same time, others suggest that refugee children need to be occupied with subjects relevant to their experiences and be encouraged to reflect upon their lives. This would mean participation for them, at least initially (R. A. Hart & Unicef, 1992, p. 24). Thus, we can see that only one conceptualization of participation would not be enough to cover all different groups, and a more extensive interpretation is necessary, one that involves more elements and could appeal to a broader population.

To conclude with, what my study revealed is that there are still several steps that need to be made in Greek Primary schools so that a satisfying level of refugee children's participation can be reached. The refugee children's right to participation, according to Article 12, does not seem to be a priority at this point. Refugee students meet lots of challenges, and their participation in schools is currently minimum because of several issues disclosed. First, schools need to take measures to tackle the communication barrier. Thus, refugee students' integration in public schools demands better preparation, spending more extended periods learning the language and the cultural values of the country. Teachers who participated in the study also suggested that refugee students' cultural background plays a significant role in their participation since they often refuse to be involved in various school activities. Therefore, familiarity with the diverse cultural values existing in schools

is vital, so that activities can be appropriately adjusted. Different teaching methods should be used as well, ones that promote all children's active participation and involvement in the process, regardless of their capacities. Finally, schools should carefully handle racism and nationalism demonstrated in the classrooms, so that refugee students can be accepted and have more opportunities for participation.

The fact that refugee students in Greek Primary schools can barely enjoy their right to participation is unfortunate; it could enrich them with confidence and empower them in different ways. Not only could they be able to defend their rights in case of abuse (Lansdown et al., 2014, p. 7), but also, they could cope with health and psychological issues they might struggle with. Participation enhances the feelings of self-respect, self-esteem and self-control as well as the feeling of "being important, being welcome and being appreciated" (De Winter et al., 1999, p. 20). Those involved in decision-making in education matters should realize the benefits that real participation could have on refugee children's lives, and take its implementation in schools seriously, trying their best to promote and achieve the respect of participation rights. That way, refugee children's confidence would be enhanced, rendering the ability to dream and hope for a brighter future possible.



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# Appendices

## Appendix 1-Information letter

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to examine the children's participation in Greek public Primary schools. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

The University of South-eastern Norway is the institution responsible for the project.

Program: MSc Human Rights and Multiculturalism

Name of supervisor: Ådne Valen-Sendstad

### **Purpose of the project**

The purpose of this project is to examine the teaching methods and strategies appealing to refugee children in Greek public Primary schools. Specifically, the main interest will be on children's participation.

### ***Main research question:***

To what extent the strategies implemented in Greek Primary schools permit and encourage the child's right to participation to be enjoyed by refugee students?

### ***Research objectives:***

- To understand the perceptions that child refugees, as well as their teachers in Greek Primary Schools, possess about the child's right to participation.
- To identify teachers' evaluation of current policies used by Greek Primary Schools regarding child refugees' participation, and try to make suggestions for reforms.
- To explore different understandings of participation and their implications.

### **What does participation involve for you?**

If you choose to participate in the project, this will involve that you will be interviewed for about 45 minutes. The interview includes questions about the teaching process and everyday routines at school concerning refugee students and their participation in class. I will ask you if I may record the interview, and I will take notes. The parents/guardians of the students who will take part in the project may see the interview guide in advance if they wish so. Apart from the interviews, I will take some time to observe classroom activities. The non-participant observation sessions will last up to one week.

## **Participation is voluntary**

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you could withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. The real names of the participants will not be revealed. I will use pseudonyms for you, which, if you wish, you can choose yourself. The project does not aim to collect sensitive data of the participants, and information that could expose their identity will not be published.

## **Your personal privacy**

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially. Access to the personal data collected will have only the student-researcher. The content of the interviews and observations will be available only to you and me-the researcher. You will be anonymized as well as the school, to which I will also give a pseudonym. Any possibility for you to be recognized will be eliminated by using pseudonyms and concealing information that could reveal your identity. The data collected from the interviews and observation sessions will be kept safely stored in correspondence with the rules of USN, and only me-the researcher will have access to it. In this case, I will use a sound recorder that is not connected to the internet and transfer the collected data to an encrypted device. As soon as the project finishes, all data will be deleted. The choice of recruitment will be held by the school, which will ask you, the students and teachers, to participate in the study. That way, I will not be aware of your identity before you give your consent.

## **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The project is scheduled to end in December 2020. All your personal data, including any digital recordings, will be deleted by the end of the project.

## **Your rights**

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with the University of South-eastern Norway, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Yours sincerely,

Project Leader   Student (researcher) (supervisor)

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### **Consent form**

I have received and understood information about the project and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in interview/for my child to participate in the interview
- for the researcher to observe the classroom activities

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. December 2020.

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(Signed by participant, date)



## **Appendix 2 - Information letter for the rest students**

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to examine the children's participation in Greek public Primary schools. In this letter, we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

The University of South-eastern Norway is the institution responsible for the project.

Program: MSc Human Rights and Multiculturalism

Name of supervisor: Ådne Valen-Sendstad

### **Purpose of the project**

The purpose of this project is to examine the teaching methods and strategies appealing to refugee children in Greek public Primary schools. Specifically, the main interest will be on child's participation.

### ***Main research question:***

To what extent the strategies implemented in Greek Primary schools permit and encourage the child's right to participation to be enjoyed by refugee students?

### ***Research objectives:***

- To understand the perceptions that child refugees, as well as their teachers in Greek Primary Schools, possess about the child's right to participation.
- To identify teachers' evaluation of current policies used by Greek Primary Schools regarding child refugees' participation, and try to make suggestions for reforms.
- To explore different understandings of participation and their implications.

### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

The present project focuses on refugee children's participation in public Primary schools in Greece. To be able to collect the appropriate data needed for the study's purposes, a research method I will use is non-participant observation. This means that me-the researcher will have to spend a certain amount of time in the classroom observing the activities taking place. Even though the focus of the project is on child refugees, by observing the way the class is held, it is necessary to inform you, the rest of the students, about my presence there.

### **What does participation involve for you?**

If you participate in this project, this will involve an up to one-week non-participant observation. Me-the researcher will be in the classroom for this amount of time, observing the different activities taking place during the lessons. However, it is essential to clarify that I will not process any personal data of yours. The focus of the research is on child refugees' participation, so no data related to you will be used.

**Where can I find out more?**

If you wish to have more information about the research, you are welcome to contact either the principal of the school or me. My contact information is the following:

phone number:

e-mail address:

### **Appendix 3 - Interview questions for students**

1. How old are you?
2. When did you come to Greece? When did you come to this school?
3. Did you attend school in your home country? Was it different? How?
4. Do you feel that your suggestions and views are listened to in the class? How do you feel about that?
5. Do you feel comfortable sharing your ideas and experiences in class?
6. In general, do you like the school environment and the activities that you take part in?
7. Is there anything you would like to change as for the way the class is managed? Regarding your participation?
8. Do you feel that your teacher is close to you and listens to your ideas?
9. How do you feel when you work in teams? How would you describe your relationship with your classmates?
10. In your opinion, should children have rights?
11. Should children have a right to participate? How could children participate in schools?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share with me concerning your participation in school?

#### **Appendix 4 - Interview questions for teachers**

1. How long have you been a teacher? In this school?
2. Which is your nationality?
3. Are there any children that belong to minority groups in your classroom?
4. Are there any refugees? How many?
5. Is it the first time that you work with refugee children? If no, how was your previous experience?
6. Are refugee students different from their Greek peers somehow? Why (in which way)/why not?
7. Do you believe that participatory pedagogical methods could have an impact on child refugees' quality of life? Why/ why not?
8. Which is, in your opinion, the ideal relationship between teachers and students?
9. Could you tell me some of the advantages and challenges of working with refugee children?
10. Have refugee children in your classroom ever suggested anything about the school environment and/or curriculum amendments? If yes, how did you respond? Did you take their suggestions into account?
11. Do refugee children participate the same as the rest of their peers in class?
12. Have refugee students shared with you any prior experiences? If yes, in which conditions? In the class or in private?
13. What do you think about the Convention on the Rights of the Child? Which is its role in Greek schools?
14. Is there a relationship between the children's right to participation, according to Article 12, and pedagogical methods and practices used in Greek Primary schools? How do you perceive and comprehend participatory pedagogy?
15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me concerning child refugees' participation in schools?