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# Integration of refugee children in kindergarten: Views of nursery teachers in the Prefecture of Chios

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this paper is to investigate the views of the preschool children of the island of Chios on the integration of refugee children in public kindergartens. Greece, due to its geographical position, is a country that hosts a large number of refugees and immigrants who were aiming to come to our country to improve their living standards and their living conditions (Gotovos, 2002; Damanakis, 1997). A particularly large wave in recent years has come from the east and the Arab countries, with the result that the islands of the North Aegean are welcoming refugees, who are gradually moving to the hinterland. After the massive arrival of refugees and immigrants in our country, the refugee issue is a major issue at all levels: economic, social, political, cultural. Especially after the summer of 2015 where there was an increasing number of refugees, the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs had announced a plan for the smooth integration of children into Greek education by 2016. The North Aegean islands receive daily refugees and immigrants who are staying at Refugee Hosted Centers.*

**Keywords:** *preschool education, refugee children, kindergarten teachers, integration*

**JEL Classification:** *I24, I28*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Recent studies have shown that school has a decisive influence on the child's behavior, regardless of the presence of other factors (Dowling & Osborne, 2001). The school actively participates in the smooth integration of refugees into Greek society and especially Preschool Education is the first step. The teacher is an important factor in the implementation of programs concerning the integration of refugee children because they can intervene and shape the heterogeneous composition of classroom students. Its training on intercultural issues and the management of a multicultural environment is now needed to be able to adapt and respond to existing conditions. That is why the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs and other organizations (OEPEK, ELIAMEP, IOPE etc) organize seminars and workshops.

Beach (2003) argues that teachers with more years of experience do not apply new teaching methods to younger educators who seem to be more receptive to new techniques. Teachers' views on other cultures, religions, languages, etc.

can influence the successful or non-integration of refugee children. If they encounter racism and do not exploit the cultural experiences of children, it has the effect of preserving prejudices at school (Askouni, 2003; Frangoudaki, 2001).

Kindergartens have the opportunity to cultivate the intercultural consciousness of young children with activities based on the principles of intercultural education. (B) children come into contact with the languages of other peoples and c) the linguistic and cultural diversity that emerges leads to easier assimilation of differences (Govaris, 2000). According to Androusos and Askouni (2004), with the reflective method, teachers, according to the class requirements, are adapting, discovering and applying the teaching practices. In order to enable the teacher to carry out the above-mentioned process, they should themselves accept and understand others regardless of their own perceptions. Cummins (2005) argues that teachers in all education systems can apply methods that promote respect for all, parity, cooperative learning, identify their identity and role, and strengthen activities with collaborative relationships with students from different cultural environments.



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## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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### Legislation on the education of refugee children

In Europe, Article 24 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights enshrines the rights of children, while the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (Law 2101/1992) is one of the most important texts concerning the protection of children's rights. The European Convention on Human Rights states that each state has an obligation to provide education that respects the religious and philosophical beliefs of parents (Article 29 (1) (b) and Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The continued recruitment of underage refugees led the European Commission in 2001 to adopt a proposal for directives on minimum conditions for the reception of asylum seekers from the Member States of the European Union. The same text was then supplemented and adopted by the Council of Europe in Directive 2003/9 / EC, which refers to the education of refugee children.

Greece, as host country, is bound to implement international conventions by providing shelter, education, etc. to refugees. By Law 2121/1992 (Government Gazette A 192 / 02.12.1992) it ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 28 encourages schooling and the development of forms of education accessible to every child. With regard to Greek law and in accordance with the Constitution, Article 16 of Education, Art and Science states that "education is a basic mission of the State and aims at the moral, intellectual, professional and physical education of the Greeks, the development of the national and religious consciousness and their transformation into free and responsible citizens". Law 2910/2001 (Article 40 (1)) refers to the integration of all foreign children residing in Greece, thus ensuring their access to public education and their participation in school and educational activities, just as the rest of the pupils. The education of the minor refugees is officially mentioned in Law 3386/2005 (Government Gazette A 212 / 23.08.2005), which refers to the entry, residence and integration of third country nationals in Greece.

Children refugees have the option of enrolling in the regular school program, apart from intercultural schools operating throughout Greece. Since 2010, the Educational Priority Areas (SPAs) have been operating. In October 2016, the first Host Structures for Refugee Education are operating within the Schools of the Directorates of Education of the country where CPPs are in place, enabling children living in a CPC to attend the morning departments of the school units. The conditions for enrollment of refugee children are an issue that has triggered reactions. N 4251/2014: Code of Immigration and Social Inclusion and other provisions. (618697) is the law on registration and states that refugee children have the right to enroll in public schools even with incomplete documents (Article 21 (8)). Therefore, the submission of incomplete supporting documents or the absence of any supporting documents, such as vaccination certification, failure to provide proof of residence, certificates etc. is not due to the non-registration of a child refugee in any Greek school.

### Action Plan of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs for Preschool Education

On March 18, 2016, the Ministry of National Defense established three committees, cooperated with the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Migration Policy, the Ministry of Citizen Protection, the Ministry of Health, the many local government bodies and the HCDCP to implement the refugee support plan. Many international organizations have supported Greece in this effort, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and UNICEF.

Based on the EU's proposal on pre-school education for refugee children, provision was made for the provision of Kindergarten nurseries within the CFP because the removal of children from their parents is not an easy and safe process due to the young children. The creation of Kindergartens outside of the school frameworks would be done with specific conditions: appropriate space, equipment, educational material and furnishings. Moreover, because of the difficulty in communication, more than one kindergarten is required to be recruited and time is different. The process of setting up suitable spaces for housing for Kindergartens was particularly time-consuming, with the result that nursery schools could not function within the CPCs. For this reason, the Management Team proceeded to establish Kindergarten branches, that is to say, the building of buildings within the CPCs that were not used for any other purpose. In 2017-2018 it was proposed to be a transitional year and for Preschool Education the following proposals.

- 1) For children residing within CPPs: Establishment of Kindergarten Branches is the first choice of the Ministry of Education to provide education to children aged 4-6. The nurses who will be staffing the departments are proposed to be two per section of 20 children and to be permanent teachers wishing to take part in these nursery schools because of their experience they will be able to cope with the difficulties of the process. It is proposed to concentrate as many children as possible in 4-6 years in order to create two shifts and to have flexible working hours. Finally, the Preschool Departments will be responsible for overseeing NFPs within their CPPs and their students to carry out their practical training there and to support them scientifically.
- 2) For children staying within cities: Children whose parents reside in public kindergartens have the opportunity to attend. The number of children who do not know the Greek language can not exceed 25% of the total number of children in the classroom and if there are no seats available in the breakfast section to have an afternoon section. For additional staff in the classroom, it is proposed to appoint a nursery school or a cultural mediator or practice internships by preschool students.

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## 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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The purpose of this research is to study and record the views, perceptions and knowledge of the teachers serving in the Prefecture of Chios on the integration and education of refugee children as well as on how they feel about their existing knowledge and application in the classroom. Through the conclusions, the process of joining and attending young children can be facilitated and made more effective. The aim of the research was to capture the views of nursery

school pupils on the integration of refugee children into education in the following areas: a) benefits of integration, b) integration and c) obstacles.

### Research questions

This research attempts to answer the following key questions

1. What are the views of teachers on the basic prerequisites for integration and what makes them difficult to integrate refugee children?
2. Are the teachers satisfied with their ability to organize the appropriate program for the smooth integration of refugee children?
3. Are teachers satisfied by their ability to diversify and adapt their teaching to meet classroom needs?
4. Are teachers satisfied with their ability to know and enforce legislation?

### Methodology and sample

The quantitative method, namely the methodological technique of the questionnaire, was used in the present study. The sample of the present research process is the Chios Prefectures of the Prefecture of Chios, permanent and deputy, serving in the public schools of the island. Chios chooses to be part because it was one of the islands that received a large wave of refugees from 2016 onwards.

Specifically, 40 kindergartens were asked to answer the questionnaire, which was distributed electronically to Pre-Kindergartens of the Prefecture. The online way is a way to share the questionnaires quickly enough without the researcher moving and at no cost to the research process.

### Research tools

The questionnaire is the research tool with which this research was conducted. It is chosen as a method of collecting data because of its positive characteristics, as it is more economical, it is easy to create and use, respondents can express themselves freely (lack of direct communication), ways of analyzing the material are standardized, the researcher can not influence answers, is the least time-consuming method.

The responses were closed-ended with Yes- No answer and Likert-grade rated: a) from 1 to 5 where 1 = Not at all, 2 = Little, 3 = Enough, 4 = Very and 5 = Very and b) from 1 to 5 where 1 = I disagree strongly, 2 = I disagree slightly, 3 = I do not agree, nor disagree, 4 = I agree a little and 5 = I agree very much. The Likert scale is considered to be the most widespread type of scale to measure the attitudes, beliefs and views of large groups, so it was chosen (Philia, 1998).

The survey involved 40 preschool educators, all were women, of whom 23 (57.5%) are deputies, while 17 (42.5%) are permanent teachers. However, 25 (62.5%) are permanent residents of Chios, which means that they remain for some years in the schools of the island. Due to the fact that most of the deputies are observed, they are relatively young generation teachers with senior ages 30-34 (35%) and years of service 6-10 years (35%). In addition to the university degree, 12 (30%) hold a postgraduate degree and 19 Kindergarten (47.5%) speak a language other than English. In the intercultural section, only one Kindergarten had postgraduate courses in intercultural education, the highest percentage (72.5%) attended seminars, while the percentage that has not received any training (25%) is significant. On the other hand, during their studies 29 (72.5%) teachers have been taught the course of intercultural education as opposed to 11 (27.5%) who did not teach at the school. Finally, most of the 30 Kindergartens (75%) have worked in class with children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The first research question is: "What are the teachers' views on the basic preconditions for integration and what makes them harder to integrate refugee children?" To answer the question, questions were asked about the key factors affecting the integration of refugee children, and teachers are asked to answer questions about whether a factor is important, but also to what extent. The factors put to the questions are as follows: a) the attitude of the teacher, the attitudes of the classmates, the attitude of the refugee child's family and the attitude of the families of the other children, b) the language and age of refugee children, c) the distance of CPPs from public kindergartens, d) the constant movement of refugees and e) Training Preschool Education Teachers. To a large extent, teachers consider that the attitudes of all those involved affect the integration of refugee children. Particularly important, 82,5% (N = 33), of which 42,5% (N = 17) agreed very much and 40% (N = 16) agreed a little. Then the attitude of the classmates to 75% (N = 33) with 27.5% (N = 11) is much in agreement and 47.5% (N = 19) is a bit agreeable. The attitude of the refugee child family is considered significant by 72.5% (N = 29) of the teachers where 30% (N = 12) agreed very much and 42.5% (N = 17) agreed a little. Finally, the attitude of the families of local students is considered significant at 37.5% (N = 15).

Table 1

Contains the percentages of the respondents who agreed on 6 questions about the conditions that contribute to the integration of refugee children

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## 4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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The presentation of the results includes the demographics of the participants, the conditions for inclusion and the factors that may affect it, the organization of the integration by the teachers and the satisfaction of the teachers themselves as to the extent to which they can organize integration of refugee children. Finally, the teachers' knowledge and opinions about the legislation. For the description and analysis of the quantitative data of the questionnaires, the SPSS for Windows software was used.

Integration conditions	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
A basic prerequisite for the effective integration of a refugee child is the attitude of the educator	33	82,5
A basic prerequisite for the effective integration of a refugee child is the attitude of his classmates	30	75
A basic prerequisite for the effective integration of a refugee child is the attitude of the child's family	29	72,5
A basic prerequisite for the effective integration of a refugee child is the attitude of the families of the other children of a classroom	29	72,5

Hierarchically, teachers are of the opinion that 35% (N = 14) and 'Non-permanent refugee dwelling' with 30% (N = 12) are the factors most affected by integration, followed by the 'Teacher 'with 17.5%' and 'Age 'with 15%. The factor 'SPP distance from Nursery Schools' accounted for only 2% (N = 1). More specifically for each of the aforementioned factors: The mother tongue at 67.5% (N = 27) is considered a significant factor, but it does not seem to be particularly important for 15% (N = 6). 40% (N = 16) replied that it strongly agrees that mother tongue is a factor influencing integration and that 27% (N = 11) agree a little. According to 67.5% (= 27), 32,5% of teachers (N = 13) and too 35% (N = 14) consider that the mother tongue influences integration. The distance from CPPs is considered to be an important factor by 55% (N = 22) of teachers, while 20% (N = 8), on the other hand, considers that it almost does not affect the process of integration of refugee children. Of the participants who agreed that the distance could affect membership, 10% (N = 4) agreed very much and 45% (N = 18) agreed a little. The largest share of 42.5% (N = 17) believes it may have little effect on membership, while 12.5% (N = 5) is too much. The constant movement of refugees is considered a factor that is also considered important by teachers. More specifically, 82.5% (N = 33) believes that the continuous movement of refugees and non-permanent residence can also affect integration. The highest rate of 47.5% (N = 19) is a bit agreeable, while 35% (N = 14) is very much in agreement. 12.5% (N = 5) of teachers think it may be a little while very much 45% (N = 18). Preschool age for the overwhelming majority of teachers, 90% (N = 36) is suitable for the integration of refugee children into Greek schools and 47.5% (N = 19) is considered to have a very high impact on the integration of refugee children. 65% (N = 26) agreed very much while 25% (N = 10) agreed a little. Teacher training is considered by 82.5% (N = 33) of teachers as also an important factor influencing integration, 30% (N = 12) is very much in agreement and 52.5% (N = 21) agrees a little. Indeed, 27.5% (N = 11) consider that it can affect too much and 50% (N = 20) how it can affect a lot.

Table 2  
Contains the percentages of teachers who agreed that the above factors can influence the integration process and answered 11 questions about these factors

Factors Affecting Integration	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Mother tongue of refugee children	27	67,5
Distance of CPPs from public kindergartens	22	55,0
Continuous movement of refugees	33	82,5
Preschool age is the appropriate age	36	90
Teacher training	33	82,5

The majority of teachers, 62.5% (N = 25), considers that the education of refugee children should take place in public kindergartens, while 37.5% (15) consider that education should take place in Kindergartens within the CPCs. School and teachers play an important role in the integration and integration of refugee children by 87.5% (N = 35) of teachers. Specifically, 30% (N = 12) is very much in agreement, and 52.5% (N = 21) agrees a little. Also the majority of participants, 42.5% (N = 17) and 50% (N = 20), consider that the role of the school is important too and very much. The effect of inclusion on the other children in the classroom can work positively for 77.5% (N = 29) and for the society as a whole, 69.2% (N = 27) of teachers are likely to have a positive impact.

Table 3  
Teachers' opinions regarding refugee education

	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Training refugee children in public kindergartens	15	37,5
The role of the school and the teacher is important	35	87,5%
Positive effect on class children	29	77,5
Positive impact on society	27	69,2
Adequate teacher training	26	65,0

The question whether teachers think they are adequately trained disagrees with 35% (N = 14) of which 22.5% (N = 9) disagrees a little and 12.5% (N = 5) disagrees greatly. The majority of 65% (N = 26) neither agrees nor disagrees. Table 3: Contains the percentages of teachers who responded positively to 6 questions concerning the integration of refugee children in relation to the other respondents. The second part of the survey concerns the organization of integration by teachers and the following questions were asked: "Are teachers satisfied with their ability to organize an appropriate program for the smooth integration of refugee children?" And "They are satisfied with the teachers by their ability to differentiate and adapt their teaching to meet the

needs of the class? " Questions concerning the organization of integration within the class were answered and some factors were mentioned that could positively influence the organization of integration.

Integration Organization: 55% (N = 22) teachers seem to have a neutral view of their ability to effectively organize the integration of a refugee child while 37.5% (N = 15) claims to be able to organize membership.

Adjustment of the daily schedule: In particular, in the adjustment of the daily program, the largest percentage, 57.5% (N = 23), responded neutral, while 35% (N = 12) seems to agree that it can adjust the daily schedule. From this rate, 'I agree very much' only answered 5% (N = 2) and 'I agree a little' 30% (N = 12).

Learning refugee children's preferences: Teachers believe that only 25% (N = 10) can coordinate teaching with the preferences of refugee children. The majority with 62.5% (N = 25) seems to have a neutral attitude while 12.5% (N = 5) responded that they disagree slightly.

As far as the factors that can influence the organization of integration are concerned, teachers support the following:

Refugee children's needs and school career: 72.5% (N = 29) of teachers responded to the direct link of a successful school course with the adaptation of the program to the needs of refugee children. 25% (N = 10) neither agrees nor disagrees with the aforementioned wording.

Culture and culture of refugee children: The majority of teachers believe that the process of tension will be facilitated when the teaching program takes into account the family culture and the culture of refugee children. 12.5% (N = 5) and 'pretty much' agree 55% (N = 22) and 12.5% (N = 5).

Individual characteristics of refugee children and thematic approaches: Finally, 87.5% (N = 35) of teachers argue that the individual characteristics of refugee children should be taken into account when planning the thematic approaches. 30% (N = 12) is very much in agreement with 57.5% (N = 23).

Organization of integration	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
I can effectively organize the integration of a refugee child into the classroom	15	37,5
I can tailor the daily program to the needs of a refugee child	14	35,0
I can co-ordinate teaching with the preferences of refugee children	10	25
When the teaching program is tailored to their needs then child refugees will have a successful school career	29	72,5
When the teaching program responds to the family culture and refugee children's culture, the integration process can be facilitated	27	67,5
When planning thematic approaches, account should be taken of the individual characteristics (habits, ways of behavior, pre-existing experiences) of refugee children	35	87,5

Table 4  
Includes the percentages of teachers who are satisfied with their ability to organize the integration of refugee children

and responded that they agree with some factors influencing integration.

The majority of teachers 65% (N = 26) use the principles of intercultural education during the school year, they agree very much 25% (N = 10) and agree a little 40% (N = 16). Due to the situation, 95% (N = 38) of teachers responded that they considered any form of intercultural education necessary, of which 65% (N = 26) agreed very much and 30% (N = 12) agreed a little. The teachers' positive responses to communication with teachers who have refugee children in their class, 82.5% (N = 33), were also high. Of this, 37.5% (N = 15) is very much in line with teacher communication and 45% (N = 18) is a bit agreeable

The last question "Do the teachers know the legislation on the integration of refugee children? tries to investigate whether teachers not only know the law but also how they feel with the attitude of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs.

Knowledge of legislation: Of the total number of teachers, only 12.5% (N = 5) agree that they are aware of the legislation while the majority of 55% (N = 22) responded that they disagree with their knowledge of the relevant legislation, % (N = 9) disagrees strongly and 32.5% (N = 13) disagrees a little.

Implementation of legislation: In the implementation of legislation, teachers have a neutral attitude of 37.5% (N = 15) and a negative attitude of 40% (N = 16).

Regulatory clarity: In the question of the ambiguity of the legislation, the answers were shared and most 45% (N = 18) supported a neutral attitude. On the other hand, 25% (N = 10) agreed that the legislation is vague and 30% (N = 12) does not find the legislation vague.

Educational system readiness: 57.5% (N = 23) argued that the country's education system is not ready to address the issue of refugee children's education. The highest rate of 40% (N = 16) disagrees with the idea that the education system is ready and 17.5% (N = 7) disagrees strongly.

State Attitude: In the last question whether the state supports teachers to meet the new challenges, teachers responded negatively to 60% (N = 24), of which they disagree with 45% (N = 18) and disagree with 15% (N = 6).

Teachers, although not well aware of the legislation, agree with the host State's obligation to provide 80% (N = 33) education to refugee children, of which 27.5% (N = 11) agree very much and 52, 5% (N = 21) agrees a little.

Legislation	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
I know legislation concerning the integration of refugee children in Greek schools	22	55,0
I am in a position to implement the legislation	16	40,0
I believe that legislation is unclear as to the inclusion of refugee children in kindergarten	10	25,0
Our education system is ready to address the issue of the education of refugee children	23	57,5
The Ministry of Education supports teachers in refugee societies to address the educational challenges of integrating refugee children	24	60,0

Table 5  
Contains the percentages of teachers who responded to 5 law and state questions and their responses were negative

## 5 CONCLUSION

Teachers argue that the integration of refugee children will benefit both their own and their families, as well as local students and the local community, confirming the findings of the Papa'tiarcharch (2006), Sideris (eg), Balkar (2016 ) and Hos (2016). They consider refugee children to be part of Greek schools and this will affect their social inclusion, agreeing to agree with Sideris (eg) and Soul (2002).

Nursery students apply the principles of intercultural education during the school year, but they do not feel adequately trained and adequately prepared to cope with the new conditions. They seem to need their training due to the present situation and the awareness of everyone as suggested by Androusos & Askouni (2004), Androussou & Magos (2001), Askouni (2001), Dimitriou and others. (2004) and Zografakis (2004)

They argue that integration concerns all stakeholders (school, refugee parents, parents of local pupils) and their attitude is a key factor in the integration of refugee children by agreeing with Cummins (2005), Dragona (2003a & 2003b), Zografakis (2004) , Isambert - Jamati (1985), Christidou - Lionaraki (2001b) and Zeroulou (1998).

What is most concerned about them is the language of refugee children. They think that language is the biggest difficulty and is the factor that can more influence the integration process. Also, the main difficulty of integration is the constant movement of refugee children. It does not seem that the permanent residence of teachers influenced their views and most were substitutes. The majority claimed that education should be in public kindergartens. that pre-school age is appropriate for refugee children to begin their introduction to Greek education

According to the results of the survey on the satisfaction of teachers from their skills to organize the classroom and integration programs seem to consider it important to take into account the cultural lives of refugee children and to see what is needed for the successful school course (2004), Askouni (2003), Cummins (2005), Plexusakis (2003) and Skourtou (2001). However, they do not feel confident about their ability to organize programs and shape appropriate positions.

Teachers are also not sufficiently aware of the existing legislation on the education of refugee children and this also makes it difficult for them to cope with any reactions on the part of the parents of the local community. They have a positive attitude towards the obligation of the state to provide education to refugee children but they believe that our education system is not ready and properly organized to successfully integrate refugee children. Finally, they feel that the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs does not support them enough in the endeavor to join, and that makes them feel stressed, insecure and concerned about the possible attendance of refugee children in nursery schools.

Continuous training of teachers, permanent and alternate teachers is required to be able to implement curricula that respect and take into account the children's learning background. It is also important to sensitize parents so that there is no racism and fear, but on the contrary, respect for diversity prevails. The lack of infrastructure in Greek

Kindergartens, the need to recruit several kindergartens, the transfer of young children to public kindergartens are some of the key issues that should be solved immediately in order to allow refugee children to join the Greek public kindergartens. Today, as ever, the teacher is required to manage different situations by trying to keep the balance between different factors. It is necessary for teachers to be trained in intercultural education for teachers so that they are able to implement appropriate programs in the right way. (Jeane Copenhagen-Johnson, 2007).

The results show that the kindergarten has a positive attitude towards the integration of young children but they consider it necessary to train them and to solve basic problems. Apart from the language of refugee children, teachers believe that the attitude of the local community and the parents of the local pupils may affect the integration of refugee children. The results of the research can be used to educate teachers and thereby contribute to improving pedagogical practices. They can help designers of training programs and curricula of teachers to develop intercultural education programs more effectively. It is also possible to explore the views of nursery teachers who teach in other places and to compare the results in order to investigate whether the site affects attitudes and opinions. Even a survey of parents of children living in the North Aegean islands would help to integrate refugee children smoothly as the attitude of the local community is very important

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