

Article

Exploring Narratives of Teachers Working with Culturally Diverse Students: Any Insights about Inclusion?

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Abstract: The aim of the present study is to capture the teachers' reflections and lived experiences on the inclusion of culturally diverse students in Greek school settings. Through a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, teachers share their personal accounts and stories about their efforts, initiatives, and moves towards more inclusive schooling, as well as the barriers they face in the school environment. Five ($n = 5$) primary school teachers were recruited purposefully because of their work experience with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in mainstream, integration or reception classes. Narrative-discursive analysis unravels the effectiveness of inclusive practice in Greece for culturally diverse students according to specific aspects of inclusive pedagogy such as progressive education, transformative learning, innovative practices, and strategies, as well as school-family partnership. Teachers' experiences revealed their complex work to handle the increasing diversity in schools and to respond to all students' needs in a context of slow but steady measures towards inclusion.

Keywords: inclusive practice; narratives; Greek teachers; culturally diverse students



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1. Introduction

As inclusive education is currently considered a global priority nowadays, schools around the world make efforts to build the capabilities of mainstream schools to support more children and young people with diverse features. The vision of inclusion in schools entails “living in a community where participants are equally involved in the joint enterprise of learning in accordance with the results of a joint process of education-building” [1]. According to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on education, all people should have access to high-quality, inclusive education and opportunities for lifelong learning by 2030 [2].

However, building a pluralistic and inclusive school culture is a long and arduous journey that demands multiple voices to be heard and many challenges are overcome. Although establishing inclusive schools has numerous educational benefits such as addressing issues of equity and diversity [3,4], countries all over the world are still struggling with inclusive education, from the seemingly simple process of defining it to the more difficult effort of putting it into practice [5]. Firstly, the absence of a universal definition of inclusion is a fundamental problem. Several terms define this idea in either a broad or narrow manner, focusing on different aspects of it, but are never comprehensive. The various definitions of the goals to be achieved also vary significantly, owing to the features of the context and the education system, which are usually ignored in most reviews [6]. According to Hodgkinson and Vickerman [7], inclusion is based on a complex ideology, and it is very challenging to put this concept into practice in diverse educational contexts. As a result, in-depth, culturally specific research is needed to better understand how inclusion is perceived and shared by all people [8].

The successful implementation of inclusive policy is closely related to teachers' attitudes and eagerness [9]. Unfortunately, there is a current lack of information regarding the suitable teaching strategies that promote learning in inclusive classrooms, particularly information gathered from teachers' observations and perspectives [10]. Furthermore, a closer look at the recent international literature on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion reveals that most studies are limited to the investigation of teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities, neglecting that inclusive education means real learning opportunities for all students [11].

A systematic review of international literature showed that there are few prior studies on teachers' perspectives concerning the inclusive education of culturally diverse students. In one such study, Reddig et al. [12] studied high school general and special education teachers' perceptions of culturally and linguistically diverse students with learning disabilities in inclusive settings using semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study showed that the themes that emerged were associated with: (a) providing increased social support and individualized attention for these students as well as creating positive relationships with them; (b) fruitful collaboration between the special education teacher and the general education teacher, establishing parity between them; (c) teachers' lack of knowledge of culturally and linguistic diversity strategies; (d) the need for parental involvement; and (e) the overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students with disabilities. In another recent study by Harðardóttir et al. [13], the analysis of policy documents on refugee integration in Iceland as well as the narratives of fourteen teachers working closely with refugee students demonstrated that the notion of equality in policy documents is wrongly rendered as "sameness", ignoring the historical, social, or cultural background and the experiences of refugee students. Moreover, the clear ideological lines between the majority culture and the refugee culture are related to an assimilative approach where inclusion is translated into a process of integration that lies first and foremost on refugees in terms of cultural homogeneity. During this process, teaching practice is limited to teaching the national language, whereas social and cultural aspects of inclusion come second. The results offered by Doran [14] also suggest that teachers reported extensive professional development on cultural and language diversity but lacked familiarity with key ideas and appropriate intervention strategies for culturally diverse learners.

In the Greek context, for many years, the conceptual definition of the term "inclusive education" also focused mainly on students with disabilities and/or special educational needs (SEND) [15]. However, in Greece, there are many other groups of students with diverse features and different needs, such as students coming from socio-economically disadvantaged families, migrant students, Muslim students, and Roma students. Moreover, the unexpectedly massive number of refugees and asylum seekers who arrived in Greece over the last few years has had an impact on the student population as well, since refugee students could also attend Greek mainstream schools. As a consequence, inclusive education is closely related to the notion of social justice and refers to all students who differ not only in terms of disability status but also in gender, ethnicity, culture, and social class [16].

Although interest in inclusion is on the rise in Greece, there is insufficient data so far about the effectiveness of the current inclusive practice from the perspective of the school community members. This study addresses the need for a more profound understanding of teachers' experiences regarding the inclusion of children and youth from different cultural backgrounds within mainstream schools, which has so far been lacking in scientific literature. A recent review of the relevant literature indicates that this is the first study in the Greek context that aims to identify, describe, and discuss the teachers' reflections on the inclusion of culturally diverse students in the mainstream educational system. The study was conducted in Greece from June to August 2022. The aim of the present study is to capture the teachers' lived experiences regarding the inclusion of culturally diverse students in Greek school settings. As part of a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, teachers share their personal accounts and stories about the barriers found in schools, as well as their efforts and initiatives towards more inclusive schooling. Narrative inquiry

and the illumination of life experiences encourage a sense of interconnectedness through the sharing of stories. Therefore, participants were asked, “How effective are inclusive practices for culturally diverse students in the Greek mainstream school”?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

Five ($n = 5$) primary school teachers participated in this study. They were recruited purposefully because of their work experience with with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students.. Their teaching experience was relatively short, ranging from 1 to 6 years. All participants had specialized knowledge in the field of teaching Greek as a foreign/second language or in the field of intercultural education (i.e., training programs). The inclusion criterion was based on the previous teaching experience with one or more culturally diverse students who attended one of the following classes: (a) the mainstream class; (b) the Integration Class; or (c) the Reception Class. These three structures consist of the educational scheme for the inclusion of culturally diverse students in Greece.

The Integration Class and the Reception Class are classes that operate within the Greek mainstream school during morning school hours. On the one hand, students who attend the Integration Class leave the mainstream classroom for some hours in order to be taught Greek language, mathematics, and science subjects by a special education teacher in a separate classroom. Integration Classes are created to provide differentiated teaching as well as individualized teaching to students with mild disabilities and/or special educational needs. However, it is not unusual for culturally diverse students to attend the Integration Class. Culturally diverse students are often misdiagnosed as students with special educational needs [17,18]. However, their poor school performance and disrupted schooling are not related to any disorders but to language and communication barriers because of their different mother tongues [19]. On the other hand, students who attend the Reception Class also leave the mainstream classroom in order to receive additional Greek language support. Reception Classes are core curriculum classes for students who are learning Greek as a foreign language, and they are included in a Greek school program named Educational Priority Zones (ZEP is the acronym in Greek). They are established in order to provide additional support for children who lack the necessary Greek language skills and face difficulties in Greek language comprehension. Depending on their knowledge of Greek, they attend ZEP I (no or basic knowledge) or ZEP II (moderate knowledge) classes. Reception Classes are also one of the basic forms of the Greek educational scheme for refugee education since refugee students can attend a Reception Class in a primary or secondary school in order to increase their level of Greek language comprehension and communication.

Table 1 presents the teachers’ demographic characteristics. The mean age of the participants was 40 years. Their previous teaching experience with these students was necessary to reassure them that the participants would be able to share their stories concerning this issue.

Table 1. Participants’ demographic characteristics.

Characteristics		Number of Respondents
Gender	Male	3
	Female	2
Teaching experience	Mainstream classroom (culturally diverse students co-attend together with Greek students).	3
	Integration Class (culturally diverse students leave the mainstream classroom and attend the Integration Class for some hours per week where they are taught Greek language, mathematics, and science subjects by a special education teacher).	1
	Reception Class (culturally diverse students leave the mainstream class and attend some hours per week in a Reception Class to receive additional Greek language support).	1
Total		5

2.2. Instrument

We used a narrative framework to deconstruct the experiences of the teachers to investigate how they position themselves in teaching culturally diverse students within mainstream schools. Narrative research is suitable for investigating our cultural contexts and social realms that would be difficult to investigate under traditional methods [20]. According to Mertova and Webster [21] (p. 1), “narrative is well suited to addressing the complexities and subtleties of human experience in teaching and learning”.

A semi-structured, individual interview schedule was used, and the questions were designed to invite the participants to recount their teaching experiences regarding the implementation of inclusive practices for culturally diverse students within mainstream schools. The questions that were included in the interview schedule combined key features of the inclusive pedagogical approach as described in the literature [22]. Open-ended questions with a loose format were used during the interview, prompting respondents to share their personal stories, whereas specific questions were asked as probes to clarify and extend the participants’ stories to acquire a complete comprehension of them. All teachers were informed about the voluntary nature of participation. The interview questions are included in Appendix A to help the reader better understand both the narrative data and the following analysis.

Narrative interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim, whereas pauses, filler words, and stray utterances like “um. . .” were also included during the verbatim transcription.

2.3. Data Analysis

Thematic narrative analysis was used as an interpretative qualitative approach to analyze the narrative data. According to Riessman [23], the aim of thematic narrative analysis is to identify common thematic elements based on the data, with special emphasis on the content of the narrative (“what is told”) rather than the structure (“how it is told”) (p. 58). The analysis involved reading the interview transcripts multiple times, and initial codes were created from all the narratives, noting their similarities and differences. These codes were then gathered into tentative primary themes, which were then reviewed and adjusted, attempting to identify themes within the narratives. The themes were actively interpreted through the lens of narrative theory, focusing on the continuity and coherence of the narrative data to gain a deep understanding of how the participants self-narrated their implemented practices within the classroom. Focusing on the content of the narrative, narrative-discursive analysis unraveled the effectiveness of inclusive practice in Greece for culturally diverse students according to specific aspects of inclusive pedagogy.

3. Results

Four themes were identified in the data, as indicated in Table 2. Each respondent was assigned a unique number between 1 and 5. The participant number code (e.g., P1 and P2) is added within single parentheses after the quote.

Table 2. Aspects of inclusive practice implemented according to participants.

Coding Categories	Indicative Extract
Progressive education	“I truly believe that my students learn better working in small groups and especially when they become engaged in practical work. As it is difficult for us to keep up the regular classroom, I use individualized activities depending on their needs and their learning pace and I have observed that my students stay more focused when they practice the new knowledge and they are able to use this knowledge out of school”. (P3)
Transformative learning	In my classroom role-playing has helped me a lot as a strategy to engage the children that don’t speak Greek very well in various circumstances. The most important for me is to assist them to find the learning motives that suit them despite the fact that the different mother tongue makes this task very challenging. Though only in this way they will become active learners with critical thinking, and this will help them in the future to have a great adaptation in the real world”. (P5)

Table 2. Cont.

Coding Categories	Indicative Extract
Innovative practices and strategies	"I face so much stress to include a culturally minority student in my classroom. I have been worried about how to be as effective as possible. I ended up using ICT tools and board games during my courses. These have literally gotten me out of a rut. Things get much easier because all students become interested with playful activities and the language problems do not seem so big". (P1)
School–family partnership	"I think that an important factor which plays an important role is the excellent communication that I have with the culturally minority families. I know that for many of my colleagues, this is extremely difficult, but as for me, I have set the terms for this relationship from the beginning and so far, it goes very well. Besides, these families were welcomed by the neighbourhood. Parents are eager to listen to my guidance in order to help their child and they try to continue my work at home". (P2)

3.1. Progressive Education

Three of the participants referred to progressive education as a significant feature of an inclusive classroom that is currently implemented. Collaborative tasks within the mainstream classroom were one of the most common progressive education practices that participants used so that all students were involved. The following quotes from two respondents highlight the frequent use of teamwork activities.

"When my students have to complete a shared task as a team, they all seem to be interested and they work seriously on it". [P1]

"Teamwork offers beautiful results for students from marginalized groups whose voice is rarely heard in the classroom, taking into account of course that I choose the members of each group to avoid possible cliques". [P5]

Respondents also focused on individualized attention and instruction during the learning process as they acknowledged the increasing curriculum demands. As indicated by one teacher:

"Let's be honest. The curriculum includes a lot of difficult topics and concepts for a student of this age to grasp let alone the reading and writing skills that are required and students from culturally diverse groups lack. So, I try to keep up with these requirements by giving these students different and easier material or by explaining the content more simply". [P5]

Moreover, teachers in the sample also referred to the importance of learning by doing, which is a key feature of progressive education as well. One participant explained that:

"Activities that are related to or derived from everyday life encourage them to participate. It is not easy to use such activities all the time but when they are called to make things, they seem to better understand both this experience and the knowledge". [P1]

However, teachers focused on the limited time to use principles of progressive education due to the overloaded curriculum, as expressed by this participant:

"The permanent thorn of education is the curriculum for the teachers. Even in primary school the curriculum is so heavily loaded that it leaves little room to experiment with new things such as group activities and differentiated learning". [P3]

3.2. Transformative Learning

According to four participants, transformative learning was also recognized as an important aspect of inclusive education. The following quotes indicate the participants' focus on the culturally diverse students' motivation and the need for emotional support.

"When we try to teach something, the priority is to give students who do not have the same cultural capital as us the answer why this knowledge would be useful for them. That is to answer how they can use it in the future. Otherwise, especially these children will remain indifferent during the course". [P2]

“Students from diverse backgrounds have to face so many challenges in the host country. If we want these students to learn, we have to create a unique bond with them. They should know that at least one teacher is always available for them when they need it to. In my school, this reference person is me”. [P1]

The teachers who have worked in the Integration Class as well as at the Reception Class revealed that the small number of students attending the class allowed them to implement elements of transformative learning as presented by two participants:

“Teaching in a separate class allows me to detect my students’ interests and motives and to design my teaching plan according to these”. [P2]

“In the Integration Class, I can get to know the children. Students have the opportunity to talk about their worries and difficulties and to discuss with me when they cannot understand something or when they feel bored. That is not feasible in the mainstream classroom due to the large number of students”. [P4]

In contrast, the participants working in the mainstream class did not have enough time or the strength to achieve this. One teacher working with students from different cultural backgrounds in the mainstream class revealed that:

“I truly find it very difficult to focus on culturally diverse students’ needs in a mainstream class with 20 other students”. [P1]

3.3. Innovative Practices and Strategies

Participants also recognized the strong bond between innovation and inclusive education in order to improve academic outcomes and address challenging problems while promoting equitable learning. Three teachers referred to the use of ICTs during the instructional process in their effort to draw the attention of all students. The following quotes represent the systematic use of new technologies and outdoor activities to facilitate culturally diverse students’ learning.

“New technologies have facilitated the learning process for culturally diverse students. Particularly, PowerPoint presentations, videos, and online quizzes keep students motivated”. [P3]

“Children love it when the course takes place outside the class under the tree in the schoolyard. We have our books and we also enjoy some outdoor games that are related to the learning content”. [P2]

However, the work overload and the limited teacher management time during the school day affected the implementation of innovative practices and strategies, as expressed by one respondent:

“Using new strategies and tools is undoubtedly good for my students but it is very time-consuming to get familiar with the function of those tools and to plan how to use them during my lessons”. [P1]

3.4. School–Family Partnership

All teachers who participated also reported that family involvement is the cornerstone of public mainstream schools and is essential for helping students achieve their maximum potential. According to the respondents, the family-school partnership is a shared responsibility and a reciprocal process whereby schools engage families in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways to take the initiative to actively support their children’s development and learning. Although there are various levels and forms of school–family partnership, the objective of this collaboration is to attempt to listen to parents, support them, and ensure that they have the tools to be active partners in their children’s school experience, as represented by the following quotes:

“The child has so many things to lose when the family is not willing to communicate with the teachers”. [P5]

“The meetings I arrange during the school year in order to get to know each other have helped to some extent the migrant parents as they understand that we as teachers and them as parents have the same goal, to help the child. It is wonderful when the parents of our students come to school and ask how to help their child succeed in school, but this is a rare phenomenon”. [P3]

Despite their efforts, participants admitted that they do not feel able to engage culturally diverse parents in the education of their children or school activities, except for one teacher in the sample who managed to assist these families in helping their children. To guarantee that students learn and grow, effective instruction is not sufficient. Although they recognize the crucial role of parental involvement in the success of inclusive education and the need for family voices to be empowered, they find it very difficult to achieve, and, as a result, this is sidelined.

“Communication with the family is always one of the hardest parts. I do not believe that language barriers are the only reason for the difficulty in collaboration. According to their cultural beliefs, they may not recognize the importance of education and the value of knowledge”. [P1]

“The ministry has never trained us on how to approach the parents of culturally diverse students”. [P5]

“It is not unusual for parents of culturally minority groups to have so many problems to face in the new residence and the last thing to be concerned about is to create a collaborative relationship with the teachers”. [P4]

4. Discussion

4.1. Progressive Education

The purpose of progressive education is to guide students to reflect carefully on important topics and gain a deeper understanding of them from the inside out [24]. According to Hogan [25] (p. 514), “progressive education is simultaneously about the unknowable and the possible and how these things connect to build a more equitable democratic society”. In progressive education, every student is involved in a broad range of activities, accomplishing what he or she can do depending on their abilities and interests, whereas experience-based learning occupies an important place [26]. An inclusive school is characterized by intercultural communication and a collaborative culture that can be cultivated through the democratic participation of all school community members who improve their decision-making skills by interacting with each other [27]. Progressive education goes beyond mere knowledge transfer to knowledge creation and the development of problem-solving skills, whereas students need to develop their conceptual understanding [24,25].

Apart from collaboration and active participation, learning by doing, individualized attention, and instruction according to students’ needs are also considered to be key elements of progressive education [28]. The instructional process is also based on the principles of the interdisciplinary approach, and students’ assessments do not include memorization [24]. Moreover, the organization of the school classroom, including the seating arrangement, can lay the foundation for the development of pupil-centered educational practices, avoiding the creation of a “mono-functional” school space in which only traditional educational practices are used [29]. Lindner and Schwab [30] also found that collaboration, grouping, modification of the instruction, individual motivation, feedback, and personal support for students are considered to be fundamental features of inclusive education.

The findings of a recent study conducted in Finland focusing on pre-service teachers’ inclusion narratives also revealed that participants identified many obstacles that prevent the full inclusion of students in mainstream school settings [31]. Particularly in progressive education, the curriculum is co-formulated both by teachers and students, and it is not based on students’ interests in general but on the interests of the students attending the specific class [24].

4.2. Transformative Learning

Transformative approaches to pedagogy aim to cultivate students' critical literacy, focusing not only on transmitting the curriculum and constructing knowledge but also on guiding students to critically understand how knowledge intertwines with social reality and power relations [32]. The relationship between the students and the teacher serves as a basis for creating an environment where all students feel that their needs and their interests are taken seriously by the teacher, and as a result, they experience support and understanding. Murdoch et al. [33] discuss three conditions for the teacher to cultivate educational relationships that support students to feel heard: (1) the teacher's recognition of the "perfectibility" of all learners, that is, supporting an asset view of all learners; (2) the teacher's "disposition as a listener", putting him or herself in the position of an empathic and supportive listener by requiring students to speak; and (3) the teacher's capacity to "build community" in the classroom. Specifically, it is essential to build a space in which all—not just those with the power that can come from being from a dominant group—are enabled to speak; to voice their struggles, confusions, and discontinuities in learning; to have their opinions heard and respected; and to have opportunities to explore and expand their horizons of meaning. One promising inclusive practice for designing the instructional process is to realize that educational opportunities are culturally constructed and then offer students culturally relevant and responsive learning experiences according to the principles of Universal Design for Learning [34]. The character of culturally responsive teaching is considered to be transformative since it aims to eliminate the cultural hegemony that permeates the content of both the curriculum and the traditional teaching methods, as well as to develop students' social consciousness, critical thinking, and self-efficacy to deal with phenomena of racism, oppression, and exploitation in their future adult lives. During the teaching and learning process, the focus is not only limited to respect for different cultural groups, but students' abilities and achievements are also considered, and school success is set as a non-negotiable and accessible goal for all students [35].

4.3. Innovative Practices and Strategies

Leveraging online tools can enhance the learning experiences of all students [36]. The findings of the study conducted by Beacham and McIntosh [37] showed that teachers had positive attitudes towards using ICT for equality as part of inclusive education and practice, particularly from the perspective of accessibility to the curriculum. Another recent study [38] also confirmed the teachers' positive attitudes towards the use of ICT in an inclusive classroom, considering it an important tool to focus on student diversity, create enthusiasm and motivation, and obtain feedback from the students. Especially in the colorful classroom, the use of technology can make it easier for students with cultural differences not only to have access to the language of the host country but also to understand the content of the subjects taught at school, e.g., mathematics and physics [39].

Making and playing educational games was also mentioned as an innovative practice by the teachers of the sample to overcome language difficulties. Within a game-playing community, the theory is related to learning as well as participation in social practice correspondingly [40]. Although using educational games provides positive experiences for students, a promising area for game designers in the future is to address not only aspects of cognitive learning but also the social and emotional dimensions of learning [41]. As long as ICT tools are selected and used carefully by teachers who have the necessary knowledge and skills, they can contribute to the development of collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, cultivating an inclusive classroom context where all students feel engaged and interact with each other [42].

4.4. School–Family Partnership

Over the years, parents have taken on the responsibility of getting involved in their children's schooling, whereas their involvement was considered unplanned and lacking a proper assessment [43]. Moreover, the expectations for parents' behavior, discipline, and

engagement in education are set from a monocultural perspective since they are solely based on the features of the host culture [44]. By gaining insight into how parents construct their roles and support their children at home, practitioners can find more effective ways to boost family participation [45].

The results of this study showed that in the Greek context, family engagement priorities and strategies for culturally diverse students are not implemented sufficiently. The language barriers, the different cultures, and the presence of negative attitudes are considered to be factors that do not facilitate a positive relationship between school and family. Although teachers are aware that all families need to be involved in their children's education, they usually do not know how to go about it [43,46]. Thus, it is of great significance to take into account the perspective of the family belonging to a cultural minority group as well as to re-consider how we can involve family members in children's learning [34].

5. Conclusions

This research is one of the few empirical studies, both internationally and in the Greek context, that use narratives to look at teachers' lived experiences with the inclusion of culturally diverse students and letting their voices be heard. Narrative research allows us to explore the complexities and interrelationships of participants' experiences, presenting the meanings they attribute to their experiences [23]. The results revealed participants' rich experiences within culturally heterogeneous classrooms. The findings captured their innovative practices, strategies, and adaptations aiming to provide educational opportunities to all students with different needs, as well as the complex and evolving challenges that arise in attempting to make the school environment attractive to both the culturally diverse students and their families.

The small sample size of this study is a major limitation. However, the purpose of this study is to explore the detailed account of individual experiences regarding inclusive practices throughout an extended period (i.e., teaching years working with culturally diverse students), so the intensive focus is on the perspective of a limited number of participants. With a small sample size, narrative analysis is considered to be a valuable qualitative tool for exploring the relationship between self and culture. [47], which can offer rich data on this critical issue under investigation. As mentioned by Mertova and Webster [21], "narrative inquiry is better suited to small sample sizes whilst also being sensitive to the ways in which knowledge is developed" (p. 89).

Students' learning is directly affected by their teachers' actions and behavior within the classroom context [10]. Teachers' narratives serve as a lens to reveal how they perceive the current inclusive practice towards culturally diverse students in Greece, and our analysis of their experiences provides insight into the importance of accepting differences and catering for the needs of all learners. Participants indicated various aspects of inclusive pedagogy that they used during the educational process, and they also highlighted their complex work to handle the increasing diversity in schools and to respond to all students' needs in a context of slow but steady measures towards inclusion. In other words, teachers seem to perceive a gap between the theory and the practice of implementing inclusion since they become overwhelmed by the increased duties and the various challenges that emerge daily [48].

Several practical implications can be derived from our findings. At the teacher level, professional development is of great importance for teachers to be an effective part of a complex learning environment. Participants' specialized knowledge in the field of teaching Greek as a foreign/second language or intercultural education was probably associated with the practices that were implemented in school as well as with their awareness of the difficulties that culturally diverse students face. When teachers participate in training programs, they have the chance for ongoing professional development (i.e., learning new techniques, approaches, and strategies), and they appreciate the significance of increasing students' creative and critical thinking skills for their future lives in a pluralistic society. Teachers need to create their lesson plans based on the principles of Universal Design

for Learning (UDL) using differentiated instruction. Taking into account the students' diverse needs, teachers who help students approach new knowledge in an experiential and alternative way (i.e., using team-building activities, role-playing, and digital tools) manage to involve students in the learning process. Apart from improving student motivation, integrating these instructional strategies allows for new information to be presented in a variety of ways so that all students can understand and interpret the meaning of the instruction.

At the administration level, the school principal also has a crucial role to play in cultivating an inclusive school environment. As shown by participants' experiences, the collaboration between family and school has a great impact on supporting culturally diverse students' needs in a mainstream classroom, but it is regarded as a very challenging process linked to various barriers. Teachers' willingness is not a sufficient factor to create an equal and collaborative partnership with families. School leadership is related to building a culture of collaboration in the school community and fostering practices that support a more intensive school–family partnership [49,50].

At the policy level, the results highlighted the urgent need for educational changes and initiatives. The teachers revealed key issues that are regarded as barriers to the implementation of inclusive education and are related to education policy. As teachers strive to meet every student's learning needs, textbooks, class size, and assessment types are among their fundamental concerns, and these concerns belong to the landscape of education policy. Education policymakers should consider teachers' needs when providing quality public education. Inclusion and equity in and through education are at the heart of a transformative education agenda and have a crucial role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to create a more sustainable future for all [51,52]. Consequently, education policies should ensure equal access to all levels of education for all children, including those belonging to socially vulnerable groups.

The results of this study offer insight into how schoolteachers position themselves in teaching culturally diverse students within mainstream classrooms, emphasizing the importance of effective teacher development in light of 21st-century societal changes. It is also possible to draw conclusions from these findings about the interaction between actual instructional practices and international educational policy, thereby providing a new perspective on how to realize a fully inclusive education system for all students as a vital component of their social inclusion as adults.

The present study has raised many questions in need of further investigation. The narrative approach can contribute to a better understanding of inclusive practice. In the future, research should reveal the different perspectives of stakeholders (parents, school administrators, school counselors, and students) on inclusive education and compare their perceptions with teachers' practices to dismantle educational barriers and promote learning within inclusive classrooms. Moreover, it is of great importance to design and implement appropriate and effective teacher training for the education and inclusion of students with different cultural backgrounds, and moving forward, future teachers require a deeper comprehension of inclusion and diversity [31]. A lack of training prevents teachers from having discussions about culture and race with multicultural students [53]. As a result, teacher education should not be limited to teaching about diversity; it should also address fundamental issues regarding the causes of educational disparities [54] while also teaching global and intercultural competences [55]. To implement an inclusive school in Greece, educational reforms must be accompanied by a change of mentality [9] so that each student can be embraced for who they are and what they bring to the learning environment.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Can you remember any positive experiences you had while working with culturally diverse students?
2. Can you remember any negative experiences you had while working with culturally diverse students?
3. What pedagogical goals do you set while teaching culturally diverse students?
4. Can you describe any actions you take to trigger culturally diverse students' interest in your classroom?
5. Can you describe any practices you implement to keep culturally diverse students engaged during the educational process?
6. Can you describe any strategies you use to make the learning content more accessible to culturally diverse students?
7. Can you describe any difficulties you face while teaching culturally diverse students? How do you overcome them?
8. What kind of actions do you take to support the positive relationships between native and culturally diverse students?
9. Are there any further actions you take to help students like the school?

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