

Problems that students face in schools in cyprus



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Abstract

This assignment is an exploration of the problems that students from other ethnicities face in Cypriot schools. It has been for ages that people immigrate for a lot of reasons. In Cyprus there are many foreign students and they face different difficulties. Phenomena of racism, discrimination, isolation, enmity, distrust and alienation occur in schools from native students and teachers against immigrants. Immigrant students have problem with the language and moreover low attainment in school. In the assignment are mentioned the reasons why foreign students underachieve in school. Finally, there are stated some measures that must be taken and recommendations that can be adopted from the school including students, teachers and leaders; parents; the Ministry of Education; and the government in order to help these children to overcome the problems and achieve in school. The monoculture character of schools should change and modify to multi-culture.

Introduction

Immigrations have been popular experience from ancient years (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 5). People immigrate because they face different problems in their countries, such as financial, social and political (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 5). A lot of immigrants move to countries in Mediterranean area. One of these countries is Cyprus, one of the major immigrants' entry countries in European Union (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 5). Most of the immigrants in Cyprus are from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, the former Soviet Union (Papasavva 2007, p. 220), Arab countries, Eastern Europe and some European Union (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 27); there are also Roma

immigrants (Demetriou and Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 244) and Pontian Greeks (Papasavva 2007, p. 221). There is no official information about the number of the immigrants but it is estimated between 60, 000 to 80, 000 (Demetriou and Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 243) from whom 13, 000 approximately are students (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 5). Most of the immigrants live in concentrated areas, such as the old district of Limassol, while some stay in Kofinou, and others are spread in the quarter of Paphos (Demetriou and Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 244). Because of the immigrants, the population of students in schools in Cyprus has increased heterogeneously the last years (Oikonomidou 2003, p. 44). Racism is undoubtedly related with native and immigrant people of a country (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 5). According to Gillborn (2008, p. 3) the definition of racism is controversial. He states that it is a cruel word and some individuals feel uncomfortable in using it. To receive the racist feeling or behaviour of people is a derogatory term and moreover an obstacle for living in a foreign country. Additionally, people try to avoid actions that will label them as racist because this word sounds forcefully. While Connolly (1998, p. 10) supports that racism is naturally contradictory, the beliefs, ideas, actions and the context related with racism modify by the passing of time and the experience of discrimination at any time of period is depended on the context they live. Connolly (1998, p. 10) states that racism would not be always related with racial inferiority or skin colour or minority nationalities. It is a distinct phenomenon that takes different types in any singular historical time and geographical place (Cole 2006, p. 82). Immigrants and especially immigrant students face a lot of problems in Cyprus. I decided to write about the problems that students from other ethnicities face because, as a future teacher and leader, I want to

investigate the situation that appears in schools in Cyprus; the problems that occur and look for recommendations for solving this problem. I want to consider the measures that the government, the school, the leaders and the teachers should take in order to overcome the problem.

The Situation in Cyprus

In Cyprus, primary and secondary schools are free for all students, regardless of their ethnic identity, financial situation, colour or religion (Demetriou and Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 246). Demetriou and Trimikliniotis (2007, p. 248) quotes that ' at a formal or official level, as far as the right to education is concerned, equality before the law is upheld as a cornerstone of the rule of law'.

Racism occurs in schools for different reasons. First of all, Cypriot students suppose that immigrants arrive to the country in order to get a job that Cypriots reject to do, while financial development and ethnicity life are not donated from them. Moreover, it is believed that immigrants are responsible for the increase in crime activities and unemployment (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 23).

Until few years ago, Cyprus had a monoculture character; teachers, students, the whole school and the society were monoculture. This situation should change, the educational system should stem from the monoculture because of the huge number of immigrant students (Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. 2010, p. 489). Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. (2010, p. 489) quote that ' the discrimination, alienation and isolation of some minority students, as well as the teachers' prejudiced attitudes, inappropriate training, and limited sense

of responsibility for the learning of their minority students is further evidence of the deficiencies in the current educational system'. Trimikliniotis and Demetriou (2008, p. 84) also argue that students from other ethnicities are isolated. Isolation in school is related with educational elimination (Symeou et al. 2009, p. 3). A variety of researches on racism in schools confirm that stereotypes and discrimination from native students appear against immigrants. Consequently the authorities' statement that students' identities have an intimate knowledge of human rights so that the prejudice on ethnic view against their foreign classmates is not permitted comes into view as unfounded (Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 46).

Cypriot students are mainly sensitive to the race, ethnicity and the colour of the skin. They view pupils from other ethnicities stereotypically and marginally (Zempylas 2010a, p. 325). Zempylas (2010a, p. 325) mentions that children in Cyprus have racial attitudes and they are nationalized from their young age. Zempyla's et al.'s (2010, p. 10) research showed that racism and nationalization processes were related with practices, awareness and discourses in public schools in Cyprus. The findings from their study prove that Cypriot students, in general, have negative behaviours against students from other ethnicities and the questionnaires show that they prefer to be separated from immigrants. Cypriot children recognize that racism attitudes against immigrants are a huge problem and racist experiences are not isolated. They have a bad behaviour against students from other ethnicities; they develop negative attitudes; they indicate apathy and unconcern toward immigrants (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 24). Demetriou's and Trimiklinioti's study (2007, p. 2) indicates racism and intolerance from

Cypriot students against immigrants, while immigrants have negative feelings against education as they think it is a pointless duty.

Despite the fact that, the school policy against immigrants interprets the conception of equality in order to get figure of multicultural character, students from immigrant communities still underachieve at school courses (Symeou et al. 2009, p. 16). Racist facts in schools in Cyprus can not be monitored because there are no systems to do so and there is no explicit school policy dealing with how they should react in such incidents (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 26). It is provided that in Cypriot schools the policy makers separate students with high existence of immigrants, minorities and Cypriots from poor families; despite the policy they should use, not to separate students according to their ethnicity and the financial status (Demetriou and Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 243). The government of Cyprus has never been involved with anti-discrimination issues. Limited measures were taken in some unique occasions that responsiveness is increased (Trimikliniotis & Demetriou 2008, p. 83). The only measure that the government provides is that when a great number of the same ethnicity students are present at in a school their mother tongue is offered for learning, while history and culture courses, that are relative to their country, are not offered (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2008, p. 84).

Students from other ethnicities can attend the language support courses that are provided for language assistance (Papasavva 2007, p. 224). While Trimikliniotis (2004, p. 14) assumes that immigrant students need special support in language learning because they have different language and

culture but these courses are seemed to be as extra activities without particular significance.

There is a noticeable number of national stereotypes, racism, feelings of enmity and distrust against immigrant students. Cypriot parents complain that their children's education suffers and the curriculum is not covered by the teachers; because of the fact that a lot of students in the class are from different ethnicities and they have difficulties with the language. They finally prefer to move their children to a different school (Trimikliniotis 2004, p. 16). The structure of the existing curricula and the schooling materials are mostly proposed for Cypriot students and the foreign students predestine to fail (Karagiorgi et al. 2009, p. 9).

In Cyprus during the national festivals parades take place in the streets by the schools. Each school is leaded from the best students and they have the advantage to carry the Cypriot flag, the Hellenic flag and the symbol of their school. Foreign students are not allowed to carry the flags without regard to the high achievement they may have and they are rejected or forced to understand that they can not belong to this event (Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 51).

The problem in Cyprus

It is a fact that a lot of immigrants in Cyprus live in poverty. Immigrant students, who live under these circumstances, are isolated and ghettoised. The communication with Cypriots is limited (Trimikliniotis 2004, p. 17). It is considered that a lot of immigrant parents, because of their financial problems, are forced to work a lot of hours a day. As a result of this situation, they are not able to dedicate their time for monitoring and helping their

children with their homework. Financial problems may also impact on the way of living, the home environment and the different opportunities that are offered in the educational field. Poor resources of a family may force children to get a job to earn some money, and consequently they do not have enough time to rest, study, and be prepared for the school, and in some situations they absent from school (Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. 2010, p. 488). Pilkington (1999, p. 412) assumes that parents are responsible for students' low achievement in school. Educational achievement is strongly depended on social class (Gillborn 1997, p. 350; Gillborn 2008, p. 51).

It is observed that students from other ethnicities achieve considerably worse than local students. Mainly the causes for this underachievement are: the low attendance in school, the low assistance from parents, the low generation position and because of the fact that their parents are uneducated (Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. 2009, p. 11). Because of the low attendance in school, children are not benefitted from important information and explanations from the courses, and moreover underperform in school (Theodosiou-Zipiti 2009, p. 12). Immigrant parents seem that they do not trust the Ministry of Education and the school and consequently they do not communicate with the school and the teachers to ask for their children's improvement (Trimikliniotis 2004, p. 17). A considerable number of immigrant parents think that there is no reason for their children to go to school because they do not understand, they have low attainment, they feel isolated and rejected and sometimes they fight with other students (Trimikliniotis 2007, p. 54).

Immigrant students seem to perform lower in theoretical subjects, such as Modern Greek, rather than the practical ones like Mathematics. This is because these subjects are depended more on language knowledge (Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. 2009, p. 11). While foreign students, who attend in the first classes of primary school, face difficulties merely with the language and arithmetic courses (Trimikliniotis 2004, p. 17).

Teachers in schools in Cyprus are not trained well and they do not have the appropriate schooling materials in order to manage to offer a proper multi-culture education. This is how the educational troubles are increased regarding the foreign students; and therefore the need of necessary communications and the need of an inclusive and organized school policy according to the multi-cultural character of the schools are provided (Trimikliniotis 2004, p. 16). Teachers and principles seem to be more xenophobic than the native students (Trimikliniotis 2004, p. 17). Several problems appeared with some teachers who express racism feelings and discrimination toward foreign students. Unfortunately, there is a lack of an organization that is able to examine correctly the extent of the problem (Trimikliniotis 2004, p. 17). It is noticed that the insufficiency of the curriculum, the lack of the appropriate teacher training, tongue difficulties and the general collapse of the school to be aware of the culture of other ethnicities are the reasons for the low attainment of foreign students (Karagiorgi et al. 2009, p. 3).

Recommendations

In order to overcome discriminations and injustices, children should understand and name the beliefs and actions on the expected advantage of

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someone's ethnic identity constitute types of racism and xenophobia (Zempylas 2010b, p. 1386). Schools should change character and be more sensitive to the difference; recognise the educational and linguistic needs of students from other ethnicities; support equal opportunities for all the students; and radically handle racism. Schools society including leadership, teachers, children, the curriculum and educating methods should recognize, understand and include multicultural matters. Students from other ethnicities will improve their academic achievement if they are educated under good circumstances (Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. 2009, p. 12). It is suggested that students must be educated for life matters in a multicultural community. This suggestion has a variety of principles, a fundamental one is that: by the time that children are educated about the culture and the identity of each other, the discrimination will be decreased (Cole 2006, p. 79). Further research is needed to focus on a numerous of complimentary features including the illumination of intends on immigrants' education (Karagiorgi et al. 2009, p. 12) and on foreign students' attainment (Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. 2009 , p. 13).

It is recommended that policymaking and classroom training will help the situation with students from other ethnicities. At the point of educational strategy, it is important that the Ministry of Education and schools should be responsible for recognizing and disputing racist views (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 26). Educational policy strategies need to develop appropriate policies that will recognise racist behaviours and suggest valuable strategies to cope with these problems (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 26). Banks (2007 see Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 26) argues that intercultural education is needed in

order to help both teachers and students to meet issues which are related with racism, injustice and discrimination with sensitivity.

It is needed to create good relations between native and foreign students to compose the connection of creating successful policymaking and practices in classroom that will poise union and multiplicity in any school in the Mediterranean area that has an increased multicultural character (Zempylas et al. 2010, p. 26-27). Gillborn (2008, p. 127) also argues that it is important to understand diversity whilst supporting union and antiracism, although the argument is addressed for the England context. Teachers who enter the school society should realize how to create classrooms that deal with matters of respect, justice and equality (Angelides et al. 2006, p. 520). Teachers are required to participate in training programmes that will help them to understand the history and the culture of the immigrant students and react to the dispute of educating students with discriminatory behaviours against foreigners. These attitudes would act to immigrant students' inclusion negatively (Karagiorgi et al. 2009, p. 10). What is really needed is the development of the curriculum, the classroom's organization and the teachers' communication with parents (Karagiorgi et al. 2009, p. 10-11; Symeou et al. 2009, p. 4). The Ministry of Education should modify the curriculum and change schooling material according to both native and foreign students. Teachers should also be qualified in successful classroom organization, in order to reduce bad attitudes against students from other ethnicities in school. The school should have a close communication with immigrant parents to facilitate students' improvement (Karagiorgi et al. 2009, p. 10-11). Symeou et al. (2009, p. 18) argue that the connection

between the school and the immigrant parents is very important because they help teachers to gain a helpful knowledge about their history, culture and tradition. The development of the culture and the tradition of a country will be useful and quickly if the school curriculum includes anti-discrimination ideas (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou 2008, p. 107).

The department of Education has already applied some changes in the schools that will help students from other ethnicities and is still working on schools' improvement (Theodosiou-Zipiti et al. 2009, p. 12). In the Annual Report (2009, p. 304) it is mentioned that the Ministry of Education should put into practise methods and strategies that will contribute to the smooth progress of the minority groups from different ethnicities in a creative environment not considering their background. The Government and the Ministry of Education must write down laws about race equality; examine their actions for signs of prejudice and mainly focusing on students' success; and have to aggressively eliminate race inequality. Trimikliniotis (2004, p. 14) argues that the government is encouraged to make new laws, implementation arrangements and processes to protect specific groups from the culture and ethnicity discrimination. Unfortunately, there is a gap between the education department, and moreover schools, and other Ministries in their efforts to apply these new conditions (Gillborn 2006, p. 5). Gillborn (2008, p. 132) supports that the Ministry of education should set processes for observing racist behaviours in schools and perform themselves to fight racism and discrimination. In ECRI (Report 2001) it is supported that the Ministry of education should make sure that teachers are appropriately prepared to teach students from different ethnicities, because of the

multicultural form of schools in Cyprus, and fight to any expression of racism or prejudiced behaviours in schools. The Ministry of education should provide Greek as the second language for immigrants and make sure that the teachers are suitably trained in this value. Immigrant students should also have the advantage to be taught their native tongue parallel with Greek language in order to facilitate the procedure of learning (ECRI Report 2001). The Ministry should also prepare race equality proposals and schools must apply race equality strategies (Tomlinson 2005, p. 155). According to Tomlinson (2005, p. 155) the government should reduce illegal discrimination, support alike opportunities and encourage better race relations.

Conclusion

The particular intention is the education of all the students excluding the differentiation, difficulties, and worries (Angelides et al. 2006, p. 514). 'Everyone has the right to education' as it is mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Anonymous 1948, p. 4). Karagiorgi et al. (2009, p. 9) support that the basic problems that immigrant students face at school are related with tongue difficulties and the fact that they are marginalized and isolated. The monoculture character of Cypriot schools should change and be modified to multi-culture due to the fact that recently a lot of immigrant students are members of the school union. A lot of changes should be applied in schools in order to help the immigrant students to face these difficulties. Teachers and leaders should first overcome their feelings of xenophobia; racism and stop the discrimination against foreign

students. After that, they will be able to educate the students to cope with matters of respect, justice and equality.

The problems that students from other ethnicities face in schools are a serious matter for my country. As a teacher I want to educate as possible as I can my students regardless to their ethnicity, having as a goal their best achievement. I want to help them with the educational difficulties and offer them the values of equality and tolerance to the difference. Teachers are responsible for the school development (Pilkington 1999, p. 412). As a leader I want to lead the school in the best way and reduce the attitudes of racism and discrimination against immigrant students. The government and the school should apply the above recommendations gradually and as soon as possible in order to help immigrant pupils to face their difficulties and achieve in school.