A MENTORING PROGRAM FOR THE INTEGRATION OF NEWLY ARRIVED MIGRANTS INTO THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT OF THE HOST COUNTRY

I. Xenophontos[1], P. Kosmas[1,2], E. Xeni[1]

[1]Center for the Advancement of Research and Development in Educational Technology (CYPRUS)

[2]School of Education, University of Nicosia (CYPRUS)

Abstract

Migration has created a global challenge to the hosting countries, on different levels, including the discrepancy between the diverse cultures of the migrant and local people. The impact of this issue is reflected in schools' environments where the newly arrived migrant students may face different challenges since there is no specific guideline on the cultural norms of the hosting country. Considering the gap between the two cultures, this study paved the way for allowing cultural integration of the newly arrived migrant students and understanding the migrant's culture of the students who were already integrated into the hosting country's culture through a mentoring programme. Four different European countries, namely Spain, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Austria, implemented a mentoring programme tailored to the needs of newly arrived migrant students. In each school, two teachers, four mentors and four mentees participated in the study where in each country the methodology was adjusted to the cultural norms of its country. Overall, teachers and students believe that the mentoring programme has been helpful, and it was more effective when the mentors had also been migrants themselves. Results from the qualitative analysis of teachers' and students' interviews demonstrate the significance of implementing a tailored mentoring program.

Keywords: migrant students, secondary classrooms, teachers, inclusive education, multiculturalism, mentoring programme, migration, integration, classroom

1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, human migration started many years ago; however, nowadays, people have more accessibility and reasons to migrate, creating a global challenge to the hosting countries. Specifically, the challenges appear on the migration process where newly arrived migrants have to adapt to the rules of the new school or the learning process of the host country. Other challenges include socio-economic and political factors, emotional and mental health issues where there are no official frameworks which target those challenges. One of the Paris Declaration's [1] priorities is to "ensure inclusive education for all children and young people" by combating racism and discrimination and mitigate the gap between the social and educational inequalities.

Therefore, there is a great need to provide social and academic opportunities for the migrant students in order to promote intercultural competences. Considering the increasing scale of diversity that each country has globally, diversity can benefit people on an individual and societal level. Based on the Eurydice (Integrating Students from Migrant Backgrounds into Schools in Europe), students who are integrated into the educational and social system, have greater opportunity to reach their full potential [2]. Through diversity individuals can widen their perspective via gaining more experiences and grow acceptance of unfamiliar cultures, whereas on a societal level, diversity can enrich cultures. However, to reach the ultimate goal which is for every individual from one culture to be able and willing to adopt practices from the other culture without diminishing their own (i.e., cultural integration), everyone has to value diversity. Both cultures need to learn something from each other and offer something different to the other culture.

Furthermore, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) Joint Working Group, on the integration of migrants (2017) claimed that one of the biggest challenges is to successfully support the completion and give access to education and training for learners [3]. One of the tools to target the specific challenge is to tailor peer-learning activities (e.g., a mentoring program) where it allows learners to integrate into the academic and cultural environment and at the same time it allows the trainers, who have the knowledge and experience to navigate into the abovementioned environments, to understand the specific needs of the learners and provide them with some answers.

What is more, providing guidance and support to newly arrived migrants from their peers, who are already adapted to the educational and cultural system of the hosting country, allows students to create a positive relationship with other students where they feel comfortable to express their needs [4]. Both parties from the pairs (i.e., the mentor and the mentee) can benefit from any scholar mentoring program since the mentors can enhance their cultural awareness and increase their self-esteem. Mentors have the opportunity to share and listen to different narratives [5]. On the other hand, mentees have the opportunity to safely practice their social skills in the new cultural context and practically find answers to their questions [6]; where they would not do with an authority figure (e.g., their teacher).

From a psychological perspective, group identity begins to develop in childhood and more specifically, ethnic identity continues to develop until adulthood [7]. According to Jean Phinney's Ethnic Identity Theory, the first stage is the unexamined ethnic identity, where children observe and decide which attitudes to assimilate [8]. Different factors influence their decision, where one of them is the peer interaction. By providing peer interaction to students from different cultural backgrounds, students have the opportunity to explore their cultural identity gradually and move on towards their identity achievement. Therefore, mentoring is an effective tool to kindle inclusion and provide a safe place for the mentors and mentees to learn from each other [9, 10].

Having in mind that Cyprus has one of the highest migrant populations in the EU, a mentoring program was developed using a culture-based educational methodology to address the needs of the students and promote multiculturalism to tackle the issue of integrating newly arrived migrant students into the educational and social system. Another four different European countries, namely Spain, Greece, Italy, and Austria, which have the highest proportions of foreign-born persons with low educational attainment, also implemented the mentoring program. However, each country adjusted its methodology to the needs and cultural norms of its country.

1.1. The Mentoring Program

The mentoring program which was developed for the means of the study was based on a culture-based educational methodology. Through the mentoring program, students were encouraged to interact at three different levels; with the self (e.g., self-reflection), the others (e.g., brainstorming), and the environment (e.g., using gamified platforms for learning). Each country selected four different secondary education schools from different regions. Each school involved two teachers, four mentor students (i.e., students who were integrated into the cultural system of the hosting country) and four mentee students in each school (i.e., students who arrived in the hosting country within the last three months). All students were grouped in pairs with a mentor-mentee and they had to meet at least twice a month, for 40 minutes, where the mentor would ask the mentee any questions related to the subjects of the school and any other questions related to culture. Teachers gave feedback and examples, adjusted to the age of the students and to the language level, to be integrated into the current educational system in Cyprus. All teachers and mentors underwent a workshop, where they were instructed on how to approach their mentees.

Table 1. Examples of some suggested activities

Number of week	Topic of the Activity	Suggested Activity
One	Myself	Discuss with your mentee about yourself
Two	The person I admire	Go to the museum and discuss who was your favourite person in history
Three	My family	Draw your family tree and then describe your family members
Four	A happy moment	Watch a movie together and discuss what was your favourite moment

2. METHODOLOGY

In the framework of the FEINAMC (Foster Educational Inclusion of Newly Arrived Migrants) project, we developed a mentoring program for the secondary education schools between the newly arrived migrant students and students who have been well integrated into the educational and cultural system of Cyprus.

For the purpose of the study, the research team (which consisted of senior and junior researchers and a Chief Education Officer Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth in Cyprus) selected four different secondary education schools from four different regions in Cyprus (i.e., Nicosia, Larnaca, Famagusta, and Limassol). The principal of each school assigned two teachers, four mentor students (i.e., students who were integrated into the cultural system of the hosting country) and four mentee students in each school (i.e., students who arrived in the hosting country within the last three months). The selection of the mentors and mentees were conducted with the help of the researchers. The

selection guidelines were based on the availability of the students, their willingness to learn, teach and commit to the study. All students were grouped in pairs (i.e., mentor-mentee) and they had to meet at least twice a month, for 40 minutes.

All the teachers and mentors had workshops done by the researchers, prior to the beginning of the mentoring program. All the workshops were done online and in Greek. The workshop with the teachers was to explain their role and importance in how to support newly arrived migrant students. In the workshop teachers were taught about biases and how to be aware of them. Additionally, teachers were given alternative suggestions on how to guide students with different cultural backgrounds who find it challenging to adjust immediately to the pace of the educational and social school environment.

The research team facilitated a workshop for the mentors where they discussed about the mentor's role and how to approach their mentees. More specifically, the researchers prepared a suggested interaction-led curriculum which was based on an age-appropriate and culture-based educational methodology. The objectives of the curriculum were to raise awareness about multiculturalism in a meaningful, creative, and engaging way, and through the provision of space, voice, audience and influence, as advocated in Lundy's Model of Participation, to encourage critical thinking and reflection. All the activities had an interactive nature and were categorised into three different levels; with the self (e.g., self-reflection), the others (e.g., brainstorming), and the environment (e.g., using gamified platforms for learning). The mentors were instructed to complete a log of the activities they had with their mentees and record the dates.

this qualitative-based field research aimed to address the effectiveness of the mentoring programme and the usefulness of the prior-assessment tool to be disseminated to other secondary education schools in Cyprus

Then, the researchers gave a questionnaire to evaluate the tool in terms of appropriateness before giving the tool to the students. The tool was taken from and tested in the context of the CircleUp project. Afterwards, the students completed the tool and teachers evaluated the tool using the same questionnaire.

A qualitative method, consisting of focus groups and interviews, was adopted to examine the effectiveness of the mentoring program. Teachers and students were asked after the implementation of the mentoring program the following questions:

- What are the main educational and social gaps/needs of the newly arrived migrant students?

- Did those gaps and needs get satisfied after the implementation of the mentoring program? If yes, how?

- What aspects of the mentoring program worked better than others?

- Was the methodology of the suggested curriculum suitable for the mentoring program? If yes, how?

- What challenges did the teachers and students (both the mentors and the mentees) face during the implementation of the mentoring program?

- What additional cultural best practices may support enhancing the education and awareness of the host culture so that newly arrived migrant students can integrate into the other culture, have respect for others?

Data was analysed by thematic analysis, where the research team was able to map and evaluate the effectiveness of the mentoring program.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Participants' views

3.1.1 Teachers' view on the effectiveness of the mentoring program

Based on the teachers' responses, the level effectiveness of the mentoring program in order to help the newly arrived migrant students integrate into the school environment was high. The effectiveness was measured by the extent to which the mentoring program could bridge the gap between the social

and academic needs of the newly arrived migrant students and the confidence in understanding the academic system, ability and willingness to adopt practices from the other culture without diminishing their potential own. Three teachers reported, "The focus for newly arrived migrant students is primarily on language. They have 14 academic periods where they learn Greek. As a result, their schedule becomes too busy and they don't have time for focusing on the social and cultural norms of the school." Quoting T5: "Neither Cypriot students nor newly arrived migrant students are prepared on how to respond to diversity and they do not know what to expect. Therefore, students don't know where and what to ask, as a result we don't know their actual needs. Everyone comes with different skills and knowledge. I believe that the relationship that the mentor and mentee build helps to create a safe space for them to speak." All teachers agreed that the mentoring program was effective to all students, mentors and mentees, but to different extent. T1 explained that mentees who were matched with the same nationality as their mentor were the most benefited; hence the level effectiveness of the mentoring program was higher for those students. Overall, all the teachers agreed that the newly arrived students decreased the number of questions and were able to navigate themselves socially by approaching other students at school.

3.1.2   Students' view on the effectiveness of the mentoring program

Similarly, all students (i.e., mentors and mentees) agreed that the mentoring program was "enjoyable" and all students had the opportunity to meet others. All students added that the structure of the mentoring program was very convenient because they had specific time allocated for program and whenever they had any questions, there was at least one teacher who was available to help them. More specifically, a mentor (M2) reported, "I had the opportunity to see how other students at my age are able to experience the school environment." Some mentors claimed that "There was some difficulty in communicating with my mentee because her native language is not the same as mine." Some mentees reported that "I felt that there was a safe space for me to ask questions and learn. I wouldn't be judged and my mentor was willing to help. Even when I didn't have any questions he would ask me how my day was and talk about Palestine. I liked that I had the opportunity to participate in this program, even though it added more of what I had to do."

3.2   The implementation of the mentoring program in school

3.2.1   Teachers

Most teachers believe that the methodology of the program was "spot on" because "based on the students' comments, it didn't feel like a homework assignment, it came out naturally." T6 claimed that one of the advantages of the methodology was that it was "flexible." She added that "once you get the gist of the methodology you can adjust it to what is needed and with the time provided." Another teacher added that "unfortunately, we couldn't do all the activities which were suggested, mainly due to lack of time."

3.2.2   Students

All of the students commented that they liked the activities which were introduced to them and the fact that they had the freedom and space to suggest other activities. A mentor claimed that "I wanted to suggest interesting activities and topics for discussion." Most students, mentors and mentees, agreed that they liked the group activities, but they did not have many of them. Most of the activities included the mentor and the mentee.

Πρόγραμμα διαδράσεων/ Πρόγραμμα Εβδομαδιαίων Διαδραστικών Δραστηριοτήτων

Εβδ. Διαδ. Δραστηρ.	Θέμα	Δραστηριότητα
1η εβδομάδα	Ο εαυτός μου	Είμαι η/ο _____ και είμαι από _____. Είμαι ____ χρ. και πηγαίνω στην ___τάξη.
2η εβδομάδα	Αυτά που αγαπώ/ Αυτά που με ευχαριστούν/ Αυτά που μου αρέσουν/ Τα χόμπι μου	Το αγαπημένο που παιχνίδι είναι …../ Το αγαπημένο μου φαγητό/ φρούτο/ γλυκό είναι …./ Η αγαπ... Αγαπώ/ Μου αρέσει/ Περνώ όμορφα όταν/
3η εβδομάδα	Τα όνειρά μου	Ονειρεύομαι να γίνω/ να πάω/ να κάνω… Σε 5/ 10/ 15 χρόνια θα ήθελα να…
4η εβδομάδα	Η οικογένειά μου	Φέρνω μια φωτογραφία της οικογένειάς μου και μιλάω για/ παρουσιάζω τα μέλη της.
5η εβδομάδα	Το αγαπημένο μου παιχνίδι	Φέρνω το αγαπημένο μου παιχνίδι και μιλάω για αυτό. Αν θέλουμε και οι δυο παίζουμε μαζί.
6η εβδομάδα	Αγαπημένο τραγούδι/ τραγουδιστής	Μοιράζομαι το αγαπημένο μου τραγούδι και το ακούμε μαζί.
7η εβδομάδα	Αγαπημένη ταινία	Μοιράζομαι την αγαπημένη μου ταινία και προγραμματίζουμε μια συνάντηση για να την παρακολο... την τάξη).
8η εβδομάδα	Αγαπημένο μέρος	Φέρνω φωτογραφίες μου από το αγαπημένο μου μέρος και μιλάω για αυτό/ Μοιραζόμαστε ένα βίν... αγαπημένο μου μέρος και μιλάω για αυτό.
9η εβδομάδα	Αυτός/ αυτή που θαυμάζω	Παρουσιάζω ένα άτομο που θαυμάζω και αναφέρω γιατί το θαυμάζω.
10η εβδομάδα	Ένα όμορφο όνειρο	Διηγούμαι ένα όμορφο όνειρο και αναφέρομαι στο πώς με έκανε να νιώσω.
11η εβδομάδα	Μια φοβία που έχω	Κάνω αναφορά σε μια φοβία μου και όλα όσα με κάνει να νιώθω.
12η εβδομάδα	Μια ευτυχισμένη στιγμή	Μοιράζομαι μια ευτυχισμένη στιγμή και νιώθω ξανά όλα τα όμορφα συναισθήματα που μου προκα...
13η εβδομάδα	Οι επόμενές μας δραστηριότητες	Κάνουμε μαζί πλάνο για τις επόμενές μας εβδομαδιαίες δραστηριότητες.

Figure 1. Workshop with teachers, presenting the methodology of the mentoring program

3.3 Challenges and Limitations

3.3.1 Teachers

Most teachers reported in the focus group that "the main challenge was the lack of time and the selection process." Quoting T4: "We didn't have the luxury of time to give all of the attention to the students and have more time to explain the activities" Another teacher added that "because we didn't have clear guidance on how to select students, we selected mentors and mentees from the pool of students that we taught. Also, we didn't want to be unjust to anyone, which took more time to discuss with other teachers." Lastly, T3 commented that "for the mentees whose native language was unknown to all of us, it was difficult to match them with any of the mentors."

3.3.2 Students

Similarly, all the students commented that they wanted more time in order to achieve other activities. Additionally, a mentee reported that "I wanted to know more about the curriculum and what was planned because sometimes I felt lost and I didn't know what to ask and what to do."

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Recommendations

Based on data received and analysed for the purposes of the study, the following recommendations can be made:

- The mentoring program should be more tailored to the school schedule. Teachers explained the mentoring program would be more effective if the activities were related to the school subjects. Teachers commented that migrants coming to Cyprus with a different ethnic

background find great difficulty in history classes. Therefore, activities which are related to the history of Cyprus would be more helpful and effective.

- More time should be given to activities. A possible solution given to this is to select mentors and teachers who are also available to stay after school or communicate online via social networks. However, teachers added that someone should monitor closely their activities because students may transgress confidentiality and liability.

4.2 Lessons Learned

The present study evaluates the effectiveness of the mentoring program for the integration of newly arrived migrants into the school environment in Cyprus. Based on the literature review, one of the most effective tools to promote social inclusion and help students to integrate into the school environment is by developing a mentoring program. As mentioned above, teachers and mentor students had the opportunity to undergo different workshops which guided them on how to support the newly arrived migrants.

Based on the teachers' and students' focus group discussions, an element which helped in the effectiveness of the mentoring program was the relationship built between the mentors and the mentees, since it created a safe environment to collaborate and express any concerns. Other elements which helped was the adaptability of the culture-based methodology which was tailored to the needs of each mentor-mentee pair. Regarding the prior-assessment tool, it mostly measures prior knowledge of the students, hence it lacks measuring the skills of the students.

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