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Educators' Perspectives on Translanguaging and Trauma in Refugee Education: Insights from Multiple Contexts in Greece

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Abstract

Since 2016, Greece has functioned as both a transit and host country for refugees from Asia and Africa, generating a wide range of educational responses across formal, semi-formal, and informal contexts. Within these settings, translanguaging has emerged as a central pedagogical and psychosocial practice that mediates learning, inclusion, and identity reconstruction. This study investigates how educators working in diverse educational contexts describe the institutional and classroom conditions shaping refugee children's learning, how they perceive and address the impact of trauma and displacement on students' participation, and how they understand and employ translanguaging as a tool for communication and empowerment. Drawing on three interviews with teachers engaged in refugee education in Greece, the analysis reveals that translanguaging operates both as a strategy for comprehension and as a relational practice that fosters safety, belonging, and agency. The findings further indicate that teachers' epistemological stances and institutional constraints influence the extent to which translanguaging can be integrated into classroom practice. By situating educators' narratives within frameworks of trauma-informed and multilingual pedagogy, the study highlights translanguaging as a humanizing and agentive response to the educational and emotional realities of refugee children in Greece.

Keywords:

Translanguaging; Refugee Education; Trauma-Informed Pedagogy; Teacher Agency; Multilingualism; Greece

Introduction

Refugee and migrant children in Greece

Although Greece is officially monolingual, with Greek as its national language, it is, in practice, a multilingual country shaped by immigration and broader social dynamics (Aravossitas et al., 2020; Kourtis-Kazoullis et al., 2019; Kourtis-Kazoullis et al., 2018). Over the past decade, Greece has served as a major entry point into Europe for refugees and migrants—particularly from Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, and Palestine—whose displacement is driven by war,

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persecution, hunger, and systemic violence (Greek Council for Refugees, 2025; Stathopoulou et al., 2025; Gouvias et al., 2025).

Since 2015, more than one million refugees and migrants have arrived in Greece, with children constituting a substantial proportion of these arrivals (Gogonas & Gatsi, 2021). According to UNHCR and UNICEF reports, in 2024 alone, more than 41,000 children entered Southern European states, including Greece, with national statistics showing over 6,400 child arrivals in Greece—over four times the figure for the same period in 2023 (UNICEF, 2024; UNHCR, 2024). Of particular concern are the more than 4,000 unaccompanied and separated minors, who remain at heightened risk of abuse and exploitation (Gouvias et al., 2025; Skourtou et al., 2021).

While access to safety and basic living conditions is an immediate priority, education plays a vital role in creating stability in refugee children's lives and in enabling them to regain a sense of childhood, beyond their status as statistics (Gouvias et al., 2025; Skourtou et al., 2021). Research in the Greek context highlights both the potential and the challenges of providing education under such conditions, with particular attention to the importance of inclusive pedagogies (Cummins, 2021, 2000) and trauma-informed practices (Lê, 2023; Koliandri & Datsogianni, 2025).

Since 2016, a range of initiatives aimed at establishing safe and inclusive educational environments for refugee children have been implemented in Greece. These include formal structures such as the Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFRE) and integration classes within public schools coordinated by the Ministry of Education, often co-funded by the European Union, as well as informal initiatives organized by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Teachers are central to these initiatives as they mediate between institutional policies and the lived realities of refugee students, between the mainstream and the communities (Skourtou, 2014). Recognizing their pivotal role, this paper examines three interviews with teachers engaged in the formal and informal education of refugee children within diverse literacy contexts.

Recent scholarship emphasizes the importance of situating refugee education within broader frameworks of translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014), trauma-informed pedagogy (Lê, 2023), and inclusive learning environments (Cummins, 2021, 2000). Translanguaging has been shown to foster participation and identity affirmation (Cummins & Early, 2011; García & Wei, 2014), while research on trauma-informed practices highlights their potential to build resilience and school belonging among refugee children (Lê, 2023; Koliandri & Datsogianni, 2025). Studies in Greece reveal the constraints and opportunities of current practices, stressing the centrality of teachers in shaping equitable educational responses (Stathopoulou et al., 2025; Martínez-Medina & Chania, 2024; Samsari, Palaiologou, & Nikolaou, 2024). Research has demonstrated that contextual factors, including learning objectives and students' linguistic backgrounds, influence the scope and nature of translanguaging practices (Tian, 2022a, 2022b). Together, these insights provide the theoretical and empirical foundation for examining how translanguaging operates in refugee education in Greece.

What this research is about and where do we stand in it

Having worked for years in language education with minoritized students and communities in Greece (e.g., Skourtou, 2008, 2014), we regard our involvement in the language education of refugee children as a pressing necessity. Our university students, enrolled in education departments, who will become teachers, are expected to develop the capacity to teach in super-diverse educational environments (e.g., mainstream day classes, support classes, and informal education settings). They must be prepared to support children in accessing school literacy and comprehending new input (Cummins, 2001), as well as to respect and build upon the prior knowledge that children bring to school, thereby facilitating connections between existing and new learning (see Hornberger, 2003, for the continua of biliteracy).

Refugee children and unaccompanied minors represent the most recent to an educational landscape that is already linguistically and culturally diverse. Migrants, repatriated individuals from the Greek diaspora, minoritized local communities, and culturally mixed families have all contributed to shaping this multifaceted and fluid cultural, social, and educational environment. Responding to this reality, Greek scholars have conducted quantitative and qualitative research to describe and analyse diverse aspects of multilingual and refugee education in Greece, and to suggest and apply educational implementations (Gogonas & Gatsi, 2021; Chatzidaki & Tsokalidou, 2020; Tsokalidou & Skourtou, 2020). Issues such as bilingualism, second language learning, translanguaging, literacy and teaching practices, giving voice to children and minors, and understanding teachers' epistemological stances have been — and continue to be — central to this process. In the case of refugee children, the accumulated scholarship on the above issues provided the foundation for expanded and alternative approaches. We consider translanguaging a novel approach within refugee education in Greece, applied either as an extension of existing pedagogical frameworks or as an alternative to them. It should be noted that, in addition to the work of individual researchers and research teams

in Greece who have focused on refugee language education, there has also been a broad institutional response. This is reflected in the inclusion of relevant content within undergraduate and graduate curricula and programs. For example, the Master's Program Language Learning for Refugees and Migrants (LRM) at the Hellenic Open University focuses extensively on bilingualism, translanguaging, second language teaching and learning, and teachers' epistemological stances (see, e.g., Kitsiou, 2019).

Our main aim is to explore how educators perceive the languaging practices of their refugee students across different educational chronotopes (Blommaert, 2015; Blommaert & De Fina, 2017) and whether they incorporate translanguaging into their communication and teaching routines. We understand translanguaging, following García and Wei (2014), as the liberating, barrier-crossing linguistic practice through which children and adolescents strive to make sense of themselves, to make themselves understood, and to develop a sense of agency. At the same time, we view translanguaging in relation to translation practices (Baynham & Lee, 2019; Creese et al., 2018), as well as to students' awareness of the named languages that play a crucial role in their survival and safety. In this sense, we do not draw a rigid distinction between translation and translanguaging (García et al., 2019). For the students in our research, translation does not function as a means of separating languages; rather, it ensures that they can be properly understood—particularly by the authorities who make decisions about the students' futures.

We hypothesize that, even within a monolingually oriented mainstream education system such as that of Greece, teachers retain both the space and the agency to recognize and validate translanguaging practices in their classrooms. We base this hypothesis on the concept of the nested pedagogies (Cummins, 2021, 2019; Skourtou, et al., 2006) that allows us to see educational settings not as oppositional concepts but as nested into the other with the possibility of extension of their limits. Specifically, nested pedagogies refer to a model in which different pedagogical orientations are layered within one another rather than treated as separate or competing approaches (Cummins, 2021; Skourtou, et. al. 2006). In this framework, transmission, social constructivist, and transformative pedagogies are viewed as interconnected levels of teaching and learning practice (Cummins, 2021; Skourtou, et. al. 2006). Transmission-oriented pedagogy forms the inner layer and focuses on the direct teaching of curriculum content and skills. This approach emphasizes structured guidance, clear objectives, and explicit instruction, which remain important for effective learning in many contexts. Social constructivist pedagogy occupies the middle layer; it builds on transmission approaches by incorporating collaborative knowledge construction, experiential learning, and the development of higher-order thinking through interaction between teachers and students (Cummins, 2001). Transformative pedagogy forms the outer layer and extends social constructivist principles toward the development of critical literacy. Its purpose is not only to support students construct knowledge, but also to enable them to analyse social discourses and to consider actions that can influence social realities (Cummins, 2001). The concept of nesting highlights that traditional methods are not rejected but integrated within broader, more critical and socially responsive approaches. Structured instruction can coexist with collaborative inquiry, and social constructivist practices can create the conditions for transformative learning. In this way, nested pedagogies provide a flexible and inclusive framework that supports multiple dimensions of learning rather than privileging a single pedagogical orientation (Cummins, 2021; Skourtou, et. al. 2006).

In this sense, even a conservative educational system can be opened or expanded toward a more progressive model, which, in turn, may evolve into a transformative one. The pedagogical orientation of an educational system potentially extends its educational limits, transforming both students' and teachers' potentials. In this sense, the different chronotopes (Blommaert & De Fina, 2017) in which the interviews took place create a continuum. The notion of chronotope allows us to gain a clearer idea of the actual social constrains and the fluidity in the different contexts in which students and educators find themselves. Informal education may constitute an overall context, but each educational facility constitutes a unique and fluid chronotope. Students often move from an informal chronotope to a more formal one (e.g., to a reception class). Though distinct in their features, the chronotopes function as a continuum in students' lives. Similar for the teachers: in-service teachers may have taught both in reception classes and in informal educational centers. Their epistemological stances are therefore continually shaped by their educational experiences across diverse chronotopes (Kitsiou & Karantzola, 2022). In summary, our theoretical framework builds pedagogically on the notion of nested pedagogies (Skourtou et al., 2006) and situates the language education of refugee children in Greece within an inclusive paradigm that views bilingualism and translanguaging as complementary and mutually reinforcing dimensions of learning (Skourtou, 2024).

As authors—privileged, mainstream, white academics—our long-term engagement with migrant students, students from minoritized local communities, and refugee children and adults compels us to continuously reflect on our own positionalities within this context (Golash-Boza, 2016). Operating from within the mainstream, while conducting research

in minoritized communities and designing materials and tasks for teaching Greek as a foreign or second language, may inadvertently lead one to act through a raciolinguistic lens—that is, to adopt a neocolonial stance as a "white listening subject" (Flores & Rosa, 2015) without conscious awareness. Ethical considerations, critical awareness of social and racial power relations, and the positionalities of both researchers and participating teachers must therefore be made explicit. Seltzer and de los Ríos (2018, p. 49) refer to the concept of "teachers' raciolinguistic literacies," which can enable educators to better understand their students' languaging practices, recognize their own epistemological stances, and design classroom learning experiences in more humanizing and equitable ways.

Building on this theoretical and ethical ground, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do educators working in different educational settings in Greece (formal, semi-formal, and informal) describe the classroom and institutional conditions in which refugee children learn?

2. How do educators perceive and respond to the effects of trauma, displacement, and conflict on refugee children's participation and learning?

3. How do educators understand and implement translanguaging within their teaching practices, and in what ways do they view it as contributing to inclusion, communication, and identity formation?

Language support for refugee students in Greece

As we have already mentioned, in Greece, language support for refugee children is provided through both formal and informal educational frameworks (Chatzidaki and Tsokalidou, 2020). As regards formal education, there are policies that define how refugee children should be educated. According to Article 21 of Law 4251/2014 (Government Gazette A' 80), underage third-country nationals residing in Greece are subject to compulsory education under the same conditions as Greek nationals. This provision applies to children eligible for international protection, minors originating from conflict-affected regions, third-country nationals with irregular residence status, as well as individuals who have submitted applications for international protection. Notably, access to formal education is granted even in cases where documentation is incomplete.

Furthermore, to provide education for children whose parents are third-country nationals, a specific educational structure was established: the Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFREs). These facilities operate as part of the formal education system, functioning within school units during the afternoon for four teaching hours. However, their status and pedagogical orientation have been subject to criticism. Although RFREs are located within mainstream schools, they are organized according to a segregation model, as they remain disconnected from mainstream classes and fail to promote inclusive educational policies (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2019).

The subjects taught within the Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFREs) include Greek Language, English, Mathematics, Physical Education, Culture and Activities, Information and Communication Technology, and Aesthetic Education (Music, Visual Arts, and Drama Education). In the case of preschool education, RFREs operate within accommodation centres as extensions of nearby kindergartens during morning hours. These structures are intended to provide refugee students with basic learning tools and to facilitate their smooth integration into the mainstream educational system. In recent years, however, an increasing number of children have bypassed RFREs and have been directly enrolled in mainstream schools. At first glance, this development appears to reflect a shift toward integration rather than segregation, suggesting that formal education is indeed the appropriate setting for refugee children to learn alongside their mainstream peers. As will be shown below, however, the degree of integration or segregation often depends on the teacher, and forms of separation may still emerge within the context of the mainstream classroom.

In areas where Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFREs) do not exist, children with a refugee background are enrolled in the age-appropriate grade in primary education or, in many cases, are placed in a lower grade while parallelly attending a Reception Class. Depending on the student's level of proficiency in the Greek language, as determined through diagnostic testing, students are placed either in a Reception Class within Educational Priority Zone 1 (EPZ 1) or Zone 2 (EPZ 2). Although RFREs do not incorporate trauma-informed practices (see, e.g., Boukhari, 2025), public schools are staffed with school psychologists who can provide relevant support. In contrast, informal educational programs may or may not integrate trauma-informed approaches, depending on the design and orientation of each specific program.

The informal education for refugee children refers to educational activities that occur outside the formal school system. These programs are designed to be flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the specific needs of displaced learners (UNESCO, 2012). The informal education typically encompasses a broad range of learning activities, including literacy and numeracy instruction, life skills education, psychosocial support, language acquisition, and vocational or technical

training (UNHCR, 2011). Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Greece play a vital role in addressing the educational needs of refugee and migrant children by offering language instruction within these informal educational frameworks.

The primary objectives are to support children's integration into formal education where feasible, promote psychosocial well-being, and enhance future livelihood prospects (INEE, 2024). The informal education may function as a complement to formal schooling or serve as an alternative when access to formal education is restricted due to legal, social, linguistic, or infrastructural barriers. However, informal education has been critiqued for often perceiving refugee children as a homogeneous group, consequently applying teaching methodologies that fail to address the diverse needs of these students (Kitsiou et al., 2021; Gogonas & Gatsi 2021).

Translanguaging in the Greek context

As can be expected, formal education settings are more rigidly structured compared to informal ones, which allow for greater flexibility. Nevertheless, even within formal settings, educators often create spaces to implement inclusive practices together with their students (see above, nested pedagogies).

Bilingualism and translanguaging approaches may be viewed either in an integrative and complementary way (Cummins, 2019, 2021) or in an antagonistic way (Flores & García, 2013, 2022), with the latter framing translanguaging as a replacement for bilingualism. Translanguaging is frequently framed as a shift of focus from named languages, which are considered to have been socially constructed by a colonial logic (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020), towards the dynamic, barriers transcending and therefore liberating languaging practices of speakers. In multilingual educational environments, an exclusive focus on the target language tends to exclude—or rather marginalize—the students' linguistic repertoires in their entirety. In this sense, opting for focusing on language is increasingly questioned, particularly in the case of refugee children who need to apply all resources available to them to develop essential communicative resources for survival and resilience (García & Wei, 2014).

A speaker-focused perspective—"doing languaging"—creates room for the active and synthetic use of the learner's full repertoire. It breaks down rigid boundaries between named languages and strengthens students' agency. Documented examples from classrooms with refugee children demonstrate how translanguaging can be pedagogically implemented to support learning (Gkaintartzi & Tsokalidou, 2018). In everyday life—within families, communities, play, and informal learning contexts—languaging and translanguaging naturally constitute core features of communication. In refugee settings in particular, translanguaging operates as a vital tool for survival, resilience, and identity affirmation (Kitsiou & Karantzola, 2022).

Educational settings, however, are not fully authentic communicative environments; rather, they simulate communication with the primary purpose of teaching a target language. Traditionally, education reflects broader societal structures, yet it often struggles to keep pace with rapid social change. Consequently, teachers frequently face a pedagogical dilemma: whether to prioritize exclusive use of the target language or to embrace translanguaging practices. Recent evidence from Greek classrooms indicates that translanguaging often emerges spontaneously and that teachers sometimes employ it as a scaffolding strategy to facilitate students' transition from their first languages to Greek (Stathopoulou et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the literature highlights significant intersections between translanguaging and trauma-informed pedagogy (Boukhari, 2025). Enabling children to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires can help mitigate feelings of exclusion and foster resilience under conditions of displacement. A recent review from Greece and Cyprus emphasizes both the guiding principles and the implementation gaps of trauma-informed education, offering practical as well as policy-oriented recommendations (Koliandri & Datsogianni, 2025). These insights underscore that translanguaging functions not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a powerful psychosocial resource within refugee education.

Methodology

To address the research questions outlined above, participants were selected through convenience and purposive sampling, and data were gathered via semi-structured interviews. Such interviews enable in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives while allowing flexibility to probe emerging issues (Creswell, 2013; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews were conducted online in Greek, audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim and then translated into English.

Data analysis followed Krippendorff's (2018) approach, integrating content and textual interpretation to generate valid inferences from qualitative data. The material was inductively coded to identify recurring themes related to educators' experiences with refugee students across three educational contexts—formal, semi-formal, and informal.

Ethical principles of confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation were maintained throughout. Identifying details were removed, and all data were securely stored. While the small sample

limits generalizability, the study prioritizes depth and contextual understanding, offering insight into how educators in Greece navigate multilingual and trauma-related dimensions of refugee education.

Results

Following the methodological procedures described above, this section presents the analysis of three semi-structured interviews with educators involved in the education of refugee children across different settings in Greece. The participants were: (1) a teacher who also served as director of a public primary school attended by refugee children likely residing in Greece temporarily; (2) a teacher working in a public institution exclusively for children with refugee backgrounds; and (3) a teacher-researcher affiliated with a non-governmental organization providing education for unaccompanied refugee minors. All three participants were women educators. These interviews were selected because each represents a distinct educational chronotope—formal, semi-formal, and informal—offering complementary perspectives on the complexities of refugee education. The data were analyzed thematically according to three core categories: (a) classroom and institutional context; (b) trauma and conflict; and (c) educators' perspectives on translanguaging as a pedagogical tool.

The first theme explores the classroom and institutional context in which each educator operated, focusing on the structural conditions, participant roles, and broader educational environments that shaped teaching and learning practices.

Classroom and Institutional Context

The classroom and institutional settings described by the three interviewees reflect distinct yet interconnected educational chronotopes within Greece's refugee education landscape. Each context illustrates how institutional structures, teacher roles, and local conditions shape both the learning experiences of refugee students and the pedagogical agency of educators.

Interview 1: A teacher /director in a public primary school with refugee children who were most likely living in Greece temporarily

> *"The school had many children from Palestine, Syria, and Iran. The NGO provided interpreters to communicate the educators with parents. Most of the children had attended school before, except the youngest ones."*

The public primary school was located on an island in Greece, in an urban location. This island received a substantial number of refugees through sea routes, but most of the refugees on the island were there on a temporary basis, as the island did not have a formal reception centre. This public school had 6 classes (grade 1 to grade 6) and approximately 95 students who lived in the school district. In each school year there were approximately 5 refugee children who remained at the school from 6 months to 1 year and then were moved to other parts of Greece or abroad, depending on the refugee status of their parents and on other circumstances. There were refugee children from Palestine, Syria, and Iran. Enrolment was facilitated through a non-governmental organization (NGO), which provided interpreters to support communication with families. In this public school, students were generally placed one year below their chronological age on the assumption that this would facilitate language learning. Most children had previous schooling experience except for the youngest newcomers in the first grade.

Interview 2: A teacher in a public institution, only for children who have a refugee background

> *"The majority of the children were Arabic speakers, but they spoke many other languages...."*

The second interviewee worked as a substitute teacher in a Reception Facility for Refugee Education (RFRE) located in northern Greece. The RFRE operated within a public primary school building but began functioning relatively late in the academic year. The class included 22 refugee students whose educational levels ranged from early primary to late secondary grades. All the students resided in a nearby refugee camp under police and military supervision.

Even after her teaching contract ended in June, the educator continued volunteering during the summer months, providing continuity and emotional support for the children. To avoid potential opposition from local parents, educational authorities sought to limit interaction between refugee and Greek students—a practice that the teacher described but did not fully contextualize. Consequently, RFRE classes were scheduled in the afternoons, after the mainstream school day had ended.

Initially, the teacher was employed solely to teach Greek, but additional subject teachers—responsible for mathematics, English, and physical education—were appointed much later. Meanwhile, university students from nearby education departments volunteered to organize music and theatre activities, enriching the children's learning experience. Despite its institutional limitations, the RFRE thus functioned as a semi-formal educational space that combined structured instruction with creative, community-based initiatives.

Interview 3: A teacher who was also conducting research in a non-governmental organization for

unaccompanied refugee children

> *"I worked in two NGO shelters with unaccompanied refugee children in Athens... Most children were Arabic speakers, while others spoke many different languages".*
>
> *"The interpreter within the facility held significant authority in mediating communication and managing multilingualism".*
>
> *"Institutional constraints categorized the children as Farsi, Urdu, or other language groups – placing linguistic labels"*

The third interviewee worked as a volunteer teacher and researcher in two NGO-run shelters for unaccompanied refugee minors in Athens over a period of six to eight months. Her work took place within informal educational settings designed to offer psychosocial support, safety, and access to learning for children outside the formal school system. The students were mainly from Palestine, Kuwait, Egypt, and Syria, with Arabic being the most commonly spoken language, alongside a variety of other linguistic repertoires.

A professional interpreter was permanently present in each shelter and played a pivotal role in mediating communication, managing linguistic diversity, and influencing how translanguaging occurred within the space. The interpreter's authority often extended beyond linguistic mediation, shaping interpersonal dynamics and the degree of participation in educational activities.

The educator emphasized the institutional challenges of working within an environment where children were categorized according to named languages such as Farsi or Urdu. These categorizations, while administratively convenient, often oversimplified the children's complex linguistic identities and experiences. The boundaries between languages, roles, and responsibilities were thus both institutional and relational, highlighting how linguistic and social hierarchies intersect within humanitarian education settings.

Taken together, these three contexts—formal, semi-formal, and informal—reveal how institutional structures and local conditions shape the educational experiences of refugee children and the pedagogical choices available to teachers. Across settings, educators navigated the tension between prescribed curricula and the realities of multilingual, transient student populations. Their practices often extended beyond institutional mandates, drawing on personal commitment and improvisation to meet learners' linguistic and emotional needs. These accounts also highlight how educational environments, even when framed as neutral spaces of instruction, are deeply embedded in broader social, political, and humanitarian dynamics that influence both teaching and learning.

Trauma and Conflict

The following excerpts illustrate how trauma and conflict are perceived, referenced, or indirectly expressed within educational contexts involving refugee children. Each interview offers a distinct perspective on how educators recognize—and sometimes overlook—the psychological and emotional effects of displacement in their students. From subtle symbolic gestures to explicit reflections on classroom challenges, these accounts shed light on the complex interplay between learning, memory, and emotional survival.

Interview 1: A teacher/director in a public primary school with refugee children who were most likely living in Greece temporarily

> *"Apart from the younger children, who tried to adapt to the school environment and were more manageable, the older children were initially very negative. Some of them told us that they were not at all interested in learning Greek, since they were planning to go to Germany. Instead, they wanted to learn English, because they believed that it would help them in their new homeland.*

The teachers found it very difficult to manage children with refugee experiences. In fact, many of them said that they had not been prepared to deal with such situations and had not received adequate training."

The excerpt above reflects the complex dynamics of language learning, adaptation, and teacher preparedness within refugee education. The older refugee students clearly prioritized their learning goals in accordance with their intention to leave Greece, viewing the acquisition of languages such as English as more beneficial for their anticipated relocation. Their perspectives were not merely expressions of resistance but rather realistic reflections of their personal aspirations and migration trajectories. This passage underscores the diverse attitudes toward language learning as well as the challenges faced by educators who reported limited preparation and insufficient institutional support in managing culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

The interviewee's account offers valuable insight into the pedagogical challenges of teaching refugee students, while also revealing certain limitations in perspective. Notably, the teacher did not refer to specific instances of trauma—perhaps due to a lack of awareness of events occurring in other classrooms, or because she had not encountered such incidents before. This absence of reference may also point to the limited visibility of students' traumatic experiences within everyday classroom life, where emotional

distress often remains concealed or unrecognized. Such omissions highlight the importance of teacher education that not only addresses linguistic and cultural adaptation but also equips educators with the sensitivity and skills to identify and respond to trauma among refugee learners.

Interview 2: A teacher in a public institution, only for children who have a refugee background

> *"I also saw mathematics as a language. Based on age they made groups. The younger children did calculations within the top five, the older ones [did] more difficult [ones]. Suddenly one child insisted on going to the blackboard to write something.*

He wrote in Kurdish something like the number 68. He started to make movements pretending that he was in a boat and finally wanted to inform the teacher that there were 68 people in the boat carrying them. I asked him about it afterwards and the boy confirmed it".

This account offers a poignant example of how trauma may emerge indirectly through symbolic expression and classroom activity. What began as a mathematics exercise unexpectedly became an act of remembrance and testimony. The child's decision to write the number "68" in Kurdish and his subsequent miming of being in a boat transformed a seemingly neutral academic task into a powerful recollection of collective suffering. The number itself became a signifier of a lived experience—a crowded boat, perilous conditions, and the enduring memory of survival.

The teacher's reflection reveals how moments of trauma can surface in educational contexts that are not explicitly designed to engage with emotional or psychological experiences. This incident demonstrates how learning activities can unintentionally trigger memories of distress while also offering opportunities for expression and meaning-making. The child's use of mathematics as a narrative medium underscores the complexity of trauma, which often resists verbal articulation yet finds expression through embodied and symbolic forms.

This episode highlights the importance of trauma-informed approaches within refugee education—approaches that enable teachers to recognize and respond to non-verbal manifestations of trauma with empathy, care, and pedagogical sensitivity. It also calls attention to the need for interdisciplinary teacher preparation that bridges cognitive, linguistic, and emotional dimensions of learning. In this context, mathematics was not only a subject but also a medium through which memory, identity, and emotional truth converged.

Interview 3: A teacher who was also conducting research in a non-governmental organization for unaccompanied refugee children

> *"Language use was connected to children's feelings of safety and identity."*

This observation captures the deep interconnection between language, emotion, and selfhood within the learning experiences of unaccompanied refugee minors. The educator explained that children's willingness to use Greek—or to engage in communication more broadly—depended on their sense of safety and trust within the learning environment. Many initially resisted speaking Greek, not out of linguistic limitation but as a form of self-protection, shaped by earlier encounters with authority during their arrival and registration processes. Silence, in this sense, became a defensive strategy—a means of maintaining agency in settings where personal control was often restricted.

The teacher also emphasized that the use of language was closely tied to the children's negotiation of power and belonging. Translanguaging emerged spontaneously when feelings of safety were established, often facilitated by the presence of interpreters or the educator's own efforts to connect linguistically with the students. Language thus served both as a bridge for communication and as a shield against vulnerability, reflecting the children's complex emotional landscapes and their strategies for navigating uncertainty.

> *"We tried to get him to participate, but he insisted on staying in bed. When we finally got him to come to the lesson, he drew a bed."*

This incident refers to a student who withdrew completely from classroom activities following the rejection of his family reunification application. The drawing of a bed functioned as a silent, symbolic expression of exhaustion, grief, and longing for safety—a powerful non-verbal manifestation of trauma. The teacher's response was compassionate, yet it also revealed the limits of pedagogical preparedness in addressing the psychological and emotional dimensions of displacement.

The account highlights the urgent need for trauma-informed pedagogies that recognize emotional expression and silence as integral components of learning. For unaccompanied refugee children, language learning extends beyond the acquisition of linguistic competence; it is embedded in processes of identity negotiation, trust-building, and recovery. In this sense, translanguaging is not merely a communicative strategy but a means of restoring agency and dignity in conditions of instability and loss.

Many children left the facilities abruptly and under life-threatening circumstances—some hiding beneath trucks in desperate attempts to reach other countries, such as Italy. Their lives were marked by constant risk, trauma, and displacement, making education a fragile and transient "safe haven," a brief interval of safety and normalcy amid persistent danger and uncertainty. The teacher described feelings of deep concern and helplessness as she witnessed these departures, recognizing that her role extended far beyond academic instruction. In such contexts, teaching became an act of care and moral responsibility, shaped by the tension between the fleeting stability of the classroom and the ongoing precarity of the children's lives.

The Educator's Views on Translanguaging as a Teaching Tool

The following section presents educators' reflections on translanguaging as a pedagogical practice within refugee education. Their accounts reveal multiple interpretations of how translanguaging is understood, enacted, and valued across different educational settings. These narratives highlight both the challenges and affordances of implementing multilingual approaches in environments marked by displacement, linguistic diversity, and emotional complexity. At the same time, they expose the spectrum of educators' orientations toward students' home languages—from restrictive to transformative—reflecting broader tensions within Greek educational policy, institutional frameworks, and prevailing language ideologies.

Interview 1: A teacher/director in a public primary school with refugee children who were most likely living in Greece temporarily

> *"Some teachers allowed children to speak their own languages, but others forbade it even outside the classroom. Most did not try to use the children's languages in teaching. Only the reception teacher, with the principal's support, engaged meaningfully with students' languages."*

The interviewee, who is also the director of the school, noted differences in attitudes towards students' home languages among the teaching staff. Some teachers permitted the use of home languages both inside and outside the classroom, whereas others strictly prohibited their use. Most educators did not actively explore or incorporate children's home languages into teaching practices. However, the reception class teacher and the school principal were exceptions, as they acknowledged and utilized the multilingual repertoires of the students. This indicates that even within the mainstream school, despite its restrictions, there are educators and administrators who attempt to move beyond their comfort zones, often in contexts where other members of the school staff lack understanding of the pedagogical potential of children's languages.

> *"Translanguaging was practically absent in the classroom, but children spoke multiple languages freely during breaks, which helped them get along. Teachers often missed opportunities to support this pedagogically."*

The interviewee claims that translanguaging was not widely recognized or implemented by most teachers. There was limited integration of students' diverse linguistic resources in instructional settings, and translanguaging was largely absent from pedagogical practices. However, in informal contexts, such as playground interactions, children naturally engaged in multilingual communication, freely shifting between languages in ways that fostered social integration and peer relationships. This spontaneous use of multiple languages stood in stark contrast to the restrictive language policies upheld by many teachers within the same school.

> *"Some teachers knew about bilingualism but did not connect language with identity or empowerment at school. Children used language naturally in play, showing natural plurilingual identities."*

Although some teachers had been exposed to concepts of bilingualism and second language learning through their university studies and training, a significant gap remained in their understanding of the benefits of translanguaging and the role of identity investment. Most educators did not explicitly connect language practices to processes of identity construction or empowerment within the school context. This conceptual gap limited their recognition of students' multilingual identities and of the pedagogical potential of translanguaging to foster belonging and agency. Nevertheless, in informal social interactions—such as play during recess—children communicated fluidly across languages, prioritizing understanding and connection over adherence to formal linguistic norms.

Interview 2: A teacher in a public institution, only for children who have a refugee background

> *"Translanguaging was my survival tool in the classroom".*
>
> *"In the Reception Classes the learning of Greek was more systematic". "School starts long before first grade and continues after school, to fit right into the context. There is a belief that school is only about knowledge and learning. If we ensure that children are also happy at school, then they will make progress".*

The teacher had heard of the term translanguaging in a training workshop she had attended, but claimed that up to that point she had no needed to use it, as most of her students with migrant or refugee backgrounds already knew Greek. When she began teaching in the RFRE, she realized that she could not

teach without translanguaging, as she had no other means of communication with students who did not know Greek, and she did not speak their languages. She described translanguaging as "a survival technique in the classroom," enabling both her and the students to communicate effectively and co-construct meaning across languages.

Because of translanguaging, she was able to facilitate communication and build a community of learning. Examples included bilingual songs adapted by students, student-led Arabic lessons during the summer, and collaborative discussions in which children analysed how to translate specific Greek words (such as "kaseri" cheese) into both Arabic and Kurdish. Puppet theatre, conducted by university volunteers, was another effective medium for translanguaging: children performed bilingual dialogues between puppets, moving freely between their home language and Greek. The teacher emphasized that translanguaging was not a formal method she applied "by the book," but rather an instinctive, flexible approach guided by her students' needs and the multilingual reality of the classroom.

> *"Many children with an immigrant or refugee background get lost in Greek classrooms"*

The teacher viewed bilingualism and translanguaging as essential elements in shaping student identity and inclusion. She stressed that students with refugee or migrant backgrounds often become "invisible" (Gkaintartzi et al., 2025) in regular classrooms and risk being lost in the system. Allowing students to use their own languages, she argued, meant recognizing their identities and affirming their cultural backgrounds. She highlighted the importance of making students feel happy, safe, and emotionally connected within the school environment—believing that emotional well-being was a prerequisite for learning and progress. She also noted that the flexibility of the RFRE setting, which did not impose a rigid curriculum, allowed for deeper relational work and more responsive teaching. In summary, she advocated for an educational model that embraces multilingualism, supports students' linguistic and emotional needs, and fosters inclusive identities.

Interview 3: A teacher who was also conducting research in a non-governmental organization for unaccompanied refugee children

> *"Translanguaging occurred spontaneously when children felt safe and would use Google Translate or switch languages".*

The third interviewee - who was also a researcher – was very familiar with the pedagogical benefits of translanguaging. She stated that translanguaging took place in various forms: informally, through tools such as Google Translate; strategically, to withhold or obscure meaning; and personally, as a right tied to self-expression and identity. One child with prior school experience exemplified effective translanguaging—he proudly spoke Arabic, English, and Greek and acted as an informal mediator among peers. His playful switching between languages was both communicative and performative. However, for many children, the learning of Greek occurred in fragmented ways, often detached from meaningful contexts. The activities, such as museum visits and theatre outings, functioned more as a space for "normalization" rather than deep learning.

> *"They preferred to speak their own language through the interpreter rather than in Greek, as it was more than communication — it was protection and resistance." "Language use was connected to children's feelings of safety and identity."*

The presence of the interpreter ensured that children were not obliged to speak Greek and could assert their linguistic rights. Children often insisted, "Without an interpreter, I will say nothing." This stance was respected and normalized within the learning space. The interpreter's role was decisive: depending on her relationship with the educator, she could either facilitate children's expression or abruptly end conversations. Once trust was established, the children began referring to the educator affectionately as "teacher nur" (light), signalling relational closeness. At that point, translanguaging practices emerged more clearly. The educator herself began learning Arabic, which further strengthened communication and engagement. Identity negotiation (Cummins, 2001) became a visible process as children questioned one another's linguistic and national affiliations.

> *"Experiences, languages [should be] child-centred, not school-centred ... moving from the language to the speaker. Everyone speaks to each other and language is at the centre. We cannot ignore it".*
>
> *"Language and identity negotiations were constant among the children".*

The interviewee emphasized that bilingualism and translanguaging are deeply intertwined with identity formation, power, and emotional well-being. Language was not just a tool for communication but a mode of self-representation, resistance, and negotiation. Rather than focusing on schooling, the educational focus was on the child—on their emotions, histories, and future hopes. Language awareness played a crucial role, particularly for children with prior educational experience, who leveraged their multilingualism to assert agency and identity. The educator described a broader pedagogical shift: from treating language as an object of instruction to recognizing it as a living, dynamic expression of the child's experience. She concluded that, in working with refugee children, she could not ignore trauma (Lê, 2023), insecurity, or the constant possibility of sudden

displacement. Every pedagogical act was, in her view, conditioned by the complexities of asylum processes, emotional crises, and institutional instability. Ultimately, she viewed translanguaging and multilingualism not merely as assets but as necessities for supporting refugee children's identities in contexts of dislocation and uncertainty.

Insights that emerge in the Three Interviews

Across the three interviews, a series of interrelated insights emerge concerning how educators understand and navigate the linguistic, emotional, and pedagogical dimensions of refugee education in Greece. Although each setting differed in structure and purpose, several common patterns can be identified.

First, teachers' awareness of multilingualism and translanguaging varied considerably, reflecting both institutional constraints and individual pedagogical dispositions. In the mainstream school, translanguaging was largely absent from classroom practice, constrained by monolingual policies and limited conceptual understanding among teachers. In contrast, in the RFRE and NGO contexts, translanguaging emerged as an adaptive and survival-driven practice, allowing communication and participation where shared linguistic codes were unavailable. These differences suggest that institutional flexibility and teacher autonomy strongly influence whether translanguaging is perceived as a pedagogical resource or as a deviation from established norms.

Second, the relationship between language and emotional safety surfaced as a key theme across all cases. Teachers observed that students' willingness to use Greek—or to engage in any form of learning—was closely tied to feelings of trust and belonging. In the NGO context in particular, children's linguistic choices were intertwined with protection, identity, and resistance. This reinforces the argument that language practices cannot be separated from the affective and social dimensions of refugee students' lives.

Third, the interviews point to persistent gaps in teacher preparation and institutional support. Even well-intentioned educators expressed uncertainty about how to respond to trauma or how to integrate students' home languages meaningfully into instruction. The lack of systematic training in both trauma-informed and multilingual pedagogies leaves teachers to rely on instinct and improvisation, often producing uneven outcomes.

Finally, translanguaging emerges as both a pedagogical and psychosocial practice. It enables communication and learning while simultaneously affirming identity, agency, and emotional resilience. When teachers acknowledged students' linguistic repertoires, they created conditions for inclusion and empowerment. Conversely, when these repertoires were ignored or suppressed, exclusion and disengagement often followed.

Taken together, these findings highlight the need for a more integrated framework of refugee education in Greece—one that combines trauma-informed approaches with multilingual pedagogies, recognizes teachers' agency, and promotes institutional structures that value linguistic diversity as a foundation for both learning and well-being.

Lastly, there are certain central points that emerge:

(a) Chronotopes / Context. The different chronotopes presented here—from formal to semi-formal to informal—by definition allow for varied uses of language(s) and languaging. However, even in strictly formal contexts, translanguaging appears to be at least tolerated, while in semi-formal contexts educators have the space to develop inclusive initiatives. We therefore consider these educational contexts not as rigidly separated but as expandable points along a continuum. In light of Blommaert's (2018) work, we view context and chronotope not as oppositional but as complementary interpretive tools. The general educational context, the RFRE context, and the NGO shelter contexts represent broader, relatively stable frameworks that accommodate diverse, specific, and fluid chronotopes. As our third interviewee observed, the interventions and decisions made within these chronotopes were conditional.

(b) Translation / The Interpreter. The students' demand for the presence of an interpreter—highlighted in the third interview but also evident in the second—along with their resistance to using Greek, functioned primarily as components of agency-building. In relation to language and languaging, this insistence shows that while engaging in translanguaging, students remain aware of the distinct named languages in their environment and of the power relations between them. Furthermore, they express preferences regarding how their language use should be mediated. Since translation has been discussed in relation to both named languages and translanguaging (García et al., 2019; Baynham & Lee, 2019), we suggest that in the context of refugee education—where certain languages are perceived as vital for survival—the gap between named languages and translanguaging should be reconsidered. Rather than viewing them as opposing poles, they should be understood as complementary practices. The key point here is that socially constructed named languages play a central role for individuals who are compelled to learn one for reasons of survival.

(c) Trauma. There were numerous references to trauma within the context of refugee education (see Interview 3). Trauma (Boukhari, 2025; Lê, 2023) is presented as both a personal and institutional experience. Traumatic experiences are lived and relived within host institutions that can either open spaces of resilience or, conversely, push individuals to their limits—as exemplified by the case of the boy who became depressed after receiving a negative response to his application for relocation. This may be further explored in relation to similar experiences among other displaced groups (see, for example, Lê, 2023, for the notion of transtrauma).

Conclusions and Implications

In summary, the three interviews illuminate how translanguaging operates simultaneously as a linguistic, emotional, and ethical practice within refugee education. Across the chronotopic continuum—from formal classrooms to NGO-run shelters—teachers negotiated their own agency within institutional constraints while responding to students' immediate communicative and affective needs. Translanguaging emerged not only as a pedagogical resource but also as a relational practice, mediating belonging, safety, and identity formation. These insights set the stage for the concluding discussion, which situates the findings within broader debates on teacher agency, trauma-informed practice, and the development of nested pedagogies (Cummins, 2019, 2021) that link policy, practice, and theory in inclusive refugee education.

We acknowledge that the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution regarding their generalizability. The three interviews conducted cannot be assumed to capture the full complexity of refugee education, nor can they be considered representative across different chronotopes and contexts. Nevertheless, they provided valuable insights into the educational routines of teachers working in diverse refugee education settings, ranging from formal to semi-formal to informal environments.

Our engagement in this research encouraged critical reflection on both theoretical and practical dimensions of refugee education, exposing enduring gaps within translanguaging theory—particularly the tension between "languages" and "languaging." At the same time, it deepened our understanding of the complementarity between context and chronotope, the potential for teacher empowerment, and the significance of safe—albeit fluid—spaces for identity negotiation and agency building.

This study highlights how translanguaging manifests across different educational settings in Greece, specifically in contexts involving refugee children. Although each educator engaged with translanguaging differently—shaped by their role, institutional framework, specific chronotope, and familiarity with the theory—all shared a common goal: to support multilingual students in navigating complex linguistic, emotional, and institutional terrains. The findings underscore that translanguaging is not only a pedagogical strategy but also a response to students' lived realities, acting as a vehicle for inclusion, communication, and identity formation.

Official educational policy in Greece is defined through laws and ministerial circulars, including those that regulate education within Reception Facilities for Refugee Education (RFREs). However, teachers often go beyond these frameworks, implementing their own strategies based on the needs and lived experiences of the children they teach. These teacher-led practices frequently reflect child-centred approaches that adapt to the linguistic and emotional realities of refugee students.

Moreover, Greek educators rarely encounter translanguaging theory directly, as it is neither integrated into the national curriculum nor included in professional development programs. This absence in official educational policy helps explain why many teachers rely on intuition rather than theoretical grounding. As demonstrated in this study, while some educators make instinctive efforts to incorporate multilingual practices, they often do so without structured training or institutional support.

These findings suggest the need to re-examine the gap between official policy and classroom practice. Rather than viewing teachers' intuitive strategies as informal or marginal, they should be recognized and supported as legitimate and context-responsive pedagogical practices. If educational environments are to become truly inclusive, policies must evolve to equip educators with the theoretical tools and institutional backing necessary to engage meaningfully with translanguaging. Such a shift would affirm multilingualism not as a challenge to overcome but as a rich resource for learning, identity formation, and resilience.

In line with Cummins's (2019, 2021) call for integrative and nested pedagogies that bridge bilingual and translanguaging approaches, and with García and Wei's (2014) conception of translanguaging as a liberating and agentive practice, our findings reaffirm the need for pedagogies that recognize the full linguistic repertoires of refugee learners. Ultimately, translanguaging in refugee education should be understood not only as a bridge between languages but as an ethical and humanizing response to displacement—one that fosters learning, belonging, and resilience.

Future research should explore how teacher education programs can integrate trauma-informed

and translanguaging-based approaches, enabling educators to respond more effectively to the linguistic and emotional needs of refugee and migrant students across diverse educational contexts.

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