

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND COMMUNITY IN THE SCHOOL INCLUSION OF STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS

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Abstract: This paper explores how family and community factors influence the school inclusion of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Greece, focusing on mechanisms that strengthen participation, belonging, and educational continuity through home–school–community collaboration.

Methodology: A narrative review approach was employed. Peer-reviewed studies and policy-oriented reports on intercultural education, migrant and refugee schooling, minority inclusion, parental engagement, and school–community partnerships in the Greek educational system were purposively identified and synthesized. The analysis followed a thematic synthesis logic, grouping evidence around communication practices, institutional mediation, community support structures, and barriers to engagement.

Results: The reviewed literature converges on three core findings. First, inclusion is facilitated when schools build consistent, trust-based communication with families and reduce language barriers through interpretation and cultural mediation. Second, community organizations and local networks frequently function as “bridges,” offering informational support, translation, counseling, and practical assistance that indirectly improves attendance, motivation, and school engagement. Third, exclusion risks increase where engagement is framed through deficit assumptions about families, where bureaucratic procedures remain inaccessible, and where socioeconomic precarity, unstable housing, or irregular work schedules constrain parents’ capacity to participate in school-defined activities.

Conclusions: Family and community engagement operates as a central inclusion mechanism rather than a supplementary practice. The evidence suggests that effective inclusion depends on institutional capacity—school leadership, teacher preparedness, and structured partnership practices—alongside external support ecosystems that connect families to schools.

Recommendations: Schools should institutionalize culturally responsive communication routines, provide stable interpretation and mediation services, and train staff to recognize and counter deficit-based assumptions. Participation opportunities should be flexible (multiple formats and times) and co-designed with families. Policy-level support is needed to fund school–community liaison roles and to formalize partnerships with municipalities and civil society organizations.

Keywords: intercultural education, school inclusion, family–school partnership, community engagement, minority and migrant students, Greece

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic diversity has become a stable feature of Greek classrooms, reshaping how schools define equity, participation, and educational success. In this context, *school inclusion* extends beyond formal access and enrolment to include students’ meaningful participation in learning, their sense of belonging, and their ability to progress without being positioned as “outsiders.” Intercultural education in Greece is officially framed as a response to pluralism and migration, yet research repeatedly indicates a gap between policy language and the lived reality of schooling, where practices often remain oriented toward linguistic and cultural assimilation rather than reciprocal adaptation (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). This persistent tension makes the role of families and communities analytically central: inclusion is not produced by schools alone but is co-constructed through relationships, resources, and trust across the home–school–community ecology.

The Greek intercultural education agenda emerged alongside demographic change and the growing visibility of migrant and minority students. However, scholarship on the Greek case emphasizes that intercultural education has often been implemented unevenly and, in practice, tends to prioritize integration into a dominant linguistic and cultural norm, with limited institutional support for bilingualism or systematic engagement with students’ home cultures (Paleologou, 2004). Under these conditions, inclusion depends heavily on whether schools are able to develop communicative bridges with families and whether community networks can compensate for institutional constraints. Family engagement is thus not simply an individual “parental attitude” variable; it is shaped by structural factors such as language accessibility, familiarity with educational procedures, socioeconomic precarity, and prior experiences with public institutions.

Evidence from Greek multicultural school settings suggests that home–school communication is frequently impeded by cultural and linguistic diversity, stereotypes, and practical barriers that limit sustained interaction, producing

forms of passive or constrained parental involvement (Pliogou & Tromara, 2024). Importantly, these barriers are not evenly distributed. For historically marginalized groups such as Roma communities, qualitative evidence illustrates how parents may value education and aspire to mobility for their children, while simultaneously experiencing limited resources and constrained opportunities to support schooling on institutional terms (Strataki & Petrogiannis, 2021).

Against this background, the problem addressed in the present study is the uneven and fragile nature of inclusion for students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Greek schools, viewed specifically through the lens of family and community engagement. The objective is to clarify the mechanisms through which families and communities enable or constrain inclusion processes, particularly participation, belonging, and continuity, and to identify the school-level and local conditions that make partnerships functional rather than symbolic. By foregrounding family-school relations and community “bridging” capacity, this paper contributes a focused account of inclusion as a relational and context-dependent outcome within the Greek educational system.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study follows a narrative review design intended to synthesize and interpret research evidence on how family and community factors shape the school inclusion of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in the Greek educational system. The materials for the review consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly book chapters addressing intercultural education, minority and migrant schooling, parental engagement, school-community partnerships, and inclusion/exclusion processes in Greece. To ensure conceptual coherence, the review prioritized sources that: (a) investigated the Greek context empirically (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods), or (b) offered theoretically grounded analyses explicitly linked to Greek schooling and intercultural education. Key conceptual anchors included school inclusion (participation, belonging, continuity), family-school relationships (communication, trust, involvement), and community support (formal services, civil society organisations, local networks). A structured search was conducted across major education and social science databases (e.g., ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science) and supplemented with targeted searches in Google Scholar to capture Greece-focused publications that may not be consistently indexed. Boolean operators were used to connect clusters (e.g., “Greece” AND “intercultural education” AND (“parental involvement” OR “community engagement”)). Reference lists of highly relevant papers were also manually screened (backward searching) to identify additional eligible studies. Inclusion criteria were: (a) publication in a peer-reviewed outlet; (b) explicit relevance to Greek primary or secondary education; (c) substantive focus on family factors, community factors, or their interaction with school inclusion; and (d) publication in English or Greek. Studies were excluded if they: (a) did not address schooling outcomes or inclusion-related processes; (b) focused exclusively on higher education; or (c) were purely descriptive without analytical engagement with inclusion, family-school relations, or community mediation. After removing duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, followed by full-text assessment of potentially eligible items. When multiple publications reported overlapping data, the most analytically complete version was retained. For each included study, the following information was extracted into an evidence matrix: author/year, study design, sample/setting, focal student group(s), operationalisation of inclusion, family/community variables examined, key findings, and stated implications. The narrative synthesis proceeded through thematic coding and iterative categorisation. Evidence was clustered into recurring themes such as: (a) communication, trust, and institutional accessibility; (b) language mediation and cultural brokerage; (c) socioeconomic constraints on engagement; (d) community organisations as bridging infrastructures; and (e) school leadership and partnership governance. Divergent findings were preserved and interpreted in relation to differences in populations (e.g., newly arrived migrants/refugees vs. long-standing minority communities), educational level, and local context. Because narrative reviews typically integrate heterogeneous evidence, methodological quality was appraised at the level of interpretive weight rather than by excluding studies solely on design. Greater evidential weight was assigned to studies with clear sampling logic, transparent analytic procedures, and explicit linkage between data and claims. This approach supports balanced conclusions while retaining the breadth necessary to capture the complexity of family-community-school dynamics in Greece.

3. RESULTS

The narrative synthesis yielded six interrelated results concerning how family and community factors shaped the school inclusion of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Greece. First, the evidence indicated that inclusion was strongly conditioned by the accessibility and quality of home-school communication. Studies that examined school-based perspectives reported that communication with families was often filtered through institutional routines that presupposed Greek-language proficiency and familiarity with bureaucratic procedures, which limited families’ capacity to engage on equal terms and reduced opportunities for trust-building. Where communication

remained irregular or one-directional, parents' engagement was interpreted as low, even when families were actively concerned with their children's schooling (Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023).

Second, the reviewed literature showed that language functioned as a key "gateway" variable not only for students' participation, but also for family-school collaboration. Research on immigrant parents' experiences highlighted that parents negotiated schooling through complex language ideologies and perceived pressures for linguistic assimilation, which shaped how they interacted with schools and how confidently they advocated for their children (Gkaintartzi, Chatzidaki & Tsokalidou, 2014). In parallel, teacher-focused evidence suggested that schools relied heavily on students' rapid acquisition of Greek to operationalize "integration," thereby positioning language support and mediation as prerequisites for broader inclusion (Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023).

Third, findings consistently suggested that family engagement was constrained less by "motivation" and more by structural vulnerability. In the Roma case, mothers were reported to have valued education and expressed aspirations for upward mobility for their children, yet they also described limited resources and restricted capacity to provide school-recognized support, revealing a mismatch between institutional expectations and families' lived conditions (Strataki & Petrogiannis, 2021). This pattern indicated that inclusion processes were embedded in socioeconomic and spatial inequalities that shaped attendance stability, access to learning support, and the feasibility of participation in school life.

Fourth, evidence from refugee education emphasized that community and meso-level supports operated as bridging infrastructures when schools lacked sufficient internal capacity. Teachers and students were reported to have experienced a mixed landscape in which positive policy steps coexisted with gaps in implementation, uneven provision, and persistent needs for coordinated psychosocial and communicative support (Stergiou & Simopoulos, 2024).

Fifth, the synthesis showed that school inclusion was shaped by educators' orientations toward diversity, which indirectly affected how families were positioned. Teacher accounts described both positive dispositions toward immigrant and refugee students and the persistence of ethnocentric framings, with these ambivalences linked to an "insufficiently organized" policy environment and limited systematic support for multilingual and culturally responsive practices (Giavrimis & Dimitriadou, 2023). This result suggested that family engagement outcomes were not neutral but were influenced by how schools interpreted difference and which forms of participation were recognized as legitimate.

Finally, the review indicated that partnership practices were more likely to support inclusion when they were institutionalized rather than ad hoc. A tiered conceptual approach to redefining Greek public schools as intercultural highlighted that sustainable inclusion depended on coordinated school-wide strategies, rather than isolated teacher initiatives (Karananou, 2022). Similarly, empirical work focusing on parental involvement within targeted support settings in Greece (Priority Education Zones) showed that parental involvement was patterned by how support structures were organized and by whether schools created workable channels for engagement under conditions of linguistic and social inequality (Karpontini, 2025).

4. DISCUSSIONS

The present narrative review indicated that school inclusion in Greece was not shaped only by in-school pedagogy or formal access, but was co-produced through the quality of the home-school-community interface. Interpreting the findings within the broader knowledge base on intercultural education suggested a central implication: when inclusion policies were implemented primarily as technical solutions (for example, language support measures) without parallel investment in relational infrastructure, the inclusion process remained fragile and uneven. In practical terms, inclusion appeared to depend on whether schools developed reliable channels for communication, trust, and shared responsibility with families, and whether community actors were positioned as legitimate partners rather than as external, temporary "helpers."

A key contribution of the results was that they reframed "parental involvement" from an individual-level attribute to a structural and interactional outcome. Families' engagement tended to rise when schools reduced linguistic and bureaucratic barriers and recognized diverse forms of participation as valid. Conversely, where school routines presupposed Greek-language fluency and institutional familiarity, families' constrained participation was at risk of being interpreted through deficit lenses. This matters because deficit framings do not merely misdiagnose the problem; they also shape institutional responses that intensify exclusion—for example, by privileging compliance-based contact over dialogue, or by limiting parental participation to formal meetings that are inaccessible to families with precarious work schedules. The broader interpretive point is that inclusion was mediated by the extent to which schools treated families as epistemic partners who hold relevant knowledge about children's needs, histories, and capacities.

The findings also suggested that community resources functioned as bridging mechanisms that stabilized inclusion pathways, particularly for families under conditions of mobility, poverty, or limited access to public services. However, this bridging role appeared to be contingent and locally variable. When community supports operated outside coordinated frameworks, the result tended to be a “patchwork” inclusion model, where outcomes depended heavily on geography, local leadership, and the presence of non-state actors. This pattern aligned with the general knowledge that inclusion systems become robust when they are institutionalized rather than dependent on ad hoc goodwill or short-term projects. For Greece, the implication was that the sustainability of inclusion required formal governance arrangements that connect schools to municipal services, mediation resources, and culturally responsive support networks.

Two additional interpretive points emerged. First, the evidence implied that inclusion strategies could not be “one-size-fits-all” across populations grouped under broad labels such as “migrant” or “ethnic minority.” Newly arrived refugee families and long-standing minority communities often faced different barriers and held different expectations toward schooling; thus, effective partnership work required contextual calibration and sensitivity to local histories of marginalization. Second, educators’ orientations toward diversity appeared to influence partnership quality indirectly by shaping which family practices were recognized as legitimate and which were dismissed as “non-cooperation.” This reinforced the notion that inclusion is simultaneously a pedagogical, relational, and institutional task.

The significance of these insights was that they clarified why inclusion reforms that focus narrowly on student-level deficits (language “gaps,” adaptation “needs”) frequently underperform. Instead, the results pointed to inclusion as a systems property emerging from interaction patterns and institutional design. Accordingly, the most defensible conclusions were that (a) inclusive schooling in Greece required consistent, accessible, and culturally responsive communication with families; (b) community actors could enhance inclusion when integrated into stable partnership structures; and (c) schools’ capacity to avoid deficit framings was a critical mediator of whether family and community engagement translated into sustained participation and belonging.

Several limitations should be acknowledged to interpret these conclusions cautiously. Narrative reviews integrate heterogeneous evidence and do not provide effect-size estimates; therefore, the conclusions should be read as patterns of convergence rather than causal proof. In addition, Greece-specific studies often reflected localized settings, which likely amplified the role of context. Even so, the overall pattern remained theoretically coherent: inclusion improved when relational and institutional barriers were reduced.

From a practice standpoint, the discussion supported a shift from episodic “parental involvement activities” to institutionalized partnership work. Schools would benefit from predictable multilingual communication routines, structured mediation roles, flexible participation formats, and school-wide strategies that normalize collaboration with community stakeholders. At the policy level, inclusion efforts would likely be strengthened by funding and governance mechanisms that embed school–community partnership capacity into the educational system rather than treating it as a temporary programmatic add-on.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This narrative review concluded that the school inclusion of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Greece was shaped less by formal access to schooling and more by the strength and accessibility of the family–school–community interface. Across the synthesized evidence, inclusion was consistently associated with relational and institutional conditions that enabled families to communicate with schools, understand expectations, and participate in school life without facing linguistic, bureaucratic, or symbolic exclusion. Where such conditions were absent, family engagement was frequently constrained and at risk of being misinterpreted through deficit framings, which in turn weakened students’ participation and sense of belonging.

A second key conclusion was that language operated as a central mediating factor, influencing not only students’ classroom participation but also parents’ capacity to interact with teachers and navigate school procedures. As a result, inclusion efforts that treated Greek language acquisition as the primary or sole integration mechanism appeared insufficient when they were not accompanied by culturally responsive communication practices, interpretation or mediation support, and institutional openness to diverse forms of parental participation. In this respect, inclusion was best understood as a systems property produced through everyday interaction patterns and not merely as an outcome of student-level adaptation.

Third, community actors and local networks were found to play a significant bridging role, particularly in contexts characterized by socioeconomic vulnerability, mobility, and limited access to public services. However, the effectiveness of community support depended on whether schools developed stable partnership structures rather than relying on ad hoc initiatives. Where community engagement remained informal or project-based, inclusion pathways

tended to be uneven and geographically contingent, reinforcing disparities between schools with different local infrastructures and leadership capacities.

Overall, the implications for the field were threefold. First, research and practice in intercultural education in Greece should conceptualize parental involvement as a relational outcome shaped by institutional design rather than as an individual family attribute. Second, sustainable inclusion requires coordinated governance across school leadership, municipal services, and civil society, with explicit roles for mediation and culturally responsive communication. Third, inclusive strategies must be context-sensitive, recognizing that different student populations and communities encounter distinct barriers and may require differentiated partnership models. These conclusions support a shift from narrowly framed integration measures toward comprehensive, institutionalized approaches that embed family and community engagement as core components of inclusive schooling.

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