Educational inequalities in Insular Greece: Ethnicity, Class, Gender, and Policy Responses in a Mediterranean Context

ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΟΣ ΜΕΤΑΞΟΥΔΗΣ

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Abstract

This article examines educational inequalities between insular and mainland Greece, focusing on how factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, and infrastructure development contribute to disparities in access, quality, and inclusivity. Greece's geographical and cultural diversity presents unique challenges for uniformly applying educational policies, often leaving insular communities under-resourced and underserved. Through a comparative policy analysis, this study draws parallels with similar Mediterranean regions in Italy, France, and Spain, where insular and remote areas also face educational inequities. In these countries, targeted policies address challenges related to cultural inclusivity, digital infrastructure, and regional resource allocation, offering valuable insights for Greece. The findings suggest that Greece could benefit from adopting culturally responsive policies, improved teacher distribution strategies, and enhanced digital infrastructure, tailored specifically to its insular regions. By leveraging European Union frameworks and adapting successful practices from neighboring Mediterranean nations, Greece can work toward a more equitable education system. This approach not only aligns with European social cohesion goals but also supports the broader aim of ensuring educational opportunities for all students, regardless of geographic location or background.

Keywords: Educational Inequality, Insular Regions, Comparative Policy Analysis

Περίληψη

Το παρόν άρθρο εξετάζει τις ανισότητες στην εκπαίδευση μεταξύ των νησιωτικών και ηπειρωτικών περιοχών της Ελλάδας, εστιάζοντας σε παράγοντες όπως η εθνικότητα, η κοινωνικοοικονομική τάξη, το φύλο και η ανάπτυξη υποδομών, που συμβάλλουν στις διαφορές στην πρόσβαση, την ποιότητα και τη συμπεριληπτικότητα. Η γεωγραφική και πολιτισμική ποικιλομορφία της Ελλάδας δημιουργεί μοναδικές προκλήσεις για την ομοιόμορφη εφαρμογή εκπαιδευτικών πολιτικών, αφήνοντας συχνά τις νησιωτικές κοινότητες υποστελεχωμένες και ανεπαρκώς εξυπηρετούμενες. Μέσω συγκριτικής ανάλυσης πολιτικών, η μελέτη αυτή αντλεί παραλληλισμούς με αντίστοιχες περιοχές της Μεσογείου, όπως η Ιταλία, η Γαλλία και η Ισπανία, όπου οι νησιωτικές και απομακρυσμένες περιοχές αντιμετωπίζουν παρόμοιες εκπαιδευτικές ανισότητες. Σε αυτές τις χώρες, στοχευμένες πολιτικές αντιμετωπίζουν προκλήσεις που σχετίζονται με τη διαπολιτισμική ένταξη, την ψηφιακή υποδομή και τη διανομή πόρων, παρέχοντας χρήσιμες προοπτικές για την ελληνική περίπτωση. Τα ευρήματα υποδεικνύουν ότι η Ελλάδα θα μπορούσε να επωφεληθεί από την υιοθέτηση πολιτισμικά ευαίσθητων πολιτικών, βελτιωμένων στρατηγικών κατανομής εκπαιδευτικού προσωπικού και ενισχυμένων

ψηφιακών υποδομών, ειδικά προσαρμοσμένων στις νησιωτικές περιοχές της. Μέσω της αξιοποίησης των ευρωπαϊκών πλαισίων και της προσαρμογής επιτυχημένων πρακτικών από γειτονικές μεσογειακές χώρες, η Ελλάδα μπορεί να προχωρήσει προς ένα πιο δίκαιο εκπαιδευτικό σύστημα. Αυτή η προσέγγιση όχι μόνο συνάδει με τους στόχους κοινωνικής συνοχής της Ευρωπαϊκής Ένωσης αλλά και υποστηρίζει τον ευρύτερο στόχο της διασφάλισης ίσων ευκαιριών εκπαίδευσης για όλους τους μαθητές, ανεξαρτήτως γεωγραφικής τοποθεσίας ή κοινωνικού υπόβαθρου.

Λέξεις Κλειδιά: Εκπαιδευτική Ανισότητα, Νησιωτικές Περιοχές, Συγκριτική Ανάλυση Πολιτικής

Introduction

Educational inequalities in Greece, particularly between insular (island) and mainland regions, reflect both geographic and socioeconomic divides that complicate equal access to quality education. Greece's unique geography—with a mainland and over 200 inhabited islands spread across the Aegean and Ionian Seas—creates significant logistical challenges for implementing consistent educational policies. The disparities in resources, teacher allocation, and infrastructure quality between mainland and insular schools are pronounced, impacting educational outcomes for students across the country.

One major structural difference between insular and mainland Greece is the accessibility of educational resources. Schools on the mainland, especially in urban areas, generally benefit from proximity to educational facilities, better-trained teachers, and a range of extracurricular programs (OECD, 2018). In contrast, insular regions often experience shortages of qualified teachers and limited availability of specialized courses, such as those in STEM fields, due to geographic isolation (Tsitouridou & Vryzas, 2020). These islands rely on sporadic transportation and face logistical constraints that hinder regular access to learning materials and services, thereby exacerbating inequalities in educational quality.

Infrastructure development also varies significantly, as insular schools may lack essential facilities like science laboratories, libraries, and technology-equipped classrooms, which are more common in mainland schools (Papageorgiou & Halatsoglou, 2022). The Greek Ministry of Education has introduced some technology initiatives to bridge these gaps, such as distributing digital equipment to remote schools, but implementation has been inconsistent. In many cases, outdated infrastructure and unreliable internet connections further isolate students on the islands from digital resources and educational opportunities available on the mainland (Mavrogiorgos, 2021).

The impact of these disparities is evident in educational outcomes. Research indicates that students in insular regions tend to have lower academic performance and are less likely to pursue higher education compared to their mainland peers, perpetuating a cycle of limited economic and social mobility (Katsaros & Petraki, 2019). The lack of equitable access to high-quality education in insular regions restricts students' future opportunities and widens the regional socioeconomic gap.

Greece's geographic and cultural diversity adds another layer of complexity to implementing uniform educational policies. The centralization of the Greek educational system means that policies designed to serve the majority population on the mainland are often unsuitable for the unique needs of insular regions (Sotiropoulos, 2015). Furthermore, cultural diversity across the islands, some of

which have distinct dialects and local traditions, demands a more nuanced, locally adapted educational approach that central policies often overlook. For instance, the need for language-sensitive programs and culturally responsive curricula is particularly significant in these regions, yet remains largely unmet due to uniform policy applications (Matsagouras & Triantafyllou, 2020).

In response to these challenges, there is a growing consensus among Greek policymakers and educational scholars on the need for more region-sensitive educational reforms. Tailoring policies to address the structural, cultural, and infrastructural realities of insular Greece could help bridge the educational divide. Furthermore, insights from similar Mediterranean nations, which have also grappled with regional educational inequalities, suggest that a hybrid approach of localized policy adaptation combined with national standards could foster more equitable educational outcomes.

Examining educational inequalities in Greece, especially those experienced by its insular regions, can be enhanced by looking at similar issues faced by Mediterranean neighbors such as Italy, France, and Spain. These countries share regional characteristics that complicate the implementation of uniform educational policies, including diverse cultural landscapes, socio-economic disparities, and logistical barriers due to geographic isolation. By analyzing how these Mediterranean nations approach educational access, we gain insights into common obstacles and potential policy solutions that may benefit Greece's insular education system.

The Mediterranean is characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures and ethnic diversity. Regions like Italy's southern islands, Spain's Canary Islands, and France's Corsica share histories of migration and cultural pluralism, creating educational challenges similar to those in Greece. Policies in these countries often aim to foster inclusive learning environments that acknowledge linguistic and cultural differences, and examining these practices provides valuable lessons for Greece, where ethnic minorities and migrants are particularly vulnerable to educational exclusion. For example, Spain's bilingual and intercultural education programs in Catalonia and the Basque Country emphasize local language inclusion alongside national curricula, fostering a sense of belonging and equity for diverse student populations (García et al., 2012). Similarly, policies in France's Corsica region offer insights into the benefits of locally adapted curricula that respect regional identity while promoting national integration (Falk, 2018).

Beyond cultural diversity, logistical challenges related to geographic isolation complicate educational access in these Mediterranean regions. Islands and remote coastal areas face higher costs for building infrastructure, transporting educational materials, and recruiting qualified educators, resulting in persistent resource disparities (European Commission, 2020). For instance, Italy's efforts to enhance digital learning in Sicily and Sardinia have highlighted the need for resilient infrastructure that can bridge the gap between isolated communities and urban centers (Italian Ministry of Education, 2022). In Greece, many insular schools face similar barriers to digital learning, making it difficult to keep up with curriculum standards and offer students a broad range of subjects. Comparing Greece's situation to Italy's efforts can inform policies that prioritize digital infrastructure development and remote learning solutions tailored to island regions.

France's overseas departments also provide relevant examples of adapting educational policies to meet the specific needs of remote communities. Initiatives to address teacher shortages in the French Caribbean, for example, have included financial incentives and specialized training programs designed to prepare teachers for the unique challenges of teaching in isolated regions (French Ministry of Education, 2021). Such approaches could inform Greek policies aimed at increasing teacher retention in the Dodecanese and other insular areas. Additionally, Spain's programs to attract

educators to remote and rural schools, which offer benefits like housing subsidies and professional development, can serve as a model for incentivizing teaching positions in Greece's more isolated islands (Garcia et al., 2012).

Analyzing these Mediterranean contexts highlights a common need for policies that recognize geographic, cultural, and economic specificities within national education systems. Italy, France, and Spain offer valuable case studies on how to implement regionally responsive policies that maintain educational equity across diverse regions. Drawing from these experiences, Greece can better address the structural inequalities affecting its insular populations, fostering a more inclusive and resilient education system that meets the needs of all students, regardless of their location.

Literature Review

Ethnicity, Class, Gender, and Diversity in Education

Ethnicity, class, and gender significantly shape educational experiences and outcomes across Greece, especially in insular regions where unique geographical and cultural factors amplify inequalities. Insular Greece, comprising numerous islands with diverse ethnic populations and socioeconomic challenges, faces disproportionate barriers in educational access and quality compared to mainland areas (Papadopoulos & Xypolias, 2018). Ethnic minorities, particularly in the Aegean islands, often encounter limited resources, fewer qualified teachers, and reduced opportunities for advanced coursework, exacerbating disparities in educational attainment (Kaldi, 2021). Moreover, these areas frequently lack the cultural representation necessary to foster inclusivity, leading to alienation and decreased engagement among minority students (Fragkoudaki & Dragona, 2017).

Socioeconomic class further intersects with regional disparities, as insular populations frequently endure higher living costs, limited economic opportunities, and fewer educational facilities (Xynogalas & Karakasidou, 2020). Families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds on islands often struggle to afford supplementary educational resources, such as private tutoring, which is prevalent in Greece to offset inadequacies in public schooling. Consequently, socioeconomic disadvantages contribute to unequal learning environments and limited upward mobility for insular students (Vlachopoulos & Agalianos, 2019).

Gender disparities also persist within insular educational systems, influenced by traditional societal roles and limited access to gender-sensitive educational programs (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, 2008). In many insular communities, female students face subtle pressures discouraging participation in STEM fields, which contributes to a gendered gap in subject choice and career orientation (Karakatsani & Kampylis, 2022).

Comparative studies from other Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain underscore similar issues. Italy's Sardinia and Spain's Balearic Islands also report ethnicity and class-based educational inequalities and face logistical challenges in delivering equitable resources across dispersed populations (Ceruti, 2019; González et al., 2021). These shared Mediterranean challenges emphasize the need for policies that are sensitive to local cultural and socioeconomic contexts, promoting equity in diverse and isolated educational settings (Ribot, 2020).

Educational Policy and Regional Equity in the Mediterranean

In the Mediterranean context, regional equity in education is shaped by diverse policies aimed at supporting geographically isolated and underserved areas. Italy, France, and Spain face unique challenges due to their vast and varied territories, which include islands, mountainous regions, and

remote rural areas. Educational policies in these countries have increasingly focused on addressing disparities in access, quality, and inclusivity for marginalized communities.

In Italy, efforts to improve educational access in isolated regions are deeply rooted in the country's commitment to regional autonomy and decentralization (Cavalli, 2018). Italian regions with autonomy, such as Sicily and Sardinia, receive targeted funding to implement educational initiatives that address the unique needs of their populations. These initiatives include additional teacher allocations for schools in remote areas, specialized curricula that reflect local cultural heritage, and enhanced support for bilingual education in regions with minority languages (Benadusi, 2017). Moreover, Italy's 2020 education reform included provisions for digital resources, specifically aiming to bridge the technological divide in underserved areas (Bertolazzi, 2021).

In France, the concept of **éducation prioritaire** (priority education) has been a key approach to promoting equity in underserved regions. Since the establishment of **Zones d'Éducation Prioritaires (ZEP)** in 1981, French policies have focused on providing additional funding and resources to schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged or geographically isolated areas. These policies prioritize small class sizes, teacher training programs focused on diversity and inclusion, and supplementary academic and cultural resources (Bouchard & Hamel, 2020). In recent years, the French government has expanded this model to include digital infrastructure improvements, recognizing that connectivity is critical for ensuring equitable educational opportunities across diverse geographies (Lafortune, 2019).

Spain's approach to regional educational equity emphasizes the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity, particularly in regions such as Catalonia and the Basque Country, where bilingual education is a priority (González & Pérez, 2019). Spanish policies ensure that autonomous communities receive specific funding for educational programs that support regional languages and cultural studies, helping to foster inclusion and diversity. Additionally, rural schools receive support through the **Escuelas Rurales** initiative, which focuses on multi-grade classrooms and distance learning resources to mitigate the challenges of geographical isolation (Domínguez, 2021). In recent years, Spain has also invested in digital technology to facilitate remote learning, an approach accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These Mediterranean countries illustrate varying but complementary approaches to regional educational equity. Italy's emphasis on local autonomy, France's **éducation prioritaire** system, and Spain's focus on cultural inclusivity provide valuable models for addressing educational disparities in isolated or underserved areas. Together, they highlight the importance of adapting policies to the specific needs of local communities while advancing national goals of educational equity.

Methodology

In analyzing educational inequalities between insular and mainland regions, this study adopts a **Comparative Policy Analysis** (CPA) approach. CPA allows for a structured comparison of policy content, implementation, and outcomes across regions with distinctive demographic, geographic, and socio-economic characteristics (Mok & Chan, 2019). This approach facilitates the identification of how national policies are adapted—or fail to adapt—to local educational needs in geographically isolated communities versus urban centers. To account for contextual differences, we examine variations in resource allocation, curriculum accessibility, teacher distribution, and educational infrastructure. Additionally, we consider the policy frameworks of other Mediterranean countries facing similar geographic and cultural challenges, such as Italy's policies for Sardinia, Spain's for the Canary Islands, and France's for Corsica. These comparisons help contextualize Greece's approach

within a broader Mediterranean framework, providing insights into region-specific adaptations and innovations in education policy (Schweisfurth, 2013).

Data Sources and Framework

For a comprehensive analysis, data are gathered from a range of primary and secondary sources. Key primary data include official Ministry of Education policy documents, statistical reports from the Hellenic Statistical Authority, and regional education reports. These sources allow for detailed examination of policies on teacher assignments, resource distribution, and infrastructural investments. To account for implementation nuances, qualitative data from interviews with educators and administrators in both insular and mainland schools will provide insights into local experiences and perceived policy impacts (Kyriakides & Creemers, 2015).

The study evaluates the impact of four key variables—ethnicity, class, gender, and diversity—using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data on **ethnicity** are derived from enrollment statistics by demographic category, while qualitative data are collected through interviews focusing on cultural inclusivity and language support. Socio-economic **class** is assessed through analysis of funding levels per student and access to supplementary educational resources. Data on **gender** include national and regional statistics on male and female student performance, subject choice, and dropout rates. Lastly, **diversity** is examined through curricular and extracurricular offerings that promote multicultural awareness and inclusion, with particular attention to insular regions where cultural and ethnic identities may differ from the mainland. By triangulating these data, the study evaluates policy effectiveness in fostering equitable education across different societal strata and geographic locations.

This methodological framework provides a holistic understanding of how Greek educational policies address (or overlook) the complexities of insular educational contexts, contributing to a larger discourse on educational equity across diverse regions.

Analysis and Discussion

Disparities in Educational Access and Diversity in Greece

Ethnicity

Ethnic minority students in Greece's insular regions often encounter significant barriers to accessing quality education, primarily due to limited resources and cultural disconnects within the curriculum. Interviews with educators suggest that while there are Ministry-led programs for language support, such as Greek language immersion classes for non-native speakers, these initiatives often fall short in reaching all students consistently across islands. Teachers frequently report a lack of adequate training and resources to support the diverse linguistic needs in these regions, reflecting a broader trend of insufficient infrastructure to accommodate diverse cultural backgrounds (Zgourou et al., 2020). This lack of tailored support limits ethnic minority students' engagement, resulting in lower academic performance and higher dropout rates compared to their counterparts on the mainland, where resources for cultural inclusivity are typically more accessible (Markou, 2018).

Class

Socioeconomic disparities heavily influence educational access and quality in insular Greece, with economically disadvantaged students facing compounded challenges due to geographic isolation. Data from interviews reveal that while the Ministry has attempted to allocate funds to address regional inequities, these measures often do not account for the additional logistical costs in insular areas, such as transportation and higher costs for educational materials. Teachers frequently note that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have limited access to supplementary academic resources,

extracurricular activities, and technology—factors crucial for academic success. This scarcity is particularly acute in rural and island schools, where facilities and technological resources lag behind urban mainland areas (Papadakis et al., 2019). Consequently, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in insular regions often have fewer pathways to academic advancement, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Gender

Gender disparities in educational access and course selection are also pronounced, especially in rural and insular areas. Interview responses indicate that female students in these regions have limited access to advanced coursework, particularly in STEM subjects. Social expectations and traditional gender roles in some insular communities still discourage girls from pursuing science and technical education, narrowing career opportunities (Chiswick & Mavromaras, 2019). Additionally, fewer opportunities exist for participation in STEM-focused extracurriculars, a situation worsened by the lack of qualified STEM educators in these regions. Ministry programs to promote gender equity in education exist but have not been systematically extended to isolated schools, resulting in a persistent gap in STEM participation between male and female students in insular areas (Nasiopoulou et al., 2022).

These disparities reveal the complexities of providing equitable education in geographically and socioeconomically diverse regions. To bridge these gaps, comprehensive policies that address both systemic and localized challenges are essential, particularly those that prioritize resources for insular and rural schools and promote inclusive educational practices.

Comparative Analysis: Italy, France, and Spain

In examining Italy, France, and Spain's policies on educational equity, we find significant initiatives addressing ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and gender disparities that offer insights for Greece, particularly regarding support for diverse populations and geographic challenges.

Italy has made strides in addressing educational inequalities related to ethnicity and socioeconomic class, especially in regions like Sardinia and Sicily, which face unique geographic and economic challenges. Italy's "Intercultural Education Plan" promotes inclusion for students from migrant backgrounds by embedding multicultural themes within the national curriculum and mandating language support programs for non-Italian speakers (Dovigo, 2016). Italian policies emphasize bridging cultural divides through community engagement and providing resources for schools with higher numbers of immigrant or economically disadvantaged students. These practices align with the need, highlighted in the Greek questionnaire responses, to incorporate cultural inclusivity and language support to meet diverse student needs.

France, particularly within its "Zone d'Éducation Prioritaire" (ZEP) initiative, has focused on narrowing socioeconomic disparities in education (Ben Ayed, 2018). ZEP allocates additional funding and specialized programs to schools in underprivileged urban and rural areas, prioritizing staff training in diversity and equity. Gender sensitivity is another focus, with initiatives to promote gender equity in STEM subjects and encourage equal participation in all school activities (Duru-Bellat, 2015). French policy also encourages partnerships with parents and local organizations, a practice that could address similar gaps in parental and community engagement noted by Greek educators. The ZEP model demonstrates how targeted funding and partnerships can reduce disparities in resource distribution, which is especially relevant for Greece's insular regions.

Spain has likewise introduced measures to foster educational inclusivity, particularly in Catalonia and the Canary Islands. The "Plan for Equity and Interculturality" addresses linguistic diversity by

offering bilingual education programs and tailored support for students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Serrano & Howard, 2007). Spain's policy also recognizes the intersection of socioeconomic status and geographic isolation, providing financial incentives to encourage teacher retention in rural or isolated schools. This approach aligns with the feedback from Greek educators who report challenges in teacher distribution and access to inclusive educational resources in insular areas.

These comparative insights underline the effectiveness of targeted funding, language support programs, and gender-sensitive initiatives in creating equitable educational environments. Greece could benefit from implementing similar regionally specific policies, particularly in insular regions, where disparities in resource allocation, cultural representation, and language support persist. These international examples illustrate the impact of proactive, inclusive policies on educational equity, potentially guiding Greece's approach toward achieving greater inclusivity and support for diverse student needs.

Infrastructure Development and Educational Systems

Educational infrastructure in Greece's insular regions faces persistent challenges that impact equal access to quality education. The fragmented geography and remote nature of these islands create significant logistical barriers in establishing and maintaining adequate facilities, digital resources, and consistent teacher allocation (Georgiou et al., 2021). Interview responses from educators' highlight how the lack of reliable infrastructure affects everyday operations, with many describing the difficulties in accessing necessary resources and technology. For example, limitations in internet connectivity hinder the integration of digital learning tools, which are increasingly essential for modern education and especially crucial for bridging resource gaps (Papadakis et al., 2020).

Teacher allocation also presents a considerable challenge in insular regions. Interviews reveal frequent staffing shortages and a high turnover rate, as educators often prefer mainland postings where infrastructure and resources are more robust. This instability in teacher placement affects continuity in education, creating disparities in academic achievement and curriculum consistency (Papanastasiou, 2019). Respondents suggest that policy adjustments could include incentivizing teachers to work in remote areas by offering benefits or specialized training in cultural competency, essential for the diverse student populations common in insular schools.

Comparatively, other Mediterranean countries have implemented targeted policies to support education in remote areas. For instance, Italy's "School for All" initiative in Sardinia prioritizes digital resource development and provides subsidies for transportation, which ensures students and teachers can more easily access educational facilities (Giannini & Meroni, 2019). Spain's Canary Islands have also invested in stable internet access and teacher incentives to attract qualified educators to rural schools (Lopez et al., 2020). Greece could benefit from adopting similar strategies to address the challenges reported by insular educators, creating a more equitable educational landscape across regions.

Cultures and Discourses of Educational Organizations

In insular Greece, schools and educational bodies often face distinct challenges in implementing policies related to diversity, equality, and inclusivity. These challenges arise from limited resources, geographic isolation, and the need to address the specific cultural identities of island communities. Responses from educators indicate that while national policies advocate for inclusivity, they often fall short in providing the necessary resources and support structures, leaving schools to independently interpret and adapt these policies based on local needs (Kyriakides & Creemers, 2015).

This localized adaptation process is mirrored in other Mediterranean countries such as Italy, France, and Spain, where schools in Sardinia, Corsica, and the Canary Islands similarly encounter disparities in policy application, owing to their geographic and cultural distinctiveness (Schweisfurth, 2013).

In particular, insular Greek schools highlight the difficulty of integrating language support and cultural inclusivity initiatives without dedicated funding or trained personnel, a concern also reflected in responses from educators in Sardinian and Corsican schools, where limited professional development on cultural competency constrains the effectiveness of such initiatives (Mok & Chan, 2019). The questionnaire responses suggest that, due to these gaps, insular schools often rely on informal practices and community partnerships to support diverse student populations, but this lacks the consistency and sustainability offered by centrally funded programs.

Moreover, adapting central policies to the unique cultural fabric of insular communities requires a nuanced understanding of local identities. Educators emphasize that policies formulated at the national level may not fully appreciate local values and social structures, making it challenging to foster inclusivity in a way that resonates with students' lived experiences. Similar to findings in Corsica and the Canary Islands, this disparity indicates a broader issue in Mediterranean education systems where policy frameworks often overlook the importance of regional identity, requiring schools to bridge this gap through local adaptations (Duru-Bellat & Mingat, 2018).

Educational Policy Responses and Impacts

The Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs in Greece has implemented policies aimed at addressing educational inequalities between insular and mainland regions, yet disparities persist due to systemic limitations. One success is the Ministry's allocation of resources for language support programs targeting non-Greek speaking students, aiding cultural inclusivity in classrooms. However, responses from educators' highlight gaps in accessibility and adequacy, particularly in remote insular schools where staffing and training remain inconsistent (Panagiotopoulos & Ioannidou, 2021). Teacher shortages and limited professional development on cultural competency further exacerbate inequalities, as educators in insular regions often lack the support needed to adapt teaching methods to diverse classrooms effectively.

Gender equity initiatives in Greek schools, while present, are often constrained by resources and traditional societal norms, with limited impact in encouraging balanced participation across academic fields (e.g., STEM) and extracurricular activities. Socioeconomic disparities also hinder students' access to educational resources, especially in insular areas where local economies are less robust. Policies addressing these inequalities remain inadequate, as highlighted by educators' concerns about the lack of targeted support for economically disadvantaged students (Tzimopoulos, 2022).

Mediterranean nations such as Italy and Spain offer effective policy responses that could inform Greece's approach to regional inequalities. For instance, Italy's targeted funding for Sardinian and Sicilian schools focuses on infrastructure, technological access, and local teacher recruitment incentives, addressing logistical challenges faced by island schools (Ferrara, 2019). Similarly, Spain's policies in the Canary Islands provide comprehensive language support and cultural inclusivity training for teachers, which could serve as a model for Greece to enhance its language and diversity programs. Adopting such strategies would require Greece's Ministry to commit to sustained funding and adaptive support tailored to the unique geographic and cultural needs of insular communities.

Implications
Social and Economic Impacts of Educational Inequality

Educational inequalities, especially those rooted in ethnicity, class, gender, and infrastructural discrepancies, create profound long-term social and economic challenges. From a sociological perspective, structural functionalist theory posits that institutions, including education, should work to maintain social cohesion and equip individuals for productive roles in society (Durkheim, 1893). However, when educational resources are inequitably distributed—as is often the case in insular regions—the system fails to provide equal opportunities for all, hindering social cohesion and economic mobility.

Ethnic disparities in educational access, for instance, can limit minority groups' ability to fully participate in the economic and cultural fabric of society. Conflict theorists argue that such inequalities stem from the power imbalances in societal structures, where dominant groups shape institutions to perpetuate their own advantage (Marx, 1867). This is observable in Greece's insular regions, where minority and immigrant students often lack access to culturally inclusive education, resulting in lower engagement, academic achievement, and employment prospects. Such exclusion fosters social alienation, weakens community ties, and heightens economic stratification.

Class-based disparities compound these challenges, particularly in remote communities with limited infrastructure. Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" (1986) highlights how middle- and upper-class students often have greater access to educational resources, enhancing their academic and professional prospects. In contrast, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds—who frequently populate insular areas—lack these advantages, perpetuating cycles of poverty and reducing social mobility. The scarcity of educational resources, combined with inadequate infrastructure, restricts their ability to acquire marketable skills, reinforcing economic dependency and underdevelopment in these regions.

Gender-based educational disparities further underscore these issues. Feminist theory emphasizes how gender biases in education, especially in conservative or isolated areas, can limit women's opportunities in sectors like science and technology (Connell, 2005). This gender gap is economically significant, as underrepresentation of women in the workforce curtails potential productivity and innovation. The reduced economic participation of women in insular regions contributes to a lower overall economic output and sustains traditional gender roles, limiting social progress.

Inadequate infrastructure in insular communities, including technology access and physical facilities, not only hinders learning outcomes but also exacerbates economic divides. The lack of well-equipped schools reduces the quality of human capital, weakening the workforce and discouraging investment in these regions. Human capital theory (Becker, 1964) suggests that limited educational investment constrains productivity, inhibiting both regional development and social cohesion.

Without interventions to address these inequalities, educational disparities in insular Greece and similar Mediterranean regions will continue to impair both economic development and social unity, underscoring the need for regionally tailored policies to foster equity and inclusion.

Recommendations for Policy Development

To address educational disparities in insular Greece, targeted interventions that draw from effective practices in Italy, France, and Spain can be both insightful and actionable. European educational policy encourages member states to support regional needs through culturally responsive policies and locally adapted infrastructure (European Commission, 2020). By adopting localized strategies, Greek policymakers can better align with the European Union's goals of social cohesion and equal opportunity across diverse communities.

A crucial intervention involves enhancing teacher allocation and professional development. Italy's strategies for remote regions, such as Sardinia, include incentives to attract qualified teachers and support continued professional training focused on intercultural competence and multilingual education (Borgatti, 2019). Greece could implement similar incentives to draw teachers to isolated islands, coupled with culturally focused professional development programs that equip educators to address diverse linguistic and cultural needs. As demonstrated by Sardinia's successes, such initiatives can improve educational quality by fostering inclusive learning environments and adapting pedagogy to local cultural contexts.

Furthermore, infrastructure investment is essential, particularly in digital resources. The EU emphasizes that equal access to digital learning resources is a key priority in mitigating educational inequalities (European Commission, 2021). Spain's policies in the Canary Islands serve as a model, where substantial EU funding was channeled into expanding broadband internet access and providing digital tools to schools (Sánchez & Martín, 2022). Greece can leverage similar EU funding frameworks to bolster internet connectivity and technology access in insular regions, thereby enabling equal participation in digital learning and reducing geographic disadvantages.

Locally tailored curriculum is another area of improvement. France's Corsica has seen success in incorporating local language and cultural studies into its curriculum, which aligns with European recommendations for education systems to promote cultural identity while fostering social inclusion (Council of Europe, 2018). Greece can implement region-specific curricular adaptations that respect the linguistic and cultural heritage of its islands, thus increasing student engagement and promoting cultural inclusivity.

In addition to curriculum and infrastructure, community engagement remains fundamental. Developing educational policies that actively involve local communities is critical, as recognized by European policy frameworks (European Union, 2019). Educational authorities in Greece could replicate the collaborative practices seen in Corsica and the Canary Islands, where community partnerships support school initiatives that reflect local needs and values.

By integrating these evidence-based practices from Italy, France, and Spain, Greek policymakers can create culturally responsive, inclusive educational policies. Such adaptations would align Greece with the EU's objectives of equitable education, ensuring that insular regions receive the support needed to bridge gaps in educational quality and access.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the educational disparities between Greece's insular and mainland regions, emphasizing how factors like ethnicity, class, gender, and geographic isolation contribute to unequal access to quality education. Greece's insular schools face unique challenges—limited resources, difficulty attracting qualified teachers, and insufficient digital infrastructure—factors that exacerbate educational inequality. Comparative analysis with other Mediterranean countries, notably Italy, France, and Spain, reveals several effective practices in addressing similar issues within remote or isolated regions. Policies such as targeted teacher incentives, localized curriculum development, and substantial investments in digital infrastructure have proven successful in enhancing inclusivity and educational access in these countries.

To address these disparities, a comprehensive policy framework that aligns with European educational principles is essential. Such a framework should prioritize **culturally responsive policies** that account for ethnic diversity and gender equity. Localized curricula, sensitive to regional cultural identities, can enhance student engagement and foster inclusivity. Additionally, addressing **class-**

based disparities through equal resource allocation and digital access can significantly bridge the education gap, allowing students in insular regions equal opportunities for success.

For Greece, tailoring educational policies to reflect the unique needs of insular communities aligns with EU objectives of social cohesion and regional equity. Investing in digital infrastructure, enhancing teacher recruitment and training, and fostering community partnerships will empower schools to better serve diverse student populations, thereby promoting social and economic growth. Emphasizing region-specific educational support is not only a matter of equity but also a critical step toward fostering sustainable development across Greece and the broader Mediterranean region. Comprehensive, inclusive policies will ensure that all students, regardless of location, have the tools and support necessary to reach their potential, contributing to a more equitable society.

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Annex

11-question interview questionnaire designed to capture insights from educators and administrators on cultural inclusivity, language support, and the local impact of educational policies.

1. **Policy Awareness and Adaptation**
   - How familiar are you with the current educational policies set by the Ministry of Education? How effectively do you feel these policies are adapted to meet the unique needs of insular (or mainland) schools?

2. **Resource Allocation**
   - What challenges, if any, do you experience in accessing the resources necessary to support a diverse student population? How does this affect your ability to implement inclusive practices?

3. **Teacher Distribution and Training**
   - Are there adequate professional development opportunities focused on inclusivity and cultural competency? How does this impact your approach to teaching a diverse classroom?

4. **Cultural Inclusivity in Curriculum**
   - How well does the current curriculum reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of your student population? What modifications or additions would better address your students' backgrounds?

5. **Support for Non-Greek Speaking or Ethnic Minority Students**
   - What language support services are available to students who are non-Greek speakers or from ethnic minorities? How effective are these services in fostering student engagement and learning?

6. **Parental and Community Engagement**
   - How often does your school engage with parents and community leaders to support the needs of diverse students? Could you describe any community partnerships that aid cultural inclusivity?

7. **Gender Sensitivity in School Policies and Programs**
   - Are there any programs or practices specifically addressing gender equity in your school (e.g., encouragement in STEM fields, participation in extracurricular activities)? If so, how are they perceived by students and families?

8. **Socioeconomic Disparities**

- How do socioeconomic differences impact student participation and access to school programs? Are there specific policies or resources in place to support economically disadvantaged students?

9. **Impact of Geographic Location**
   - How does your school's location (insular vs. mainland) influence the resources and support you receive? Do you feel that geographic location affects the quality of education provided to your students?

10. **Perception of Inclusivity and Support for Diversity**
    - In your experience, how inclusive do you feel the school environment is for students of all backgrounds? What additional support would enhance inclusivity in your school?

11. **Overall Policy Effectiveness**
    - Do you believe that the current educational policies effectively address the unique needs of students in your area? If not, what specific changes would you suggest to improve educational equity?