Student Diversity and School Climate in the Mediterranean Zone: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the extent student diversity and school climate vary within and across France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey, to investigate and compare the impact of student diversity on school climate in the selected Mediterranean countries. A quantitative research design was adopted by using the data of 41,789 teachers obtained from the dataset of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018. The research questions and hypotheses were formulated to investigate the extent of student diversity and school climate variations within and across the selected countries. Accordingly, the variability of general school climate, teacher-student relations, teaching experience in multicultural classrooms, teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms, the presence of students from various ethnic backgrounds, and diversity practices were tested in the schools of France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey in the research model. Statistical analyses, including chi-square and t-tests, ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis, were conducted to test the hypotheses and examine the relationships between student diversity and school climate. The findings revealed significant variations in student diversity and school climate within and across the participating countries, and evident relationships between student diversity and school climate were discovered and compared among the selected Mediterranean countries. This study contributes to the knowledge base of educational policymakers, administrators, practitioners, and teachers by guiding them in creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that promote positive student experiences and academic success and suggesting the need for policies and practices that support inclusive education and foster positive school climates in multicultural classrooms.

Keywords: learning environment, Mediterranean countries, school climate, student diversity, TALIS 2018

Student diversity has emerged as a key component of educational policies and systems around the world in today's more connected and diverse world. Diversity in terms of ethnicity and culture is more prevalent than ever in classrooms for both teachers and students, which makes the Western world "more culturally and ethnically diverse" (Dubbeld et al., 2019). A diverse student body that represents a range of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, socioeconomic, and ability backgrounds presents educational institutions with both opportunities and challenges.

According to Kaplan and Bista (2022), to embrace (or even to celebrate) diversity, a school community must go beyond mere tolerance and actively value diversity, which entails developing a mindset where diversity is viewed not as a weakness and a challenge but rather as a strength and something to be valued for teachers, students, and their families. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how student diversity affects school climate because it is a key factor in promoting a supportive and inclusive learning environment. A supportive and welcoming school environment with a diverse climate fosters student engagement, academic success, social and emotional well-being, and intergroup relations (Thapa et al., 2013; Ulbricht et al., 2022).

There are many facets to the relationship between student diversity and school climate. The variety of perspectives, experiences, and skills that students bring to the classroom enhances the learning environment. Students feel valued, respected, and included when diversity is embraced and appreciated in the classroom (Iglesias-Diaz & Romero-Perez, 2021). The engagement of students and collaboration among them are increased by a supportive learning environment provided through a positive school climate, which also lessens incidents of victimization among students of different ethnic backgrounds (Caravita et al., 2020; Konold et al., 2017).

Despite the widely acknowledged value of student diversity and school climate, the precise relationship between these elements has been changing as the world has faced some unprecedented impacts of transformation resulting from political, technological, sociocultural, and socioeconomic reasons. In the context of the countries in the Mediterranean region selected for this research; namely, France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey, there is a research gap providing a comparison of student diversity and school climate between these countries clarifying how student diversity varies within and between these nations and how it affects the school environment. To address this gap, this study contributes to the literature by determining the variability of student diversity and school climate within and among these countries, as well as investigating and contrasting the effect of student diversity on school climate.

Therefore, this study aimed to identify the extent student diversity and school climate vary within and across France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey, to investigate and compare the impact of student diversity on school climate in these selected Mediterranean countries. The examination of these connections would advance knowledge of how student diversity and school climate interact in the Mediterranean region and offer insightful information to educational policymakers, administrators, practitioners, and teachers.

Literature Review

Student Diversity

Diversity in education can be described as a difference or "unlikeness" between particular people or social groups (Pollock & Briscoe, 2020). It is multifaceted, may relate to tangible aspects or intangible ones, such as cultural practices, and is rational in light of the boundaries established by various social groups (Cerna et al., 2021). Student diversity is the inclusion of students from a range of socioeconomic, racial, linguistic, cultural, and ability backgrounds in "a learning environment in which curriculum, pedagogy, and outreach are all consistent with a broadly conceptualized multicultural philosophy" (Nieto & Bode, 2018, p. 39). It comprises a variety of unique traits, stories, and identities contributing to the diverse content of the student body.

Student diversity is critical to creating a dynamic and inviting learning environment for all students. There are many significant benefits to having diverse student populations in schools. It promotes intercultural understanding and respect among students in the first place and fosters a rich exchange of cultures (Davis et al., 2022). Students who are exposed to various viewpoints, cultures, and languages grow in their understanding of the world and become more prepared to live and work in diverse societies. Additionally, diverse classrooms can improve students' critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and academic performance (Dawes et al., 2020; Rasheed et al., 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to foster an environment in schools that values and respects diversity, which can be accomplished by incorporating multicultural curricula, attracting and retaining diverse educators, and offering culturally sensitive teaching methods.

School Climate

School climate is defined as the social, emotional, and physical environment of a school that influences the overall learning and well-being of students, staff, and the school community (Thapa et al., 2013; Voight & Nation, 2016). It represents the norms, values, and beliefs that shape the school community as experienced by students, parents, and school personnel (Cohen et al., 2009). It includes elements such as the quality of interactions between students and staff, the degree of safety and inclusivity, the existence of supportive policies and practices, and the general sense of engagement and belonging among the school community.

School climate, an essential element of the learning environment, has been connected to both positive and negative student outcomes. Supportive relationships, inclusive behaviours, and a feeling of belonging are typical indicators of a positive school climate. Therefore, students who experience an optimal educational environment tend to perform better academically (Wang & Degol, 2016), demonstrate enhanced social-emotional well-being (Aldridge et al., 2016) and improved mental health outcomes (Lewno-Dumdie et al., 2020; Wang & Degol, 2016). However, an unsupportive school environment can have negative effects on students, including higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms (Holt et al., 2016; Konishi et al.,

2010); lower academic motivation, decreased school attendance, and higher dropout rates (Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016). It is important to develop and promote supportive learning environments that contribute to the success and well-being of all students to lessen the effects of a negative school climate on student outcomes.

Relationship Between Student Diversity and School Climate

Student diversity has a significant impact on the overall school climate by shaping student experiences socially, emotionally, and academically. In diverse schools, the interactions between students from different backgrounds can contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant school climate, fostering positive attitudes toward diversity, reducing prejudice, and enhancing intercultural understanding (Cerna et al., 2021; Cohen & Lotan, 2014; Schwarzenthal et al., 2020). Diverse student populations enable the creation of rich and active learning environments that value diversity and promote the growth of key abilities for navigating an environment that is becoming progressively diverse. Schools can create an inviting and encouraging educational setting for all students that supports both their overall well-being and academic success by embracing and valuing student diversity.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between student diversity and school climate, highlighting the importance of fostering inclusive and positive environments for diverse student populations. Gromova et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of an accepting school environment for elementary school students who are immigrants to Russia. According to Dubbeld et al. (2019), it was reported that teachers' multicultural attitudes and their opinions of the school's policies and culture were linked to burnout by highlighting the importance of a supportive school environment for the well-being of students from different backgrounds. Similarly, Shirazi (2018) underlined the significance of school climate in fostering socio-political inclusion and a sense of belonging for diverse student populations. Additionally, Iglesias-Diaz and Romero-Perez (2021) conducted a systematic review that demonstrated the beneficial effects of inclusive classrooms on adolescent well-being by emphasizing the importance of a supportive school climate in meeting students' diverse social and emotional needs. Thus, it is important to develop welcoming environments at schools that value diversity among students and foster positive social interactions. Schools can give all students, regardless of background or identity, a sense of belonging, safety, and well-being by developing an environment that values diversity. These results highlight the significance of taking student diversity into account as a key element in determining the school climate and the demand for inclusive education policies and practices that cater to the particular needs of diverse student populations.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative research model was adopted in the study to identify the extent student diversity and school climate vary within and across France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey, to investigate and

compare the impact of student diversity on school climate in the selected Mediterranean countries. The research questions (RQs) were constructed below in line with the quantitative methodology:

RQ1. To what extent does student diversity vary within and across participating countries?

RQ2. To what extent does school climate vary within and across participating countries?

RQ3. What relationships are evident between student diversity and school climate in schools in selected Mediterranean countries?

Based on these RQs, the following hypotheses were formulated to quantitatively test various aspects of student diversity and school climate in the Mediterranean zone in the study:

H_1: The general school climate varies across countries.

H_2: Teacher-student relationships vary across countries.

H_3: Teaching experience in multicultural classrooms varies across countries.

   $H_{3.1}$: The general school climate in countries differs based on teaching experience in multicultural classrooms.

   $H_{3.2}$: Teacher-student relationships in countries differ based on teaching experience in multicultural classrooms.

H_4: The self-efficacy of teachers teaching multicultural classrooms varies across countries.

H_5: The presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds in the school varies across countries.

   $H_{5.1}$: The general school climate in countries differs based on the presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds in the school.

   $H_{5.2}$: Teacher-student relationships in countries differ based on the presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds in the school.
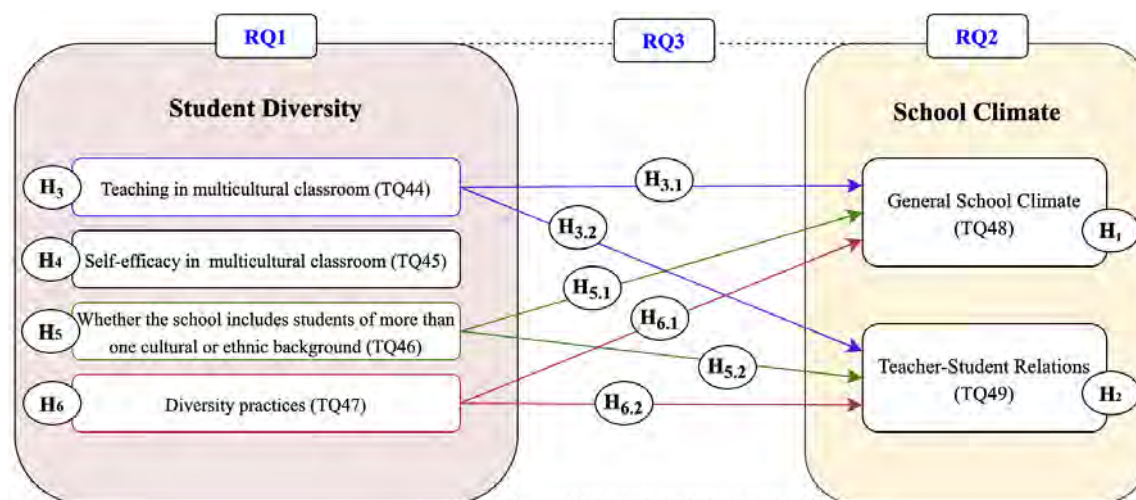
H_6: Diversity practices vary across countries.

   $H_{6.1}$: Diversity practices have a positive impact on the general school climate.

   $H_{6.2}$: Diversity practices have a positive impact on teacher-student relationships.

Regarding the RQs and the hypotheses developed above, the research model of the study is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Research Design

As depicted in Figure 1, the primary objectives of this study were to understand and compare the differences in student diversity (RQ1), school climate (RQ2), and diversity in schools in the Mediterranean region (RQ3). Accordingly, the variability of general school climate (H_1), teacher-student relations (H_2), teaching experience in multicultural classrooms (H_3: $H_{3.1}$, $H_{3.2}$), teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms (H_4), the presence of students from various ethnic backgrounds (H_5: $H_{5.1}$, $H_{5.2}$), and diversity practices (H_6: $H_{6.1}$, $H_{6.2}$) were tested in the schools of France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey in the research model.

Participating Countries

The sample of the study was determined from the internationally collected data of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 obtained from the OECD TALIS 2018 database (OECD, 2018a). The main goal of the TALIS is to offer reliable international indicators and analysis on teachers and teaching that is relevant to policymaking to assist nations and economies in reviewing and developing legislation that can foster beneficial conditions for both teaching and learning (Price & Carstens, 2020) over certain themes including diversity and school climate (Ainley & Carstens, 2018). Based on the availability and compatibility of the data, the participating countries were selected as France (FRA), Italy (ITA), Spain (SPA), and Turkey (TUR) located on the southern European coast representing the Mediterranean region. According to the World Bank (2021), the world's economies were classified into four groups of low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high-income countries. Accordingly, France, Italy, and Spain were determined as high-income economies ($13,205 or more) whereas Turkey was labelled as an upper-middle-income economy ($4,256 to $13,205) in the Mediterranean zone. Other than geographical and economic backgrounds, these countries show similarities in rich cultural heritage, migration flows they experience, the influence of multiculturalism, educational policies, focus on inclusive education, and efforts for intercultural understanding.

After the identification and extraction of the data belonging to France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey, the sample of the study comprised 41,789 teachers as listed in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographics of the Participating Countries

Country	Gender	n	%
France	Female	3,198	72.1%
	Male	1,237	27.9%
	Total	*4,435*	*10.6*
Italy	Female	2,809	77.8%
	Male	803	22.2%
	Total	*3,612*	*8.6*
Spain	Female	10,161	69.3%
	Male	4,492	30.7%
	Total	*14,653*	*35.1*
Turkey	Female	10,017	52.5%
	Male	9,072	47.5%
	Total	*19,089*	*45.7*
TOTAL		**41,789**	**100.0**

As presented in Table 1, of 41,789 teachers in the study sample, 4,435 participants were from France (10.6%), 3,612 from Italy (8.6%), 14,653 from Spain (35.1%), and 19,089 from Turkey (45.7%). Regarding the distribution of teachers by gender, the teachers surveyed in France comprised 3,198 female teachers, corresponding to 72.1% of the entire teacher population in the country sample, and 1,237 male participants, roughly 27.9% of the total. Out of a total of 3,612 teachers in Italy, 2,809 participants, making up about 77.8% of the teacher sample in the country were female while the number was 803 for male teachers, accounting for approximately 22.2% of the total. In Spain, female participants totalled 10,161, corresponding to 69.3% of the total teacher sample in the country; on the other hand, male teachers numbered 4,492, representing around 30.7% of the total. Finally, the study sample from Turkey constituted a majority with 10,017 female participants, accounting for approximately 52.5% of the total teacher sample in the country; in contrast, male teachers numbered 9,072 making up approximately 47.5% of the total.

Research Instrument

The teacher questionnaire of TALIS 2018 was used as the research instrument in the study (OECD, 2018b). The questions analysed in the study were selected from OECD (2019) as TQ44, TQ45, TQ46, TQ47, TQ48, and TQ49 in line with the RQs. TQ44 captured whether teachers taught in classrooms with students from different cultures, with options for "Yes/No" whereas TQ45$_{(A,B,C,D,E)}$ examined the extent to which teachers coped with challenges, adapted teaching, ensured collaboration among students from different backgrounds, raised awareness

for cultural differences, and reduced ethnic stereotyping in culturally diverse classrooms, with a range from "not at all" to "a lot". TQ46 assessed whether the school included students from more than one cultural or ethnic background, and TQ47$_{(A,B,C,D)}$ explored the implementation of diversity practices, offering options of "Yes/No". TQ48$_{(A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H)}$ evaluated aspects of school climate, including staff and parental participation, shared responsibility, collaborative culture, shared beliefs, consistent enforcement of rules, and encouragement of staff-led initiatives while TQ49$_{(A,B,C,D,E)}$ measured the agreement levels regarding teachers and students getting along well, teachers valuing student well-being, teacher interest in student opinions, provision of extra assistance, and teacher reliance on each other, with a 4-point Likert scale.

The results of the reliability analyses for TQ48 and TQ49 indicated that the Cronbach's Alpha value of the general school climate (TQ48) was calculated as 0.840 for FRA, 0.843 for ITA, 0.901 for SPA, and 0.941for TUR; in addition, regarding teacher-student relations (TQ49), it was detected as 0.812 for FRA, 0.811 for ITA, 0.839 for SPA, and 0.868 for TUR, which all validates the reliability of the research instrument.

Data Analysis

In the study, several statistical analyses were employed on SPSS for Windows 26.0 to explore different aspects of student diversity and school climate based on the views of teachers from different countries. Therefore, the data specifically determined to be used were extracted from the OECD TALIS 2018 database depending on the RQs and hypotheses developed in the study (OECD, 2018a). First, frequency analyses were conducted to establish the sample profile. Subsequently, to determine the reliability coefficients of the variables of TQ48 and TQ49, Cronbach's Alpha values were calculated for each participating country. Next, the chi-square test of independence to identify whether teaching in multicultural classrooms and countries randomly occurs together or whether there is an actual relationship in addition to independent samples t-test to identify differences between groups for the variables with two categories were performed to test H$_3$, H$_{3.1}$, H$_{3.2}$, H$_5$, H$_{5.1}$, H$_{5.2}$, and H$_6$. Regarding the variables with more than two groups, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to detect group differences to test H$_1$, H$_2$, and H$_4$. Based on the results of the ANOVA, post hoc tests were conducted to determine which specific pairs of groups differed from each other (H$_1$, H$_2$, and H$_4$). Finally, multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the impact of diversity practices on the general school climate and teacher-student relationships to test H$_{6.1}$ and H$_{6.2}$.

Results

Student Diversity Within and Across Participating Countries

To investigate RQ1 about the variability of student diversity, H$_3$, H$_4$, H$_5$, and H$_6$ were tested at this phase. First, the chi-square test of independence was utilized to identify if there might be a relationship between teaching in multicultural classrooms and countries. Table 2 represents the proportion of respondents in each country who reported teaching in a classroom with

students from different cultures (TQ44) and the percentage of classrooms and schools in each country with a diverse cultural or ethnic student population (TQ46).

Table 2

Variability of Student Diversity and Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms by Country

Items	France		Italy		Spain		Turkey	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Taught classroom with students from different cultures (**TQ44**)	63.8%	36.2%	70.2%	29.8%	81.6%	18.4%	45.7%	54.3%
$\chi2=4619.101$; p<.001								
School includes students of more than one cultural or ethnic background (**TQ46**)	71.3%	28.7%	85.7%	14.3%	89.9%	10.1%	48.6%	51.4%
$\chi2=7049.195$; p<.001								

As observed in Table 2, the stark differences in the percentages between countries indicated varying levels of exposure to multicultural classrooms among the teaching population. Spain and Italy had a relatively higher percentage of classrooms with such diversity while France and Turkey had a lower proportion (H_3: accepted). Regarding the percentage of classrooms and schools in each country that had a diverse cultural or ethnic student population (TQ46), France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey had different levels of cultural diversity in their educational settings, with Spain and Italy having the highest percentages of classrooms and schools with students from different cultures or ethnic backgrounds (H_5: accepted).

Subsequently, the variability of diversity practices (TQ47) was examined as part of RQ1 to test H_6. The results of the chi-square test of independence are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Variability of Diversity Practices by Country

TQ47	France		Italy		Spain		Turkey	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Encourage students' expression of diverse cultural identities	47.8%	52.2%	57.2%	42.8%	66.6%	33.4%	42.5%	57.5%
$\chi2=1347.998$; p<.001								
Organising multicultural events	27.7%	72.3%	33.2%	66.8%	48.1%	51.9%	27.5%	72.5%
$\chi2=1150.860$; p<.001								
Teaching students how to deal with ethnic and cultural discrimination	79.5%	20.5%	67.7%	32.3%	80.0%	20.0%	54.6%	45.4%
$\chi2=1796.629$; p<.001								
Adopting practices that integrate global themes via curriculum	65.8%	34.2%	76.2%	23.8%	76.8%	23.2%	52.0%	48.0%
$\chi2=1622.127$; p<.001								

As illustrated in Table 3, Spain had the highest percentage (66.60%) for encouraging students to express their diverse cultural identities, preceded by Italy (57.20%), France (47.80%), and Turkey (42.50%). As for organizing multicultural events, Spain also had the greatest proportion (48.10%), followed by Italy (33.20%), France (27.70%), and Turkey (27.50%). Concerning teaching students how to deal with ethnic and cultural discrimination, France had the highest percentage (79.50%), followed by Spain (80.00%), Italy (67.70%), and Turkey (54.60%). In terms of adopting practices that incorporate global themes into the curriculum, Spain had the highest percentage (76.80%), preceded by Italy (76.20%), France (65.80%), and Turkey (52.0%). Evidently, Spain tended to excel in encouraging cultural expression and organizing multicultural events whereas France stood out for addressing ethnic and cultural discrimination. Italy was notable for incorporating global themes into curricula. Turkey had comparatively lower percentages across all categories, suggesting a relatively lower emphasis on these diversity practices compared to the other countries listed (H_6: accepted).

Finally, ANOVA was conducted to determine the variability of teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms by country to test H_4. The ANOVA test is a statistical tool used to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of three or more independent groups. The results of the analysis are demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4

Variability of Teachers' Self-efficacy in Multicultural Classrooms by Country

Country	Cope with challenges of a multicultural classroom (TQ45A)	Adapt teaching to cultural diversity of students (TQ45B)	Ensure that students with w/out migration background work together (TQ45C)	Raise awareness for cultural differences amongst students (TQ45D)	Reduce ethnic stereotyping amongst students (TQ45E)
France	2.727 ± 0.598	2.704 ± 0.664	3.305 ± 0.588	2.970 ± 0.702	3.188 ± 0.638
Italy	2.838 ± 0.486	2.857 ± 0.497	2.971 ± 0.730	3.335 ± 0.534	3.335 ± 0.584
Spain	2.695 ± 0.650	2.692 ± 0.661	3.126 ± 0.636	3.070 ± 0.686	3.255 ± 0.638
Turkey	2.673 ± 0.514	2.647 ± 0.514	2.852 ± 0.612	2.899 ± 0.529	3.169 ± 0.508
F(p)	88.332 (0.000)	133.087 (0.000)	895.209 (0.000)	606.736 (0.000)	118.824 (0.000)
Difference	All	All except FRA and SPA	All	All	All

In Table 4, it was indicated that all 5 sub-dimensions that made up teacher self-efficacy varied according to countries ($p < 0.05$ for TQ45A, TQ45B, TQ45C, TQ45D, and TQ45E). After conducting an ANOVA test, post hoc comparisons are used when ANOVA indicates that there are significant differences between group means. The purpose is to pinpoint exactly which groups differ from each other because ANOVA only explains that there is a significant difference among the groups but does not specify in which pairs it exists. Therefore, post hoc tests are performed to identify the specific pairs of groups with significant differences in their means and provide a more detailed understanding of the data. Therefore, Tukey post hoc

analysis was carried out to reveal the source of this difference for each sub-dimension. The results detected significant differences among the countries for all of the sub-dimensions of teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms (all p-values<.001). Post hoc comparisons proved that there were significant differences between all countries for the dimensions of "coping with challenges of a multicultural classroom", "adapting teaching to cultural diversity of students", "ensuring that students with/without migration background work together", "raising awareness for cultural differences among students", and "reducing ethnic stereotyping among students". Specifically, France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey showed statistically significant differences in all of the five sub-dimensions compared to each other. However, France and Spain did not differ significantly from each other and were distinct from the other countries in all sub-dimensions except the adaptation of teaching to the cultural diversity of students. Teachers from Italy had the highest self-efficacy in "coping with challenges of a multicultural classroom", while teachers from France were the best among other countries in "ensuring that students with/without migration background work together". Italian teachers were good at raising awareness for cultural differences amongst students" and "reducing ethnic stereotyping amongst students" (H_4: accepted).

School Climate Within and Across Participating Countries

ANOVA was conducted to examine the variability of general school climate (H_1) and teacher-student relations (H_2) across different countries to address RQ2. For the general school climate, a significant difference was found among the countries ($F_{(3.41785)}$=54.822; p<.001). Therefore, post hoc comparisons proved that there were significant differences between all countries as demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5
Variability of School Climate by Country

Items	Country	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	F	p
General School Climate **(TQ48)**	France	4,435	2.801	0.464	54.822	0.000
	Italy	3,612	2.815	0.427		<u>Difference</u>
	Spain	14,653	2.907	0.534		All except
	Turkey	19,089	2.879	0.626		FRA and ITA
	Total	*41,789*	*2.875*	*0.565*		
Teacher-Student Relations **(TQ49)**	France	4,435	3.266	0.441	481.272	0.000
	Italy	3,612	3.157	0.430		<u>Difference</u>
	Spain	14,653	3.311	0.461		All
	Turkey	19,089	3.118	0.516		
	Total	*41,789*	*3.205*	*0.491*		

Accordingly, France had the lowest mean score ($\bar{X}$=2.801) whereas Spain had the highest mean score ($\bar{X}$ = 2.907) for the general school climate. All the countries except France and Italy differed significantly from each other in terms of the general school climate (H_1: accepted).

Regarding teacher-student relations, a significant difference was also observed among the countries $(F_{(3.41785)}=481.272; p<.001)$. Post hoc comparisons indicated that there were significant differences between all the countries. Turkey had the lowest mean score ($\bar{X}=3.118$) while Spain had the highest mean score ($\bar{X}=3.311$) for teacher-student relations. All the countries differed significantly from each other in terms of teacher-student relations (H_2: accepted).

Evident Relationships Between Student Diversity and School Climate by Country

To address RQ3, the variability of student diversity according to school climate was investigated through the independent sample t-test ($H_{3.1}$, $H_{3.2}$, $H_{5.1}$, and $H_{5.2}$), and the effect of student diversity on school climate was examined via multiple regression analysis ($H_{6.1}$ and $H_{6.2}$). The independent samples t-test is a statistical method used to compare the means of two independent groups to determine if there is a significant difference between them whereas multiple regression analysis explores the relationship between one dependent variable and multiple independent variables to understand how each independent variable contributes to changes in the dependent variable. First, the independent sample t-test was used to determine whether the general school climate differs according to teaching experience in multicultural classrooms, and the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Variability of General School Climate According to Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms

TQ48 / Country	Teaching Experience in Multicultural Classrooms	n	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	t (p)
France	Yes	2,682	2.805 ± 0.486	1.414 (0.157)
	No	1,523	2.784 ± 0.457	
Italy	Yes	2,472	2.822 ± 0.426	-1.298 (0.194)
	No	1,050	2.792 ± 0.445	
Spain	Yes	11,819	2.917 ± 0.537	1.888 (0.059)
	No	2,663	2.861 ± 0.533	
Turkey	Yes	8,618	2.863 ± 0.638	1.028 (0.304)
	No	10,253	2.892 ± 0.620	

As observed in Table 6, school climate did not vary according to teaching experience in multicultural classes ($p>0.05$) ($H_{3.1}$: rejected). Next, the independent sample t-test was used to determine whether the teacher-student relationship differs according to teaching in multicultural classrooms, and the results are demonstrated in Table 7.

Table 7

Variability of Teacher-student Relations According to Teaching in Multicultural Classrooms

TQ49 / Country	Teaching Experience in Multicultural Classrooms	n	X̄ ± SD	t (p)
France	Yes	2,682	3.263 ± 0.451	4.916 (0.000)
	No	1,523	3.282 ± 0.455	
Italy	Yes	2,472	3.161 ± 0.438	-3.538 (0.000)
	No	1,050	3.144 ± 0.429	
Spain	Yes	11,819	3.306 ± 0.465	-3.098 (0.002)
	No	2,663	3.341 ± 0.454	
Turkey	Yes	8,618	3.110 ± 0.527	-1.713 (0.087)
	No	10,253	3.123 ± 0.509	

As evident in Table 7, the teacher-student relationship in Turkey did not vary according to teaching experience in multicultural classrooms ($p > 0.05$). On the other hand, the teacher-student relationship in Italy was more positive if the teacher was experienced in teaching in multicultural classrooms ($p < 0.05$). Conversely, in France and Spain, the teacher-student relationship declined the variability of teaching experience in multicultural classrooms ($H_{3.2}$: partially accepted).

Moreover, the independent sample t-test was used to determine the variability of the general school climate according to whether there is more than one ethnic student in the school, and the results are listed in Table 8.

Table 8

Variability of General School Climate According to the Presence of More Than One Ethnicity in the School

TQ48 / Country	Presence of more than one ethnicity in the school	n	X̄ ± SD	t (p)
France	Yes	2,988	2.801 ± 0.489	0.943 (0.346)
	No	1,203	2.787 ± 0.442	
Italy	Yes	3,022	2.814 ± 0.420	0.146 (0.884)
	No	504	2.811 ± 0.500	
Spain	Yes	13,013	2.916 ± 0.535	6.026 (0.000)
	No	1,464	2.827 ± 0.548	
Turkey	Yes	9,186	2.835 ± 0.636	-9.253 (0.000)
	No	9,710	2.920 ± 0.619	

In Table 8, it was detected that the general school climate in France and Italy did not vary depending on whether there were students from more than one ethnicity in the school ($p > 0.05$). On the other hand, the presence of students from more than one ethnicity in Spain increased the general school climate whereas it decreased in Turkey ($H_{5.1}$: partially accepted). The

independent sample t-test was also used to determine the variability of the teacher-student relationship according to whether there are students from more than one ethnic origin in the school, and the results of the analysis are demonstrated in Table 9.

Table 9

Variability of Teacher-student Relationship According to the Presence of More Than One Ethnicity in the School

TQ49 / Country	Presence of more than one ethnicity in the school	n	$\bar{X} \pm SD$	t (p)
France	Yes	2,988	3.266 ± 0.449	-0.850 (0.395)
	No	1,203	3.279 ± 0.462	
Italy	Yes	3,022	3.152 ± 0.432	-1.360 (0.174)
	No	504	3.180 ± 0.453	
Spain	Yes	13,013	3.313 ± 0.462	0.136 (0.892)
	No	1,464	3.311 ± 0.470	
Turkey	Yes	9,186	3.093 ± 0.518	-6.294 (0.000)
	No	9,710	3.140 ± 0.516	

As a result of the t-test analysis, the presence of students from more than one ethnicity in the school did not affect the teacher-student relationship in France, Italy, and Spain (p>.05); however, the teacher-student relationship decreased in Turkey if there were more than one ethnicity in the school ($H_{5.2}$: partially accepted).

Finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted separately for each country to determine the impact of cultural diversity practices on the general school climate, and the findings of the regression analysis are presented in Table 10.

Table 10

The Effect of Cultural Diversity Practices on General School Climate by Country*

Items	France			Italy			Spain			Turkey		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
(Constant)		37.143	0.000		35.065	0.000		86.454	0.000		70.352	0.000
TQ44	0.018	1.028	0.304	0.028	1.523	0.128	-0.008	-0.921	0.357	-0.021	-2.411	**0.016**
TQ45A	0.010	0.586	0.558	0.029	1.371	0.170	0.025	2.345	**0.019**	0.007	0.780	0.435
TQ45B	0.029	1.543	0.123	0.064	2.978	**0.003**	0.036	3.317	**0.001**	0.026	2.796	**0.005**
TQ45C	0.087	4.930	**0.000**	-0.011	-0.652	0.514	0.052	5.504	**0.000**	0.045	5.185	**0.000**
TQ45D	-0.010	-0.538	0.591	0.056	2.721	**0.007**	0.012	1.185	0.236	0.001	0.083	0.933
TQ45E	0.047	2.606	**0.009**	-0.001	-0.070	0.944	0.032	3.110	**0.002**	0.018	2.031	**0.042**
TQ46	-0.006	-0.354	0.723	0.013	0.757	0.449	-0.010	-1.209	0.227	0.012	1.351	0.177
TQ47A	-0.081	-4.899	**0.000**	-0.121	-6.656	**0.000**	-0.113	-12.552	**0.000**	-0.062	-6.450	**0.000**
TQ47B	-0.058	-3.528	**0.000**	-0.044	-2.460	**0.014**	-0.063	-7.205	**0.000**	0.001	0.060	0.952
TQ47C	-0.072	-4.566	**0.000**	-0.101	-5.677	**0.000**	-0.114	-12.821	**0.000**	-0.114	-12.543	**0.000**
TQ47D	-0.065	-4.190	**0.000**	-0.112	-6.331	**0.000**	-0.148	-16.825	**0.000**	-0.106	-11.616	**0.000**
F	22.379			33.000			199.668			124.028		
p	.000			.000			.000			.000		
Adj. R^2	0.050			0.089			0.130			0.066		
DW	1.597			1.881			1.738			1.759		

*The increasing codes assigned to TQ44 and TQ47 within the original dataset are indicative of a progressively unfavourable situation. Consequently, a negative coefficient signifies a contrary positive impact.

According to the results, cultural diversity practices positively influenced the general school climate in all the countries. The models established for each country were statistically significant (p<0.05). In France, "ensuring that students with and without a migrant background work together" (β=.087; p<.01), "reducing ethnic stereotyping amongst students" (β=.087; p<.01), and all diversity practices (TQ47) had a positive impact on the school climate. In Italy, "adapting teaching to the cultural diversity of students" (β=.064; p<.01), "raising awareness for cultural differences amongst students" (β=.056, p<.01), and all diversity practices (TQ47) positively influenced the school climate. In Spain, "ensuring that students with/without a migrant background work together" (β=.025; p<.01), "adapting teaching to the cultural diversity of students" (β=.036; p<.01), "ensuring that students with/without a migrant background work together" (β=.052; p<.01), "reducing ethnic stereotyping amongst students" (β=.064, p<.01), and all diversity practices (TQ47) positively affected the school climate. Finally, in Turkey, "teaching in a classroom with students from different cultures", "adapting teaching to the cultural diversity of students", "ensuring that students with/without a migrant background work together", and "reducing ethnic stereotyping amongst students" positively impacted the school climate. Additionally, except from "organizing multicultural events", other diversity practices also had a positive impact on the school climate ($H_{6.1}$: accepted).

To test $H_{6.2}$, multiple regression analyses were conducted separately for each country to examine the impact of cultural diversity practices on teacher-student relations. The findings of the regression analysis are presented in Table 11.

Table 11

The Effect of Cultural Diversity Practices on Teacher-student Relations by Country*

Items	France			Italy			Spain			Turkey		
	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p	β	t	p
(Constant)		42.535	**0.000**		34.684	**0.000**		91.107	**0.000**		78.973	**0.000**
TQ44	0.056	3.088	**0.002**	0.039	2.065	**0.039**	0.051	5.958	**0.000**	-0.033	-3.752	**0.000**
TQ45A	-0.010	-0.586	0.558	0.030	1.403	0.161	0.028	2.544	**0.011**	0.032	3.625	**0.000**
TQ45B	0.015	0.774	0.439	0.022	0.986	0.324	0.024	2.205	**0.027**	0.010	1.062	0.288
TQ45C	0.097	5.458	**0.000**	-0.001	-0.031	0.975	0.093	9.544	**0.000**	0.044	5.045	**0.000**
TQ45D	-0.009	-0.481	0.631	0.096	4.584	**0.000**	0.034	3.343	**0.001**	0.021	2.203	**0.028**
TQ45E	0.043	2.317	**0.021**	0.016	0.865	0.387	0.066	6.187	**0.000**	0.052	5.810	**0.000**
TQ46	0.009	0.556	0.578	0.035	2.091	**0.037**	0.008	0.963	0.336	0.014	1.612	0.107
TQ47A	-0.029	-1.730	0.084	-0.064	-3.458	**0.001**	-0.058	-6.318	**0.000**	-0.035	-3.599	**0.000**
TQ47B	-0.047	-2.841	**0.005**	-0.027	-1.512	0.131	-0.024	-2.664	**0.008**	0.002	0.161	0.872
TQ47C	-0.061	-3.858	**0.000**	-0.080	-4.427	**0.000**	-0.080	-8.710	**0.000**	-0.086	-9.346	**0.000**
TQ47D	-0.047	-3.005	**0.003**	-0.080	-4.441	**0.000**	-0.099	-10.959	**0.000**	-0.064	-6.936	**0.000**
F	12.309			18.152			123.343			78.619		
p	.000[b]			.000[c]			.000[d]			.000[e]		
r2	0.027			0.050			0.084			0.043		
DW	1.736			1.811			1.817			1.855		

*The increasing codes assigned to TQ44 and TQ47 within the original dataset are indicative of a progressively unfavourable situation. Consequently, a negative coefficient signifies a contrary positive impact.

The model established for France was statistically significant (p<.001) accounting for 2.7% of the variance in teacher-student relations. In France, the results indicated that among the individual predictor variables, "ensuring that students with/without a migrant background work together" (β=.087; p<.01) and "reducing ethnic stereotyping amongst students" (β=.047; p<.01) demonstrated a significant positive relationship with teacher-student relations. Conversely, "teaching in a classroom with students from different cultures" (β=.018; p>.05), "coping with the challenges of a multicultural classroom" (β=.010; p>.05), "adapting teaching to the cultural diversity of students" (β=.029; p>.05), and "raising awareness for cultural differences amongst students" (β=-0.010; p>.05) did not exhibit significant associations. Regarding the cultural diversity practices, positive associations were observed for "supporting activities or organizations that encourage students' expression of diverse ethnic and cultural identities" (β=-0.081; p<.01), "organizing multicultural events" (β=-0.058; p<.01), "teaching students how to deal with ethnic and cultural discrimination" (β=-0.072; p<.01), and "adopting teaching and learning practices that integrate global issues throughout the curriculum" (β=-0.065; p<.01).

The model employed for Italy was statistically significant (p<.001) accounting for 5.0% of the variance in teacher-student relations. In Italy, "teaching in a classroom with students from different cultures" (β=.039; p<.05), "whether the school includes students of more than one cultural or ethnic background" (β=.035; p<.05), and "raising awareness for cultural differences amongst students" (β=.096; p<.05) demonstrated a significant positive relationship with teacher-student relations. On the other hand, "coping with challenges of a multicultural classroom" (β=.030; p>.05), "adapting teaching to the cultural diversity of students" (β=.022; p>.05), "ensuring that students with/without a migrant background work together" (β=-.001; p>.05), and "reducing ethnic stereotyping amongst students" (β=.016; p>.05) did not exhibit significant associations. Regarding cultural diversity practices, positive associations were observed for "supporting activities or organizations that encourage students' expression of diverse ethnic and cultural identities" (β=-.064; p<001), "teaching students how to deal with ethnic and cultural discrimination" (β=-.080; p<.001), and "adopting teaching and learning practices that integrate global issues throughout the curriculum" (β=-.080; p<.001).

The model developed for Spain was statistically significant (p<.001) accounting for 8.4% of the variance in teacher-student relations. In Spain, only "whether the school includes students of more than one cultural or ethnic background" did not have a significant impact on teacher-student relations (β=.008; p>.05). All the other variables, which are "teaching in a classroom with students from different cultures", "self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms" ($TQ45_{A,B,C,D,E}$), and diversity practices ($TQ47_{A,B,C,D}$) had a positive impact on teacher-student relations in Spain.

The final model established for Turkey was statistically significant (p<.001) accounting for 4.3% of the variance in teacher-student relations. In Turkey, "teaching in a classroom with students from different cultures" (β=-.033; p<.05) positively influenced teacher-student relations. "Coping with the challenges of a multicultural classroom" (β=0.032; p<.001), "ensuring that students with/without a migrant background work together" (β=0.044; p<.001), "raising awareness for cultural differences amongst students" (β=0.021; p<.05), and "reducing ethnic stereotyping amongst students" (β=0.052; p<.001) also exhibited significant positive associations. Regarding cultural diversity practices, positive associations were observed for "supporting activities or organizations that encourage students' expression of diverse ethnic and cultural identities" (β=-0.035; p<.001), "teaching students how to deal with ethnic and cultural discrimination" (β=-0.086; p<.001), and "adopting teaching and learning practices that integrate global issues throughout the curriculum" (β=-0.064; p<.001) ($H_{6.2}$: accepted).

To sum up, based on the research design of this study, the differences in student diversity (RQ1), school climate (RQ2), and diversity in schools in the Mediterranean region (RQ3) were investigated through the variability of general school climate (H_1), teacher-student relations (H_2), teaching experience in multicultural classrooms (H_3: $H_{3.1}$, $H_{3.2}$), teachers' self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms (H_4), the presence of students from various ethnic backgrounds (H_5: $H_{5.1}$, $H_{5.2}$), and diversity practices (H_6: $H_{6.1}$, $H_{6.2}$) in the schools of France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey. The summarized results are presented in Table 12.

Table 12

Overall Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	p-value	Decision
H_1: The general school climate varies across countries.	All countries<0.001	Accepted
H_2: Teacher-student relationships vary across countries.	All countries<0.001	Accepted
H_3: Teaching experience in multicultural classrooms varies across countries.	All countries <0.01	Accepted
$H_{3.1}$: The general school climate in countries differs based on teaching experience in multicultural classrooms.	All countries>0.05	Rejected
$H_{3.2}$: Teacher-student relationships in countries differ based on teaching experience in multicultural classrooms.	Turkey>0.05 Other countries<0.01	Rejected for Turkey Accepted for France, Italy, and Spain
H_4: The self-efficacy of teachers teaching multicultural classrooms varies across countries.	All countries<0.001	Accepted
H_5: The presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds in the school varies across countries.	All countries<0.01	Accepted
$H_{5.1}$: The general school climate in countries differs based on the presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds in the school.	France>0.05 Italy>0.05 Spain<0.01 Turkey<0.01	Rejected for France and Italy Accepted for Turkey and Spain
$H_{5.2}$: Teacher-student relationships in countries differ based on the presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds in the school.	France>0.05 Italy>0.05 Spain >0.05 Turkey<0.01	Accepted only for Turkey Rejected for other countries
H_6: Diversity practices vary across countries.	All countries<0.01	Accepted
$H_{6.1}$: Diversity practices have a positive impact on the general school climate.	All countries<0.01	Accepted
$H_{6.2}$: Diversity practices have a positive impact on teacher-student relationships.	All countries <0.01	Accepted

Discussion

This study sought to determine the degree to which student diversity and school climate differ within and among France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey by examining and comparing the effects of student diversity on school climate in these selected Mediterranean nations. The results revealed several significant findings. Firstly, evident variations were detected in the general school climate, teacher-student relationships, teaching experience in multicultural classrooms, self-efficacy of teachers, and the presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds among the countries (H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4, and H_5). These findings align with prior research in the field (Dawes et al., 2020; Rasheed et al., 2020; Thapa et al., 2013; Voight & Nation, 2016). Spain and Italy had a higher proportion of classrooms with diverse cultural or ethnic student populations compared to France and Turkey (H_3 and H_5). Consistently, as stated by Patiño-Santos and Rubinstein (2012), "Spain shows a wide variety of communities", which can contribute to a rich and multicultural learning environment in Spanish schools by fostering interactions and exchanges among students from different backgrounds. Similarly, due to the

number of immigrant students in Italian schools resulting in more heterogeneous student populations, it was reported that teachers in Italy were in great need of professional development for teaching in multicultural settings (Forghani-Arani et al., 2019).

Furthermore, diversity practices differed among the countries, with Spain excelling in cultural expression and multicultural events, France addressing discrimination, Italy incorporating global themes, and Turkey showing a relatively lower emphasis on diversity practices (H_6). These findings align with previous research highlighting the importance of diversity practices in promoting inclusive and tolerant school environments (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022; Karacabey et al., 2019; Thapa et al., 2013; Voight & Nation, 2016).

Post hoc analyses revealed significant differences in coping with challenges of multicultural classrooms, adapting teaching to cultural diversity, raising awareness for cultural differences, and reducing ethnic stereotyping among students across the four countries. France and Spain were similar in most sub-dimensions, while Italy displayed high self-efficacy in coping with challenges, and France excelled in ensuring collaboration between students with/without migration backgrounds (H_4). Consistently, Romijn and colleagues (2020) detected that the variance of Italian teachers' self-efficacy related to diversity was a little higher compared to the other countries, which is consistent with the results of this study. Regarding intercultural education in France, Akkari and Radhouane (2022) highlighted the centralized system in France about "strategies dealing with cultural diversity in the school" and the creation of "integration classes" in France for students from different cultures to provide intercultural, linguistic, and social support.

The general school climate varied among countries, with France and Italy differing significantly from the others (H_1). As confirmed by Dawes and colleagues (2020) and Khairutdinova and fellows (2022), a positive school climate is significant for student well-being, academic achievement, and social-emotional development. It was also detected that teacher-student relationships also varied, with Turkey having the lowest mean score and Spain having the highest (H_2). Strong teacher-student relationships have been associated with positive student outcomes, including engagement, motivation, and academic success (Rasheed et al., 2020; Thapa et al., 2013). In Turkey, despite the paucity of research that specifically examines the learning environment from the perspective of diversity, a significant tendency was detected for inclusive education practices (Sarigoz, 2019). While the diversity of students in Turkish schools presents chances for cross-cultural interaction and tolerance, it can also create problems because of linguistic and cultural barriers. Turkey is working to promote inclusive practices and cultivate welcoming school environments (Karacabey et al., 2019). According to Basbay and Bektas (2009), teachers in Turkey need to be aware of students' values, possess the knowledge and abilities to integrate cultural differences, and update the classroom environment, instructional strategies, and learning and teaching methods to meet the needs of the students by emphasizing the need for educational opportunities to help students internalize multiculturalism, particularly in institutions that prepare teachers.

Regarding the relationship between teaching experience in multicultural classrooms and teacher-student relationships, Italy showed a more positive association, while France and Spain displayed a decline in the relationship with increasing teaching experience ($H_{3.2}$). According to these findings, teachers working in multicultural classrooms require continuous professional development and assistance to successfully navigate the difficulties and build strong relationships with their students (Forghani-Arani et al., 2019). A decline was explored in the association between teacher-student relationships and teaching experience in multicultural classrooms in France and Spain, which suggests that the ability of teachers in these nations to build effective relationships with students from different backgrounds may have decreased as they gained more experience. These results underline the necessity of ongoing assistance and instruction for teachers in France and Spain to give them the knowledge and abilities to develop lasting relationships with their students throughout their careers as educators.

The presence of students from multiple ethnic backgrounds in the school influenced the general school climate differently, and an increasing trend was detected in Spain, but it was decreasing in Turkey ($H_{5.1}$). Similarly, it was also revealed that the teacher-student relationship was negatively affected by the presence of multiple ethnicities in Turkey, but not in France, Italy, and Spain ($H_{5.2}$). In other words, in Turkey, the interaction between students and teachers was negatively impacted by the presence of various ethnic groups in the classrooms. This could be because Turkish teachers' relationships with students from different cultures may be influenced negatively as a result of the difficulties teachers may encounter when working with students from various ethnic backgrounds. In contrast, the presence of multiple ethnicities in the schools of France, Italy, and Spain did not significantly impact the relationship between students and teachers, which may result from teachers' development of the necessary methods and strategies to successfully manage the diversity of their classrooms and strong interactions with students from different ethnic backgrounds. These findings revealed the complex dynamics between student diversity, school climate, and teacher-student relationships, which suggests the need for inclusive practices and strategies promoting positive interactions and cultural understanding among students from diverse backgrounds (Hoti et al., 2017; Khairutdinova et al., 2022).

The models established for each country identified specific factors that positively influenced the school climate and teacher-student relationships ($H_{6.1}$ and $H_{6.2}$), which aligns with the existing literature. A supportive environment at school promotes the growth of positive relationships between students and teachers and the effective management of behavioural and psychological issues; therefore, a welcoming learning environment is critical for diverse student populations (Hoti et al., 2017; Khairutdinova et al., 2022; Thapa et al., 2013).

In conclusion, the findings of the present study demonstrated several notable differences in school climate, teacher-student interactions, teaching experience, student diversity, and diversity practices among France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey. These results contribute to the understanding of the intricate interactions between student diversity and school climate in Mediterranean countries. Hence, it is significant to promote inclusive educational

environments in schools and implement effective diversity practices to foster positive school climates and enhance teacher-student relationships.

Conclusion

In summary, this study explored the significant variations in school climate, teacher-student relationships, teaching experience, student diversity, and diversity practices among France, Italy, Spain, and Turkey. Accordingly, some important practical implications can be recommended to educators, policymakers, and researchers. The results indicate that teachers need specialized professional development programs to improve their ability to teach in multicultural environments and to satisfy the requirements of various student populations. Moreover, the differences in diversity practices among the countries underscored the importance of implementing inclusive policies and strategies promoting cultural expression, addressing discrimination, and incorporating global themes in curricula as detected in Spain, France, and Italy, which can serve as valuable examples for other countries exploring to enhance their diversity practices. Additionally, regarding the variations in school climate and teacher-student relationships, it is a requirement for practitioners and teachers to foster positive and inclusive learning environments. Therefore, educators and school administrators should prioritize creating supportive school climates that should promote student well-being, academic achievement, and social-emotional development for all. Strong teacher-student relationships should be built and teachers should be provided with the necessary support and professional development to navigate the challenges of multicultural classrooms. It is also essential for education systems to invest in teacher training programs that equip educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources including cultural competency training, intercultural communication skills development, and strategies for creating inclusive learning environments to effectively teach in diverse classrooms.

For future investigations, it would be valuable to explore the long-term effects of diversity practices on student outcomes, and the role of specific interventions and policies in enhancing school climate and teacher-student relationships. Additionally, examining the perspectives and experiences of students, parents, and school administrators regarding diversity and their influence on school climate can provide further insights into the dynamics of diverse educational settings.

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