



SCIENCE, BELONGING AND FUTURE POSSIBILITY: A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY OF A SECOND-GENERATION ALBANIAN STUDENT IN GREECE

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Abstract:

This article explores how Alba, a 19-year-old second-generation Albanian student living in Athens Greece, narrates school science, wider schooling and future educational possibility within the Greek education system. Building on the framework proposed by Altunbas, Mulcahy and Reiss (2024), the study combines self-determination theory with Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field. The study is a qualitative single-case, participatory narrative inquiry based on semi-structured interviews with Alba, her mother Ana, and a contextual interview with Sister Maria, a Catholic religious sister whose congregation supports Albanian and other immigrant families in Athens. Narrative analysis shows that the case is organised around four tensions: strong Albanian identification alongside practical attachment to Athens; educational aspiration shaped by family sacrifice but constrained by high-stakes examinations and economic limits; school belonging produced through multicultural peer life but weakened by institutional neglect; and a relationship to school science marked by early practical curiosity but later passive teaching, limited laboratory work and almost no institutional use of STEM language. The analysis argues that science education was not rejected because it lacked value. Rather, science failed to become a meaningful field for competence, autonomy and relatedness. Science capital remained thin because it was weakly present in in-home networks, school trips, teacher practices, community support and institutional guidance. The case extends research on Albanian-origin youth in Greece by placing school science within broader narratives of citizenship, language, belonging, religious-community support, institutional recognition and social mobility.

Keywords: Albanian immigrant students; Athens; science education; STEM aspirations; narrative inquiry; self-determination theory; Bourdieu; science capital; bicultural identity

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1. Introduction

In many countries, science education is positioned as both a public good and an individual route to future opportunity, yet continuing with science after it ceases to be compulsory is often connected to national concerns about producing future scientists, engineers and technically skilled citizens (Li & Guo, 2021). For students, however, the meaning of science is rarely singular, and as a result their attitudes towards science cannot be understood simply by asking whether they like or dislike the subject (Potvin & Hasni, 2014). Attitudes include confidence, enjoyment, engagement, self-efficacy, experiences of lessons, relations with teachers and peers, and beliefs about whether a science-related future feels possible or desirable (Osborne *et al.*, 2003; Potvin & Hasni, 2014; Reid, 2006). These dimensions may move in different directions where a student may achieve high marks while feeling little sense of belonging in science; may enjoy experiments but reject a science career; may see science as useful but experience lessons as alienating; or may pursue science because it is valued by parents rather than because it is intrinsically enjoyable (Potvin & Hasni, 2014).

The experiences of second-generation immigrant students add another layer to understanding of science. For some immigrant families, education and science can hold strong practical value because they are imagined as routes to security, respectability and social mobility (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Salikutluk, 2016; Sikora & Pokropek, 2021). High expectations may coexist with linguistic insecurity along with discrimination or uncertainty about whether the host society will recognise a young person's cultural and educational capital.

This article focuses on Alba, a 19-year-old second-generation Albanian student living in Athens who has completed Greek secondary schooling and is now studying a two-year course in accounting and logistics while also working part-time. Her narrative is read alongside the narrative of her mother, Ana, and a contextual community interview with Sister Maria, a Catholic religious sister whose congregation works closely with Albanian immigrant families and children in Athens.

Much of the available research on Albanian-origin young people in Greece has focused on language shift, integration, citizenship and bicultural identity (Gogonas, 2009; Michail & King, 2024; Spyropoulou & Musaraj, 2025; Stergiou, 2018) and while those studies are essential for understanding the educational field in which Albanian Greek students are positioned, those studies have not placed students' experiences of school and more specifically experiences of school science at the centre. In this study, I am to address that gap by asking how science education is narrated within a wider educational biography, how school science is experienced, how it is linked to family expectations, whether it is associated with belonging or exclusion, and how it enters the student's imagined future. In this study I adapt the framework proposed by Altunbas *et al.* (2024), which combines Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory with Bourdieu's theory of capital, habitus and field and I also extend the approach used in Xhuxhi's narrative study of a Chinese immigrant student in a British school in Spain, where science aspiration was

shown to combine competence, family support, pragmatic future planning and the continuing influence of earlier educational dispositions (Xhuxhi, 2026).

The aim of this study is not to generalise from one student to all Albanian-origin students in Greece, but rather it is to examine in depth how one young person, her mother and a community support informant make sense of school science and general education. The case is interpretive and narrative in that I ask how the participants organise experience, which turning points they identify, what they value, which tensions they leave unresolved, and how they position Alba in relation to Greek schooling, Albanian identity, family aspiration, Catholic community support and future possibility.

The principal research questions are:

- 1) How does a second-generation Albanian student living in Athens narrate their perceptions and experiences of science education and wider schooling in Greece?
- 2) How are competence, relatedness, autonomy and forms of controlled or autonomous motivation expressed in the students' and parents' accounts?
- 3) How do Albanian migration history, home language, citizenship and belonging, peer and teacher relations, parental expectations, family resources and community support shape the value assigned to science, STEM and future education?

2. Literature review

2.1 Attitudes towards science as a multidimensional construct

The notion of attitude has long been used to describe a learned orientation through which individuals evaluate and respond to objects, situations and practices (Allport, 1935; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In science education, attitudes include feelings, beliefs and values about science as a discipline, school science, the social consequences of science and scientists themselves (Osborne *et al.*, 2003). Reid (2006) distinguishes affective, cognitive and behavioural dimensions, while Potvin and Hasni (2014) identify enjoyment, motivation, self-efficacy, engagement and sociological variables as recurring components in studies of science attitudes. This multidimensionality matters for the present study because the student might describe science as useful but difficult, enjoyable but poorly taught, important for employment but not part of their identity, or associated with parental hopes but not personal autonomy. Treating science as a school subject, a form of cultural capital and a possible future career helps avoid flattening these differences, and it also allows us to ask not only whether the student likes science, but what kind of relationship to science is being narrated.

The distinction between science as discipline, school subject and career is especially significant in a secondary school context. School science is embedded in curriculum, assessment, teacher expectations and peer cultures (Avraamidou, 2020). A student's fascination with natural phenomena may not translate into a desire to continue with science if lessons are experienced as abstract, examination-driven or socially marginalizing (Avraamidou, 2020). Conversely, a student may pursue science because it is valued as a secure credential even where intrinsic enjoyment is limited. Science identity

is therefore better understood as a process of becoming, shaped by recognition, emotions and imagined futures (Avraamidou, 2020).

2.2 Immigrant aspirations, pragmatism and science capital

Research on immigrant educational aspirations often points to high expectations among immigrant families. Kao and Tienda (1995) described this as immigrant optimism, while later work has examined how aspirations may also be shaped by the desire to improve social status, overcome blocked opportunities or secure a stable future (Salikutluk, 2016; Sikora & Pokropek, 2021). For immigrant-origin students, science and STEM may be seen as particularly valuable because scientific and technical qualifications appear to travel across national borders and to carry labour-market value beyond a single local context (Sikora & Pokropek, 2021).

A science-capital perspective directs attention to the science-related knowledge, experiences, dispositions, contacts and qualifications available to the student and family (Archer *et al.*, 2012; DeWitt & Archer, 2015). In immigrant families, science capital may be unevenly distributed. Parents may be highly committed to education but lack detailed knowledge of the host country's curriculum, subject choices or university routes. A family may possess strong aspirational capital and emotional support, while having limited institutional capital within the school system. Conversely, students may acquire science capital through teachers, peers, extracurricular activities or digital resources rather than through family science networks.

The wider Albanian context also shows the pragmatic value attached to education and mobility, King and Gëdeshi (2023) found that Albanian students abroad often understood international higher education in relation to future careers, better qualifications and access to a wider labour market. The survey of King and Gëdeshi (2023) showed that the prospect of an international career and the desire to study at a recognised university were major motivations for study abroad. Although the present study concerns an Albanian-origin student educated in Greece rather than a student leaving Albania for university, the broader pattern is relevant, education is often narrated as a route to mobility, security and recognition, and STEM fields may be imagined as especially convertible forms of capital.

2.3 Albanian migration to Greece and the second-generation field

Albanian migration to Greece began in large numbers in the early 1990s after the collapse of the communist regime in Albania. Greece, previously understood largely as a country of emigration, became a destination country, and Albanians became the largest immigrant group in the country (Aspasios & Nikas, 2021; Gogonas, 2009). The social positioning of Albanians in Greece has been shaped by both economic incorporation and stigma. Gogonas (2009) describes how Greek media and public discourse often represented Albanians through negative stereotypes, including criminality, poverty, backwardness and threat. These stereotypes affected how Albanian families managed visibility, language, names and religious identity. Strategies such as name changes or

baptism into Greek Orthodoxy have been interpreted as ways of reducing exclusion and generating trust in the host society (Gogonas, 2009). For second-generation young people, schooling took place within this wider field of recognition and misrecognition.

The second generation is not a continuation of the first, many Albanian-origin young people have been born in Greece or arrived before primary school and have been socialised through Greek schools, peer groups and language. Gogonas (2009) uses a definition of the second generation that includes children born in the host country to immigrant parents and those who arrived before primary-school age. This definition is appropriate for the present study because the focus is not only on place of birth but also educational socialisation, home language and belonging.

Citizenship adds another layer to the field, Spyropoulou and Musaraj (2025) argue that citizenship functions both practically and symbolically for second-generation Albanians in Greece, it grants rights and security, but it also signals recognition by the state. The study by Musaraj (2025) shows that the broadening of citizenship routes through birth and schooling has reshaped the boundaries of Greekness, especially for young people of Albanian origin (Spyropoulou & Musaraj, 2025). However, citizenship does not automatically erase experiences of racism or social exclusion; belonging continues to be negotiated across institutional recognition, everyday social interaction and family history (Spyropoulou & Musaraj, 2025).

Gogonas (2009) found evidence of rapid language shift among Albanian-origin adolescents in Athens, with Greek becoming dominant especially in interactions with siblings and peers. Albanian parents often valued language maintenance in principle, but in practice many did not take strong measures to transmit Albanian literacy or ensure consistent Albanian use at home. The prestige of Greek as the language of schooling and upward mobility, combined with the stigmatisation of Albanian, contributed to the weakening of intergenerational transmission (Gogonas, 2009).

Stergiou's (2018) study of university students of Albanian origin similarly shows how Greek language dominance was connected to school adjustment and social mobility. The participants described families allowing or encouraging the shift to Greek because Greek facilitated integration and academic success (Stergiou, 2018). Later, however, some families and students experienced a belated desire to reclaim Albanian language and identity. This delayed reclamation could be emotionally complex, particularly for young people who had grown up with assimilative pressures and had not been given the tools to value Albanian publicly.

These findings are important for the present study because language may mediate the student's relationship to science, scientific terminology, classroom talk, practical work, group work and assessment are all experienced through Greek. At the same time, family conversations about school, future careers or science homework may occur in Greek, Albanian, or a mixture of languages. The interview analysis will therefore attend to which languages are associated with school success, family intimacy, identity claims and future aspirations.

2.4 Recognition, institutional support and educational belonging

Perceived teacher support and peer belonging are associated with science aspiration and engagement (Mujtaba & Reiss, 2013; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). For immigrant-origin students, however, relatedness is not only a general classroom matter, but it is connected to whether teachers notice linguistic challenges without lowering expectations, whether peers treat difference as ordinary or as a source of stigma, and whether the student can ask questions without feeling exposed.

Research on foreign students in Greek higher education suggests that institutional support can be fragmented and informal, with language barriers, bureaucracy and financial difficulty limiting inclusion (Zagkos *et al.*, 2026). Although that study concerns university rather than secondary school, its analysis of institutional habitus is useful. It suggests that Greek educational institutions may formally endorse inclusion while still placing much of the burden of adaptation on students themselves. Research discussed by Zagkos *et al.* (2026) notes that school can shape educational trajectories in ways not predetermined by national origin. For Albanian-origin students, success at school may be a response to stigma, a family project of mobility, a form of recognition and a way of claiming equal standing. Stergiou's (2018) participants described school achievement as a symbolic response to devaluation. In the present study, science achievement or science aspiration may similarly operate as more than subject preference; it may function as proof of competence, respectability and future security.

However, recognition can also be fragile. A student may be treated as Greek in some contexts and Albanian in others, or may experience silence around Albanian identity as the condition for school belonging. Michail and King (2024), in their study of Albanian second-generation youth relocating from Greece to Albania, show that belonging can become ambiguous in both directions: young people may be treated as Albanian in Greece and as Greek in Albania. This double positioning underscores why identity and belonging need to be treated as processual rather than fixed.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory proposes that motivation and well-being are supported when three basic psychological needs are met: relatedness, competence and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Relatedness refers to belonging and connection with others. Competence refers to feeling effective and capable of meeting challenges. Autonomy refers to experiencing action as self-endorsed rather than coerced. In education, these needs are interdependent. A student may perform well but still disengage if they feel isolated; they may be offered choice but lack the information or competence needed to use it meaningfully; or they may feel connected to teachers but experience subject choices as controlled by family or labour-market pressure.

Self-determination theory also distinguishes qualities of motivation. External regulation depends on reward, punishment or external pressure. Introjected regulation

is internally pressuring and often expressed through guilt, shame or contingent self-worth. Identified regulation occurs when a student personally values the purpose of an activity, even if the activity is not intrinsically enjoyable. Intrinsic motivation involves interest and enjoyment in the activity itself (Deci *et al.*, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

These distinctions are useful for analysing immigrant students' science narratives. Studying science can be motivated by curiosity, by the desire to please parents, by fear of failure, by the belief that science leads to secure employment, by teacher encouragement, by peer recognition, or by an emerging sense of self as a STEM person. The same outward behaviour, such as working hard in science, can therefore have different motivational qualities. In the present case, the analysis will ask how the student and parents narrate effort, pressure, enjoyment, obligation and choice.

3.2 Bourdieu: capital, habitus and field

Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field help explain how apparently individual educational choices are structured by social histories (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986). Capital refers to resources that are valuable in a particular field. Economic capital includes material resources; social capital consists of networks and relationships; cultural capital includes knowledge, language, dispositions and qualifications; and symbolic capital refers to recognition and status. Habitus is the set of durable but revisable dispositions through which people perceive what is normal, possible and desirable. Field is the structured social arena in which particular forms of capital acquire value.

For immigrant families, capital is mobile but not automatically convertible (Erel, 2010). Albanian language, family history and transnational contacts may carry value in the family or diaspora field, while Greek language, school credentials and citizenship carry particular value in the Greek school and state fields. A parent's educational experience in Albania may shape aspirations for the child but may not translate into detailed knowledge of the Greek curriculum. Likewise, a student's Greek schooling may generate cultural and linguistic capital that is highly valuable in Greece but may distance them from Albanian-language competence or from older family narratives.

Habitus is especially useful for thinking about educational aspiration. A family may carry a migration habitus in which sacrifice, hard work and school achievement are taken for granted as the route to a better future. A student may internalise these expectations as normal, but also negotiate them in relation to peer culture, teacher recognition and personal interest. The Greek school is one field; the family home is another; the Albanian diaspora is another; and imagined futures in Greece, Albania or elsewhere constitute further fields in which capital may be converted or devalued.

3.3 Combining the frameworks for the Albanian-Greek case

Following Altunbas *et al.* (2024), this study combines self-determination theory with Bourdieu's concepts of capital, habitus and field. Self-determination theory makes visible the quality of the student's motivation and the extent to which science education supports relatedness, competence and autonomy. Bourdieu's framework explains how these

experiences are produced within family, school, migration and national fields. Together, they help avoid simplistic interpretations. Strong grades do not necessarily mean secure competence; parental encouragement does not necessarily mean pressure; science aspiration does not necessarily mean intrinsic interest; and weak interest in a STEM career does not necessarily mean low science capital. In the Albanian-Greek case, relatedness includes classroom belonging, teacher recognition, peer acceptance and the student's sense of being positioned as Greek, Albanian or both. Competence includes grades and self-efficacy, but also linguistic confidence, ability to participate in group work, and whether the student feels recognised as capable by teachers. Autonomy includes subject choices, career imagination and the degree to which the student can speak from a first-person position of "*I want*" rather than only "*my parents want*" or "*people like us must*". The Bourdieusian dimension asks which forms of capital are available and convertible. Science capital is treated not as a fixed possession but as a set of resources whose value changes across fields. A family may value science because it appears secure; a teacher may value science through examination performance; a student may value science through curiosity, practical activities, career prospects or recognition.

4. Methodology and methods

The study is a qualitative single-case inquiry using participatory narrative methods, extended by one contextual community-informant interview. The purpose of the case is interpretive rather than representative. The design is informed by the structure used by Altunbas *et al.* (2024), who combined student and parent accounts to investigate immigrant students' attitudes towards science, and by the narrative case-study approach used in Xhuxhi (2026). The present study differs in its Greek-Albanian context, its focus on a second-generation Albanian young woman in Athens, its explicit attention to general education as well as science education, and its inclusion of a contextual religious-community informant. The case is situated within the history of Albanian migration to Greece, the institutional field of Greek schooling and the informal community field in which migrant families seek support.

The focal participant is assigned the pseudonym Alba. Alba is 19 years old, was born and raised in Athens, has completed secondary schooling in Greece and is now studying a two-year course in accounting and logistics while also working part-time. Her educational biography therefore allows retrospective analysis of Greek secondary schooling and school science from the standpoint of a young adult who is already negotiating work, further study and adulthood.

The parent participant is assigned the pseudonym Ana and she migrated from Albania to Greece at the age of 18-19 and became a mother soon after arrival. Her interview provides a first-generation account of migration, paperlessness, language learning, work, school relations, parental support, religious/community support and future expectations. The father was not interviewed directly, but he appears in both family narratives as part of the migration history and as a figure of work, care and moral

example. Identifying details such as precise places of origin, school names, neighbourhoods, workplaces and peer names have been removed or generalised.

A third participant is assigned the pseudonym Sister Maria. Sister Maria is a Catholic religious sister whose congregation works with Albanian and other immigrant families in Athens through catechesis, pastoral visits, food distribution, youth activities and cooperation with other Catholic spaces.

Data were generated through three semi-structured, conversational interviews: one with Alba, one with Ana and one with Sister Maria. The student and parent interview schedule followed the areas set out in the study design: identity, education, science/STEM, parental involvement and the future. Identity questions asked how participants identified, what being Albanian and being Greek meant to them, whether Greece or Albania felt more like home, and how they experienced mixed or Albanian peer groups. Education questions asked about school, positive and negative experiences, teachers, subject preferences, examinations, friendships and daily life. Science/STEM questions asked how science was taught, whether practical work and laboratories were used, whether the term STEM was known and whether school or family visits involved science. The final sections explored parental support, homework, future professions, role models and family aspirations. The interviews were conversational rather than rigidly standardised. Follow-up questions were used to elicit examples, stories, contrasts and turning points. The full interview schedule is available on request.

Participants were informed that the purpose was academic research, that participation was voluntary, that identifying information would be anonymised and that the write-up would not report details back to identifiable schools, teachers, congregations, parishes, workplaces or individuals. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

My position as the researcher is analytically relevant here, be it that I am a science teacher, a researcher and of Albanian background working across international educational contexts. This shared background helped create moments of recognition in the interviews, particularly around family language brokering and migrant parental experience. The interview with Sister Maria also involved a shared Catholic and Albanian-oriented community concern. These forms of partial insiderness helped participants speak with trust, but they may also have shaped the stories that were told and the moral language through which they were narrated. The analysis therefore treats the interviews as co-constructed narratives rather than as transparent records of an entire education system or religious community. The interviews were transcribed from audio recordings. The student transcript was in English. The mother was interviewed in Albanian, and I translated the interview to English. Sister Maria's interview was also conducted in English. The study also relies on interview narratives. Nevertheless, the strength of the present design lies in its attention to meaning-making: it asks not simply what happened in school science, but how Alba, Ana and Sister Maria understand what happened and what it means for the future.

5. Findings

The findings are presented narratively rather than as a list of isolated themes. Across the three interviews, Alba, Ana and Sister Maria construct an educational ecology in which Albanian identity, migration sacrifice, school inequality and informal community support are closely bound together. School science is not a separate strand in this story. It appears within a wider account of school quality, teacher recognition, neighbourhood inequality, high-stakes assessment, family resources, language brokering, Catholic catechesis and the young person's movement into adulthood.

5.1 Albanian identity as the moral centre of the story

Alba's account begins with an apparently ordinary biographical description where she introduces herself, yet when asked what being Albanian means to her, her answer immediately shifts from biography to belonging:

"It means everything ... I grew up, I have lived my whole life here, but all of my family, all of my stuff, where we originate as a family, is back in my country. And I only see that as a home for me. Like, here, it is just a place that I have lived in and grown up in. Nothing more than that. I am very proud of my country, to be completely honest, and I am never going to hide it." (Alba, student interview)

This passage establishes the central identity contrast in Alba's narrative. Greece is the place where life has been lived, but Albania is the place where origin, family and moral belonging are located. Her use of 'my country' for Albania is especially important because she has grown up in Greece and holds a Greek identity document. Legal recognition does not organise the meaning of belonging in her story; family origin does.

At the same time, Alba does not narrate Albanian identity as socially dangerous in her own neighbourhood. She says that she has heard of other young people hiding their Albanian background, but she has not felt the need to do so because of the multicultural field in which she grew up:

"I hear people like my age still that will hide it, but I have never had the problem, because here in the centre that I grew up in, there are a lot of people that are from different countries ... I have always been welcome, because everybody was foreign, so I have never had a problem with that. But yeah, I did not have to hide it my whole life. I am proud of that." (Alba, student interview)

Her belonging is therefore not based on being treated as Greek. It is based on a local immigrant commonality in which difference is normal. Alba's preference for learning groups makes this position explicit. When asked whether she would prefer to study with Albanians or with a diverse group, she rejects ethnic separation but does not reject Albanian presence:

"My preference would be a diverse group, but which would also include Albanians. I would like for everybody to be able to mix in and meet each other and not click because of their origin, in a way." (Alba, student interview)

Ana's account gives the parental version of the same identity position, but with a sharper emphasis on refusal. Her story of being Albanian is tied to resisting pressure to change religion or name:

"I feel very proud. I have never accepted denying myself, being baptised Orthodox, or changing my name. I would never accept it. It was difficult. I had a lot of pressure." (Ana, mother interview)

"At the place where I worked ... there was an older woman who told me every day to get baptised. I told her: If I get baptised, I will do it for your sake, but I will never go to an Orthodox church. I told her: Let us do something else. You become Catholic, and I will become Orthodox." (Ana, mother interview)

Ana links identity to documents and state recognition, but she does not confuse paperwork with self-identification. She describes a period in which changing a name or being baptised could 'open doors', but insists that she would not accept such a conversion. She then extends this refusal to her children:

"I do not want to become Greek. The children are very proud that they are Albanian. People tell them, You are Greek because you have Greek passports, but the children say, No, we are not Greek because we have our grandfathers and grandmothers in Albania. And we have our house in Albania. We live and work here, but we are not Greek." (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria's community narrative complements this. She works with Albanian children who are born in Greece and who often speak Greek more comfortably than Albanian, yet she still reads them as strongly connected to Albanian origin:

"With the children, they know that they are Albanian by origin ... I think deep down they know that they are Albanian. Even when they are born [here]." (Sister Maria, interview)

"Young people, they are also born here. They speak Albanian plus Greek plus English." (Sister Maria, interview)

The three voices therefore agree that Albanian belonging is not erased by Greek socialisation, Greek documentation or multilingual practice. Alba's attachment to Albania is explicit and self-authored; Ana's is expressed as refusal of assimilation; Sister Maria's is expressed through observation of a community in which children may use

Greek and English but remain positioned by family, worship, grandparents and repeated visits to Albania. The difference is that Alba describes identity from within, Ana describes it as a mother defending continuity, and Sister Maria describes it as a community worker seeing patterns across families.

5.2 Migration, sacrifice and the family habitus of survival

Ana's narrative begins with vulnerability. She arrived in Greece as a very young adult, without language, papers or kin support. Her migration story gives the emotional and material background against which Alba's education is later understood:

"I came to Greece at 18/19 years old; I had not turned 19. Of course, it was very difficult. I did not know the language, I did not have papers, and I did not have any of my own people anywhere here. I spent four years without papers, without seeing my family." (Ana, mother interview)

Motherhood intensifies this vulnerability. Ana's account of Alba's early illness is also a story about language, recognition and helplessness:

"After two years, not even two years, my daughter was born. It was very difficult to become a mother and not have help from anyone ... especially when she became sick; God saved her. I needed to speak, but nobody would look me in the eye because I did not speak ... they told me my daughter had a temperature of 39 degrees and that I had to speak. I felt myself in great distress; I had nothing I could do." (Ana, mother interview)

Language is narrated not as a cultural enrichment project but as a necessity learned through work. Ana did not initially learn Greek in an organised way. She learned because survival required it:

"Whatever I said, I said wrongly, and I felt ashamed because I made mistakes. When I came to work, I learned ... I can speak Greek, but I cannot write or read it. I learned to speak not because we liked it, but because of need." (Ana, mother interview)

Alba retells the family migration story from the second-generation position. Her father is described as having left Albania young in order to work and support his parents. Her mother is remembered as young, frightened of police and unable to participate fully in society until after Alba's birth:

"My dad was the one that first came to Greece ... He left home from a young age because he wanted to go and work and be able to support his parents back home." (Alba, student interview)

"My mom, after my birth, was able to be a part of society because while she was here, she could not really go out because she was still very frightened of the police. We were hearing things that they were going to send us back ... until my birth, she was not going out at all." (Alba, student interview)

Alba then turns this hardship into admiration. She compares her mother's age at childbirth with her own present age and constructs her mother as a model of endurance rather than as a passive migrant victim:

"My mom had me at 19, my age now, which is weird to think about. I am so proud of her because after that, she had the courage to keep going with her life and work, have friends and still managed to remain a great family." (Alba, student interview)

This family story creates a habitus in which work, endurance and education are morally expected. The family has not accumulated great economic capital in Greece. Ana repeatedly contrasts long working hours with limited material progress:

"The salary is not high, and the cost of living is expensive ... I have worked in Athens since 2007, and my husband has worked here since he was 20 years old, and we still have not bought a house." (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria's account independently reinforces this family habitus of work and sacrifice. She repeatedly describes Albanian mothers and fathers as working long hours in order to support children's schooling, rent and extra courses:

"They know that their parents work hard to raise them up, because ... they have to rent, all this kind of thing. So much they are working, husband and wife. They are working in order to give all the courses to the children, courses of language and all these things." (Sister Maria, interview)

"Sometimes if you go to visit, we cannot make our timetable. We have to do according to when they are at home ... because they are working, husband and wife." (Sister Maria, interview)

"They said, Sister, to receive confirmation, we have made sacrifice ... and now on Saturday we have to do the courses that our parents are asking us to learn, because they are paying the money for us. We have to do that because our parents are working hard to pay money for that. So, we prefer to do these courses to learn for the future." (Sister Maria, interview)

Education is therefore narrated as the answer to migrant precarity. When asked what motivates her children, Ana gives a concise answer:

"To have a better life, to earn more money, and to work in her profession." (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria's account shows the same aspiration operating at community level. Extra language courses, Saturday study and parental payment are not peripheral details: they are the concrete practices through which migrant families try to convert work into children's future security. The cost of this conversion is time. Parents' work schedules shape catechesis, family presence, school support and children's weekend routines.

5.3 The religious community as an informal field of support

Ana's interview briefly mentions catechesis, but Sister Maria's interview turns that brief reference into a fuller account of an informal support field. Ana explains that she wanted to help Alba but lacked the knowledge and language to do so:

"It is not that I did not want to; it is that I did not know myself. My husband, who came here earlier and knew the language, started helping my daughter when she was in the first year of primary school, but he did not have the patience nor the time to help her at home." (Ana, mother interview)

In place of systematic institutional support, Ana turned to the place where she worked:

"So, I started bringing my daughter to the catechesis here where I work. I did not know the language to help either, but they helped her here." (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria's account indicates that this is not an isolated act of help. The congregation's work includes food distribution, prayer, village visits, catechesis, confirmation preparation and collaboration with other Catholic spaces:

"We are here, we meet also the Jesuits ... and we have every Friday, we distribute bread and vegetables. So, they come, African, they come, Egyptian, Albanian, all mixed." (Sister Maria, interview)

"We work, we go [to] a few villages ... because when we pass through Albania, so we know the language of Albania, so many times we do catechism for the Albanian." (Sister Maria, community interview)

The language of catechesis reveals the second-generation condition. The children are Albanian by family origin, but Greek has become the practical language of instruction:

"They are Albanian children, but we do catechism in Greek, because they are born here ... They speak Albanian, but for teaching they do not understand in Albanian ... Albanian children, but lesson done in Greek." (Sister Maria, interview)

The community field also creates social capital. Families provide homes as catechesis spaces, and parents respond with gratitude to the sisters' mobility and time:

"We had no place for catechism. So [a priest] asked one family to give us a room that will start catechism ... The husband waited at the door to welcome us ... Sister, welcome ... This is your house. You can take the children and do catechism." (Sister Maria, interview)

"The parents came with joining hands. Thank you, sister ... Your sacrifice is great to come all the way to come and teach our children ... Two more families [said], if you want also our house, you can use for catechism, for the children, for gathering." (Sister Maria, interview)

This field is relational and responsive. It does not operate like a formal school. Timetables change around parents' work; families host activities; children gather for confirmation; community members use Albanian, Greek and English. It provides relatedness, recognition and a culturally meaningful space. Yet it also has limits for the science question. The support described is religious, linguistic, social and pastoral. It can help a child feel accompanied, but it does not by itself produce laboratory access, science career guidance or STEM visibility.

5.4 The student as cultural broker and self-reliant learner

Although Ana provides emotional and aspirational support, she also describes limited capacity to support school learning directly. Alba is clear that parental support was constrained by migration history, language and educational opportunity:

"Sadly, when it came to my parents, they did not really get proper education ... coming here in a new country ... they had to learn the language, and it was not something that they could help me. As a kid, when I was way younger, my dad would try to help me, but at the same time he did not really know stuff. So, it was not much of a help. So, it all fell on me. I had to figure it out on my own." (Alba, student interview)

This is not narrated resentfully. It is presented as the ordinary condition of growing up as the child of first-generation migrants. Yet it produces a reversal of educational responsibility. Alba becomes a helper for her younger brother and a bureaucratic broker for her parents:

"Afterwards, when my brother was raised and born, I had to help him with his education ... Also, I would help him with paperwork because [my parents] did not know the language."

And as a seven-year-old, I had to do their forms and everything." (Alba, student interview)

The emotional weight of this responsibility appears in the phrase 'I could not mess up':

"It was very nerve-wracking because I could not mess up because it was one piece of paper that you have to write. So, it went like that. It is okay. You learn." (Alba, student interview)

Alba's competence is therefore not limited to formal grades. It includes English learned through videos, Greek schooling, family paperwork, sibling support, work, long-distance travel and movement between educational institutions. She is a high-functioning cultural broker, even where the formal school system did not necessarily recognise this as capital. Her English is also self-acquired:

"[I learned English] through videos and everything. Because in Greece, you do not really hear Greek people speak English in any way, shape or form. Only if it is for a job or tourists." (Alba, student interview)

Sister Maria confirms that many Albanian-origin children in her community accumulate linguistic capital rapidly, often more rapidly than their parents:

"The children, they all speak English ... even the small children because their parents are making them learn the language." (Sister Maria, interview)

"They said they are very good. And for the language, they learn very fast." (Sister Maria, interview)

"Children, I see. Parents maybe do not know, but the children ... people realise that English is a very important language. Everybody [is] trying to learn." (Sister Maria, interview)

These quotations show an important generational pattern. Children accumulate Greek and English capital because parents understand that languages are convertible into educational and labour-market opportunity. However, this competence is double-edged. It empowers children, but it also places them in adult-like roles. Alba's paperwork at seven years old is not simply evidence of achievement; it is a burden generated by uneven capital across generations.

5.5 School belonging in an immigrant-dense field

Alba's own experience of being Albanian in school is shaped by the ethnic composition of her neighbourhood. She says that she did not have to hide her Albanian background

because many of her peers were also from immigrant families. This produced a kind of local relatedness. Difference was normal, and a diverse peer group was preferable to a closed ethnic group.

Ana's account of the same school field is much more critical. For her, the immigrant concentration of the school is not only a source of peer diversity; it is also linked to institutional neglect:

"It has a lot of immigrants, of different nationalities: Georgian, Albanian, Pakistani, Syrian. There are 16/17 students in the class, all immigrants. They do not explain much, they do not teach much ... Teachers are not very interested in the students. They do their lessons and go home. They do not explain the why, the detail. They do not care about the students' problems in school." (Ana, mother interview)

Ana explicitly contrasts schools in immigrant areas with schools in areas where more Greek families live:

"In a different area where more Greeks live, the school is much better, because the Greeks make a fuss at the school. But to us, no one gives any importance ... In a good area, where Greeks live, there are better schools, better teachers, and better education." (Ana, mother interview)

This is a field analysis in the parents' own language. Ana does not describe the school as simply under-resourced. She describes it as positioned in a hierarchy of neighbourhoods and parental voice. Greek parents are imagined as possessing the social and symbolic capital to pressure the school. Minority parents, by contrast, are treated as less consequential.

The same pattern appears in Ana's description of bullying. Her daughter was mocked for bodily difference and disability-coded features, and her son was also affected. Yet the school response is narrated as weak:

"My daughter was bullied. She has curly hair and glasses; they used to call her blind. My son as well; he does not like to cause trouble. In private schools or in schools in better areas, this would not happen. We have no flexibility to choose the school. If you live in an area, then you take your children to the school in that area." (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria's account partly complements Alba's emphasis on mixed peer worlds. Her Friday food distribution and gatherings bring together multiple immigrant groups:

"They come, African, they come, Egyptian, Albanian, all mixed." (Sister Maria, interview)

The difference is that the Catholic support field treats mixture as a reason for hospitality and support, while Ana experiences immigrant density in school as a reason for lower expectations and weaker institutional care. Alba's school belonging is therefore split. She can feel welcome among diverse peers, yet her mother can still experience the same school field as stratified and dismissive.

5.6 High-stakes examinations, extra courses and the rerouting of aspiration

Alba's educational aspiration was not originally directed towards accounting and logistics. She wanted to study history and become a history teacher. Her narrative of the final year of secondary school is organised around anxiety, examination pressure and the difficulty of sustaining motivation until the end:

"My last year ... I could say it was one of the most anxious years of my life. But greatest. At the end of the year ... the third class of secondary school has to give these exams in order to pass to a university. And they are very important. And there are very high rates to get into those universities in Athens." (Alba, student interview)

Economic capital enters the account through geography. Alba's parents could not easily support study outside Athens, so the field of possible university choices narrowed:

"My parents really could not send me outside of Athens, because that would be a lot more money that they could provide." (Alba, student interview)

The examination story then becomes a story of exhaustion. The turning point is after Easter, when she says she lost the energy to continue:

"After Easter ... I just gave up, which is something that a lot of our teachers were frightened of. Guys, do not give up. During Easter break, please, that is when you have to really keep going. I just did not have the courage anymore, or the energy to. And I personally let it be." (Alba, student interview)

Her language here is important. She does not say that she lacked ability. She says that she lacked courage and energy. The assessment system is narrated as a field of compressed pressure in which everything depends on a deadline:

"It was not something that I was 100% into. It was something that I had to do. And I did not write well, which was kind of heartbreaking in a way, but at the same time, it happened. I could not change it afterwards." (Alba, student interview)

"It is everything that you have to push through for this specific deadline, and it is in June. And until June, you were starting from last year to study." (Alba, student interview)

The route into accounting and logistics is therefore not narrated as the fulfilment of an original passion. It is a pragmatic rerouting after a blocked history/teaching aspiration. Alba nevertheless reconstructs the new route positively because it offers employability:

"I am studying, basically, accounting and logistics. I am going to major in that and go on with life if it takes me somewhere, which it will, most likely, because it is a job that you can find everywhere." (Alba, student interview)

The study methods she describes also show the exam-oriented character of the school field. School teachers 'deliver' the lesson, while much of the serious work happens afterwards through study and extra support:

"The teachers at school would just deliver the lessons ... They would explain the lesson, make some exercises, or give us some exercises sometimes. And then it was all done by us, the studying." (Alba, student interview)

"I would be there from 3 until 7. And I would literally sit, study. If I had any questions, there was a teacher that would always help me. And she would always give me extra work to do." (Alba, student interview)

Her preferred learning strategy is writing and repetition, but she gives this method a more agentic interpretation than simple memorisation:

"What helped me personally is that I would write everything multiple times to keep it in ... Writing it helps me understand it better. Because that way, if I write it, I can make it my own. Of course, I have what the text says as a meaning, but I am going to add my own taste in it." (Alba, student interview)

Ana's account of the examination year introduces a family conflict that Alba does not foreground. Ana believes that a relationship shortly before the final examinations affected Alba's grades and that the parents' reaction may have harmed her performance:

"In May of the final year before university, while she was studying for the final exams, she formed a relationship ... This came as a shock to us ... I talked to her, my husband talked to her, and we argued with her. This set her back ... I believe that if we had been a bit more flexible and more logical, we would have tolerated this and allowed her to do the exams in peace." (Ana, mother interview)

This episode complicates the idea of parental aspiration as simply supportive. Ana is reflective and self-critical. She continues to value education, but she also recognises that family attempts to control a young woman's relationship may have undermined

autonomy and examination performance at precisely the moment when self-regulation was most needed.

5.6 Science as a weakly supported field

Science enters Alba's narrative as a subject that failed to become engaging. Her first evaluation is direct:

"I did not really like science most of the time." (Alba, student interview)

When asked why, she does not describe science as useless or beyond her capacity. Instead, she places responsibility on pedagogy and teacher relatedness:

"I am personally the type of person that you need to make me eager to like the lesson. You need to show me that it is actually a nice lesson to learn and not a boring one. And most of my science teachers sadly have been the boring ones. So, I could not really keep up with it, even if I wanted to." (Alba, student interview)

Her criticism is also institutional. She links teacher age, tiredness and low responsiveness to the Greek educational system:

"Most of them, sadly, with the Greek educational system, they are very old. They do not have the patience to teach anymore, so it would never go well. They would either skip stuff that they should say or not pay as much attention to actually see who wants to learn and should be paid more attention to." (Alba, student interview)

The phrase 'even if I wanted to' is important. It suggests that disengagement is not a fixed attitude but a response to a classroom field that did not support relatedness, competence or interest. Alba's memory of earlier practical science shows that a different relationship to science was possible:

"When I was younger ... our teacher at the time would engage with us. She would make experiments. I remember one, something with a potato ... and you had to gain weight. Also, she had different types of liquids that she would tell us to mix to create stuff and see stuff and observe them and write them down. But that was when I was way younger, not older sadly." (Alba, student interview)

When asked what changed, Alba identifies the transition to the later stage of secondary school, a change of teachers and the absence of laboratory provision:

"The teachers that I had on my last three years were not even doing the interesting and teaching in the way that they should be because they were older. And the school also, that is a problem with Greek schools, most of the schools here do not provide labs for their

students ... labs that should be used for physics and all of that. So, our teachers did not really have anything to show us to make it more engaging and interesting." (Alba, student interview)

Ana's account confirms and extends this. For her, science is not a visible part of the children's school life:

"Has science played a big role in your children's lives? I have not heard of these subjects: biology, chemistry, and physics. The teachers have not given importance to these subjects; there has not been support in these subjects, especially when the teachers understand that we are Albanian. We feel that everything changes when they know we are Albanian; things freeze." (Ana, mother interview)

Ana's phrase *"things freeze"* is one of the strongest comments in the transcript. It implies a felt change in teacher responsiveness once Albanian identity is known. She also links science teaching to the absence of minority teachers and to unapproachable school staff:

"The teachers are Greek; there are no teachers of other nationalities in our children's schools. If the teachers were from minority groups, maybe things would have changed for the better ... The teachers in our children's school are ... unapproachable, especially by us minorities." (Ana, mother interview)

Asked about teaching methods, Ana describes a textbook-and-board pedagogy and contrasts it with her own memory of practical work in Albania:

"They read from the textbooks and from what the teachers write on the board. I have never heard my children talk about laboratory work; I have never heard them talk about experiments relating to science. We used to do more laboratory work in Albania when I was young - I remember filtering water when I was younger - but here nothing has been shared with me by my children." (Ana, mother interview)

School trips reinforce the same pattern. Alba remembers regular museum visits, but mainly to history or art exhibitions. Ana similarly says trips were mostly related to history, language and religion:

"With school ... every month, we would visit at least two museums ... mostly history or if there was an exhibition of any sort ... when it comes to Greece, history is a really big part of it ... so we have mostly been to those types of museums." (Alba, student interview)

"They do a lot of excursions, trips outside school, once a month. These relate mainly to history, language, and religion. The schools focus a lot on teaching children about Greek

history and language ... and less focus on the sciences and maths." (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria's interview does not contradict this. Her community narrative is rich in educational concern, language learning and youth support, but it contains no detailed account of school science, laboratories, science clubs or STEM pathways. This absence is analytically important. The family and religious community fields both value education, courses, languages and future work, but neither appears to provide sustained science capital. The one positive science memory is Alba's younger experiment-based lesson; when this disappears, science becomes passive and uninviting.

5.7 STEM as absent from school and encountered through social media

The term STEM is almost absent from the family educational field. Alba has heard the word, but not from school and not as a structured educational pathway:

"I have heard it as a term, but I have never ... no, I do not know anything ... I heard it from TikTok actually ... one specific TikTok ... was saying that it is rare to find women in STEM." (Alba, student interview)

Her response to the gendered message is thoughtful but tentative. Once STEM is explained, she can see it as a male-associated field but also thinks women should be involved:

"I was like, that is kind of sad ... I can kind of see in a way why men would be so interested in it, but at the same time, I think that women should also be interested, of course, in it." (Alba, student interview)

Ana's answer is even simpler:

"Have you heard of STEM? Never. Have you ever heard of STEM from your children? Never." (Ana, mother interview)

When asked what would have made her interested in STEM, Alba again returns to pedagogy:

"Firstly, if my teachers had made it more interesting as a lesson, I would have been able to keep up with it, I think ... You do not have, as a teacher, to start to read me off loudly the whole book and tell me, get this and this exercise. That is all that they would do ... they would not really make us work on the stuff that we had to work." (Alba, student interview)

The repeated contrast is between receiving and doing. STEM was not a school discourse for Alba. It arrived through social media as a gendered cultural message, not through lessons, careers education, clubs, labs, community support or family conversations. The Catholic support field described by Sister Maria strengthens relatedness and language capital but does not fill this STEM gap. This suggests that informal community support can be crucial for belonging without necessarily converting into science aspiration.

5.8 Language, belonging and multilingual practice

Language is one of the most important connecting threads across the three interviews. Ana describes Greek as survival; Alba describes English as self-learned and useful; Sister Maria describes Albanian-origin children as moving across Albanian, Greek and English. The languages do different work in different fields.

For Ana, Greek was a necessity but remained incomplete in written form:

"I can speak Greek, but I cannot write or read it. I learned to speak not because we liked it, but because of need." (Ana, mother interview)

For Alba, English becomes a self-acquired resource that travels across education, social media and work:

"[I learned English] through videos and everything ... in Greece, you do not really hear Greek people speak English ... only if it is for a job or tourists." (Alba, student interview)

Yet Albanian remains connected to grandparents, prayer, family visits and origin. Sister Maria gives a small intergenerational scene in which a grandmother tries to teach prayer in Albanian while the child answers partly in Greek:

"Grandmother want[s] to teach them prayer in Albania[n] because she does not know Greek ... We start to speak in Albanian, and he is continuing in Greek. I do not understand. He cannot continue in Albanian." (Sister Maria, community interview)

This scene condenses the language shift literature into a family moment. It does not mean that Albanian identity has disappeared. It means that the linguistic resources of belonging have become unevenly distributed across generations. Greek is the language of schooling and catechesis; English is a language of opportunity; Albanian is a language of origin, grandparents, affect and partial competence.

5.9 Gender, family protection and multicultural youth culture

Gender appears most clearly in Ana's account of Alba's relationship before final examinations. Ana's retrospective reflection is frank. She states that a relationship with an Albanian or Greek boy would not have caused the same difficulty, but the family

could not accept a relationship with a boy from the Philippines. Ana then recognises that the parental reaction may have damaged Alba's exam performance:

"This came as a shock to us ... A relationship with an Albanian or a Greek would not have been a problem... they have different cultures ... I believe that if we had been a bit more flexible and more logical, we would have tolerated this and allowed her to do the exams in peace." (Ana, mother interview)

Ana also recognises that her children inhabit a different multicultural field from the one in which she was raised:

"Our children relate a lot to minority groups. Minority groups do not affect them; they form good relationships with them from school. We were raised in Albania; we were placed in a birdcage here in Athens, and we did not go out. We do not have our children's upbringing. When we say that they are different from us, they say, So what?" (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria's account complements this by showing that Albanian parental protection of daughters is recognised in community youth work. She describes a church youth meeting where organisers wanted young people to attend without parents, but she argued that Albanian families would not leave daughters alone:

"Albanian easily do not send their daughter alone by themselves ... If you want them to come, at least one of the mothers has to come. This is their tradition ... We do not want the young people to be oppressed. But this is the tradition of Albanians." (Sister Maria, community interview)

This does not make Ana's family conflict inevitable, but it contextualises it. Both Ana and Sister Maria describe a protective gendered habitus that can clash with young people's multicultural social worlds. Alba's own future narrative, however, is more self-authoring. She values family and Albanian tradition, but she wants to choose the timing of work, home, engagement and independence.

5.10 Future self-authoring: independence, family care and "doing my own thing"

Alba's future narrative is not organised around STEM. It is organised around work, independence, family support and building a life. In the short term, she wants the family to move to a bigger and better place and wants to work in the field she is studying:

"I will be working on what I am actually studying. I really want to. In an office of a company, doing the logistics and accounting. That would be really great for me. And hopefully being able to start my own progress of moving out and building my own home as a person." (Alba, student interview)

In the longer term, she imagines engagement, a home and continued family closeness, but also stresses not being a burden:

"I hope I am also, with the three years and the ten years, independent as a person. I do not want to be a burden in any way for my parents. And I want to be able to help them as much as I can as well." (Alba, student interview)

Asked whether she looks up to someone, Alba refuses direct imitation. She wants traits from family members but not another person's path:

"Surprisingly, nobody ... I want to do my own thing and be able to be good at it when the time comes ... I want to have aspects from people. For example, I want to be as wholehearted as my dad is and as good of a person as my mom is and as funny as my brother is ... but I do not want to be like everyone." (Alba, student interview)

This is Alba's strongest autonomy statement. It does not reject family influence; it converts family values into selected dispositions. She wants the father's wholeheartedness, the mother's goodness and the brother's humour, but she wants to author her own trajectory.

Ana's future narrative overlaps with this but also carries the marks of an earlier generation. She wanted her daughter to become a lawyer, and she initially imagined history and anthropology as a possible route. Yet by the interview, she has adjusted her hopes to her daughter's actual path:

"She wanted to study history and anthropology, but she did not get very good grades ... In my heart, I always wanted her to be a lawyer. That was my desire, but the teachers always say when they speak with us that not everyone can become a doctor or a lawyer." (Ana, mother interview)

"I have a lot of faith that she will finish the school she has started. She is a very good girl; she will go far in life ... She wants to study and work, and then when the chance of marriage comes ..." (Ana, mother interview)

Sister Maria offers a community-level version of future possibility. She does not speak about STEM careers, but she describes Albanian youth and parents as responsive when someone creates a space for them:

"Only somebody need[s] to lead them. And they responded." (Sister Maria, community interview)

The final narrative position is therefore pragmatic and hopeful. Alba is not the future lawyer Ana once imagined, nor the history teacher Alba once desired. She is a

young woman moving into a practical field that promises employability and independence. Science and STEM do not disappear because they are unimportant; they were never made sufficiently meaningful, visible or supported to enter this future narrative.

6. Discussion

Alba's account combines pride, belonging, teacher disappointment, practical aspiration, exam pressure and family obligation. Ana's account adds migration sacrifice, school distrust and parental aspiration. Sister Maria's account adds a community support field in which language, faith, gathering and social recognition are available, but science and STEM remain largely absent. Science is one element in a wider narrative of becoming an adult daughter of Albanian migrants in Athens.

The findings support the view that attitudes towards science are multidimensional (Osborne *et al.*, 2003; Potvin & Hasni, 2014; Reid, 2006). Alba's narrative does not show a simple negative attitude towards science as knowledge. She remembers practical work positively, especially experiments with potatoes and liquids. Her negative attitude is directed mainly towards school science as delivered. Her own explanation is pedagogic: *"you need to show me that it is actually a nice lesson to learn and not a boring one"*, but *"most of my science teachers sadly have been the boring ones"*. The problem is not science itself, but the classroom field in which science was made passive.

This distinction is crucial. If science is treated as a discipline, Alba's account contains no strong evidence of anti-science belief. If science is treated as a school subject, the account is strongly negative because the field failed to generate interest, recognition and participation. If science is treated as a career or future identity, it is almost absent. Alba first hears STEM from TikTok and says, *"I have heard it as a term, but I have never ... no, I do not know anything."* Ana similarly says, *"Have you heard of STEM? Never."* STEM therefore fails to enter the family as a school-supported route to employment, even though employment is precisely what the family values.

Altunbas *et al.* (2024) emphasise cognitive and affective resources such as enjoyment, engagement and self-efficacy alongside sociocultural resources such as home language, gender, parental expectation and teacher encouragement. Alba's case suggests that a further dimension needs to be made explicit: the presence or absence of science as an institutional practice. Enjoyment could not develop where science was rarely practical, STEM was not named, laboratories were absent, and science trips were not remembered. Ana's statement that she had *"never heard"* her children talk about laboratory work or science experiments, and that trips were mainly about *"history, language, and religion"*, shows that science capital was not being built through school or family talk.

Self-determination theory helps clarify why Alba's science motivation remained weak. Relatedness was present in family and peer life but not strongly in science lessons. Alba was socially secure in a multicultural neighbourhood and had close Albanian friends, but she did not describe science teachers as people who recognised her,

encouraged her or built trust. Ana's account is even sharper: teachers were *"unapproachable"* to minority parents and 'things freeze' when Albanian identity is known. Such narratives indicate low teacher-related relatedness in the school science field.

Sister Maria's account shows what relatedness can look like in another field. Albanian families welcome sisters into their homes, saying, *"This is your house. You can take the children and do catechism."* Parents thank the sisters for travelling to teach their children. Young people attend when they have 'their own priest or sister'. This relatedness is culturally and religiously meaningful. It offers belonging where the school may not.

Competence is also uneven; Alba is competent in many domains: she learned English through videos, completed school, managed family paperwork as a child, helped her brother, worked part-time, travelled across Athens and entered a post-secondary course. Yet this broad competence did not become science competence. In science, she says she *"could not really keep up"*, not because she lacked general ability, but because teachers did not make the subject interesting, active or supported. Sister Maria's observation that Albanian children are 'very good' academically and *"learn very fast"* with language also supports the idea that the issue is not a lack of capacity. Rather, the conversion of capacity into science competence depends on the pedagogical field.

The high-stakes examination system reduced autonomy because Alba experienced the final year as something she 'had to do' and eventually *"gave up"* after Easter. Family conflict before exams, as narrated by Ana, may also have reduced autonomy at a critical moment. Sister Maria's account of Albanian daughters not being sent alone to youth meetings contextualises this as a broader protective gendered habitus. Yet Alba's adult narrative is strongly agentic. She wants to work in her profession, build her own home, avoid being a burden and *"do my own thing"*. The movement from school to work/study is therefore also a movement from controlled motivation towards identified regulation and self-authorship.

The quality of motivation in the case is mainly pragmatic and identified rather than intrinsic. Alba studies accounting and logistics because it is 'a job that you can find everywhere'. Ana says motivation is *"to have a better life, to earn more money, and to work in her profession"*. Sister Maria hears children say they prefer paid language courses on Saturday because their parents are paying for them *"to learn for the future"*. This does not mean that education is shallow or merely economic. For this family and community, employability is a moral response to migration sacrifice. However, science did not become the field through which that pragmatic motivation was channelled.

Ana and her husband possess powerful aspirational capital: they work, endure, value schooling and imagine education as the route to security. They also possess family, ethnic and religious capital: Albanian pride, transnational family memory, Catholic identity and a strong moral account of sacrifice. However, their institutional capital in the Greek school field is limited. Ana learned spoken Greek through work but cannot

read or write it confidently. She did not know about language schools when she arrived. She wanted to help with homework but “*did not know*”.

Alba's role as a child broker shows the conversion of linguistic and cultural capital across generations. She does forms, helps her brother and navigates Greek institutions. From a Bourdieusian perspective, she accumulates embodied cultural capital that her parents did not have. Yet this capital is also a burden. Doing paperwork at seven years old is competence under pressure, not simply empowerment. Her phrase “*I could not mess up*” shows the emotional cost of early brokerage.

Ana's comparison between immigrant-area schools and schools in Greek-majority or wealthier areas suggests unequal distribution of teacher attention, parental voice and educational quality. Parents with more recognised social and symbolic capital can 'make a fuss'. Minority parents are less heard. This echoes the literature on institutional support in Greek education, where support may be fragmented and informal rather than systematic (Zagkos *et al.*, 2026). In Alba's case, support came through informal routes such as catechesis, extra study and individual teachers rather than through a coherent institutional response.

Science capital is therefore particularly thin- there are no science professionals in the family narrative, no STEM vocabulary at home, no sustained laboratory experiences, no science clubs, no science museum memories and little teacher encouragement. The one remembered experiment shows that science capital could have been built through practice, observation and enjoyment. Yet because this did not continue, science remained a weakly convertible form of capital. It was not converted into grades, identity, aspiration or career imagination.

The findings also speak directly to the literature on Albanian-origin identity in Greece. Spyropoulou and Musaraj (2025) argue that citizenship functions both practically and symbolically, but that legal status does not automatically produce belonging. Alba and Ana give a clear example of this distinction. Greek passports and Greek identity documents are acknowledged, but both participants refuse the idea that documents make the children Greek. Ana's formulation – “*we live and work here, but we are not Greek*” - is a concise statement of citizenship without symbolic assimilation.

The case also complicates research on language shift. Gogonas (2009) documents rapid language shift among second-generation Albanian immigrants in Greece, and Stergiou (2018) shows how Greek schools' monocultural and monolingual practices can encourage assimilation before some young people later reclaim Albanian identity. Alba's interview was conducted in English, a language she says she learned through videos, and her everyday schooling took place in Greek. This supports the language-shift literature, but it also shows that language shift does not necessarily produce weak Albanian identification.

Sister Maria's phrase 'deep down they know that they are Albanian' is important here. It shows how Albanian identity can remain affective and familial even where Greek is the stronger language of schooling and catechesis. The grandmother's attempt to teach Albanian prayer, while the child continues in Greek, illustrates the emotional complexity

of intergenerational transmission. Albanian survives as prayer, grandparents and origin; Greek dominates instruction; English is pursued as future capital. This multilingual arrangement is not simply assimilation. It is an uneven distribution of linguistic capital across fields.

Michail and King (2024) show that belonging for second-generation Albanian youth can become ambiguous in both directions, especially when young people relocate from Greece to Albania and may be treated as Greek there. Alba calls Albania home, but she also says that she has not travelled much in Albania, that Athens is the city she knows, and that her connections are spread across Athens and Greece. Her “home” is therefore partly ancestral and affective rather than simply experiential. Sister Maria similarly describes parents taking children to Albania so that they learn “*it is your country*”. Albania is produced through visits, grandparents, houses, prayer and family narrative. Athens is the home of schooling, work, transport, friendship and everyday competence.

Education is narrated as the answer to Ana's immigration history. This aligns with research on immigrant optimism and pragmatic aspiration (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Salikutluk, 2016; Sikora & Pokropek, 2021). It also resonates with King and Gëdeshi's (2023) work on Albanian students abroad, where education is often valued for career mobility, recognition and labour-market security. Alba's choice of logistics is practical because it is a job “*you can find everywhere*”. Ana's hopes for both children are similarly practical: her daughter should work in her profession; her son should be able to “*maintain himself*”.

Sister Maria confirms the same pragmatic orientation at community level where she describes Albanian adults accepting difficult jobs despite previous qualifications: women may have “*high school, university ... or diploma*”, but in Greece they may care for elderly people or clean houses in order to manage the family. This directly echoes Ana's account of work and limited economic progress. Education is valuable because it promises that children might not have to reproduce the same labour conditions.

However, the case also shows that educational aspiration is not always realised through the originally desired route. Alba's desired pathway towards history teaching was interrupted by high-stakes examinations, fatigue, economic limits and family conflict. Her present trajectory is not failure, but it is rerouting. The case therefore supports the idea that aspiration is shaped by both agency and constraint. Alba remains agentic, but her choices are made within a field structured by exam thresholds, family finances, neighbourhood schooling, available credentials and community expectations.

6.1 Implications for science education and school support

The case has several implications for science education.

First, science engagement for immigrant-origin students cannot be separated from teacher recognition and school belonging. Alba's main science criticism is not the difficulty of content but the lack of active, responsive teaching. Ana's main institutional criticism is not only that science is weak but that minority parents and children receive less attention. Sister Maria's community narrative shows that when children are

recognised and gathered through trusted relationships, they respond. Science pedagogy and inclusion therefore need to be addressed together.

Second, practical work matters. Alba remembers the younger science teacher who made experiments, mixed liquids and asked students to observe and write. That memory remains even though she did not continue with science. Laboratories, demonstrations, inquiry activities and student-centred STEM projects are not optional extras in such a case; they are the practices through which interest, competence and possible science identity can be built.

Third, STEM needs to be named and made visible. If a student first hears STEM from TikTok rather than from school, school has missed an opportunity to connect science, technology, engineering and mathematics to future study, gender equity and labour-market possibilities. For a family motivated by secure employment, STEM could have become a valued future route. It did not, because the field did not make it visible or meaningful.

Fourth, parental support requires institutional support. Ana values education but lacks the Greek literacy, time and institutional confidence to help directly. Sister Maria's account shows that community organisations can help families gather, teach children, sustain identity and provide relatedness, but such networks should not become substitutes for school responsibility. Schools that serve immigrant families need proactive communication, language support, parent guidance about subjects and pathways, anti-bullying action, accessible teacher relationships and partnerships with trusted community actors. Without these, the burden of adaptation falls on children such as Alba, who become brokers for their families while also trying to manage their own educational futures.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Alba, Ana and Sister Maria for being so willing to participate in the study.

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Conflicts of interest statement

I declare no conflicts of interest with this work.

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