

Teaching Greek in Primary School

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I am a practicing on probation primary school teacher of the 5th grade at the 2nd Chlorakas-Lembas Primary School. From January to May 2006, I conducted a project during my postgraduate WBL studies with Middlesex University. The aim of this project was to identify the most common methods and means which are used for making the teaching of Greek Language more effective. Furthermore, the project intended to investigate the attitudes and the real needs of pupils in the lesson of Modern Greek, along with the problems that the teachers confront within the mainstream teaching of Greek.

The objectives of my project were to develop efficient teaching approaches, which will lead to the required educational results and at the same time study the teaching practice with a view to proposing effective teaching methods that will promote learning. I aimed at reaching useful conclusions and making appropriate recommendations for furthering the development of the existing teaching methods of Greek.

My project is appropriately related to my work role as a teacher. In my experience in the previous three years, I tried to use several techniques and approaches for the effective teaching of the Greek language lesson, as a class teacher of two grades. I continue searching for efficient approaches of teaching the Greek language, being a teacher of a single grade. Furthermore, I personally have had a great interest in the Greek language lesson since my school years.

I believe that teaching Greek is very challenging. Each theme must be introduced by using different techniques and approaches. Greek language has to be present in every single teaching approach. Teachers have to use several teaching aids, decamping from the traditional usage of set books. The Greek lesson can also be delivered in an interdisciplinary approach.

The term "language" was widely used in my project. When I refer to the "Greek language", I refer to the lesson of teaching Greek. I mean that I investigated the teaching of the particular form of spoken language by the Greek nationals and it is being taught as a basic lesson of the National Curriculum at all stages of the compulsory state education in Greece and Cyprus. I did not investigate the Greek language linguistically.

Thus, taking into consideration the aims and objectives of this research, my research questions were the following:

1. Which are the inefficient/efficient and unattractive/pleasurable teaching approaches to pupils?
2. Which are the real needs and demands of the pupils at the Greek lesson?
3. Which are the problems and difficulties that the teachers face during the regular teaching of Greek?
4. Which are the effective/unproductive teaching aids used in the mainstream teaching of Greek?
5. What are the efficiency and the utility of the existing reading and grammar books for the Greek lesson?
6. Which are the most efficient techniques, activities, materials and syllabus for SEN pupils and for pupils with different mother tongue in teaching Greek?

As a worker/researcher I tried to design an effective research methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative families. I tried to focus on the breadth of the data, taking up as many numerical elements as possible: the use of the questionnaires led to a statistical analysis. On the other hand, I tried to focus on the depth of the data which I collected. My intention was the accuracy and cleanness of the collected data for the analysis: the interviews were structured and analysed in a thematic approach.

The sample of the pupils for the questionnaires consisted of the 85 pupils of the 4th, 5th and 6th grades of the school. The sample of the pupils for the interview consisted of 11 pupils of the 4th, 5th and 6th grades, while that of the teachers for the questionnaires consisted of the eleven teachers of the school, including the headmaster. The sample of the teachers for the interviews consisted of 6 teachers.

Taking into consideration the questions which have been set, I decided that the Survey would be the appropriate research approach for me to follow. A Survey gives a researcher the ability to gather the useful data from a wide range of a representative sample of respondents. In this way, a researcher compares and collates the information for further analysis. Survey ensures an assurance of the objectivity and massiveness of the outcomes. My position, as a teacher, allowed me the contact with the respondents (teachers and pupils).

I used a combination of techniques for collecting data in order to ensure that the analysis of the data is reliable and produces valid results. I used the technique of questionnaires. Questionnaires are widely used for conducting various researches. They offer the participants the opportunity to give many responses easily and in a short time, when the questions are closed, as in my case. Thus, a researcher not only describes, but also compares the answers for enhancing validity.

I, also, used the interview technique. Interviews help an insider researcher to interact with the respondents and discuss about their aspects directly, getting their exact reactions in depth. Through the Interview, a researcher has the opportunity to probe responses, to investigate further the area of interest, and thus achieve more in-depth understanding. A researcher seeks insight rather than statistical analysis. At the end, I triangulated my data for the validity of the outcomes.

Conducting my project, I continually had to consider its feasibility and ethical issues. I had to take into consideration many crucial factors: the borderline you are authorised to move as a teacher; the participation of my own pupils and the participation of pupils of other grades; the participation of my fellow teachers and my demands on them; the timing of the research and the financial issues.

My role as a worker researcher was not that simple. However, I managed not to influence my respondents, or be biased by any situation. Nevertheless, the fact that I conducted my research into a familiar and a very close to my daily life situation enabled me to feel more comfortable and secure for my operations. Conducting the research by myself I was in the position of broadening my skills in researching. I found out how useful a tool research is and how important results may generate from a particular research.

After conducting the research, I had to check the degree at which my results had met the requirements of the project. Thus, taking into consideration the aims and objectives of this research, my research questions have been answered as follows:

The Orthography¹, the Word reading and the Grammar teaching are considered inefficient and unattractive teaching approaches, while the communicational, the collaborative, the individualised, the exploratory-active learning and dramatisation are considered effective

¹ Spelling

approaches. At the same time, the reward method, and the teacher's humour and friendly attitude are considered efficient and pleasurable teaching methods.

About the real needs and demands of the pupils, at the interview they all said that they like the lesson. Justifying their statement, they reported that "through the Greek lesson we learn new things; we enrich our knowledge and vocabulary". They expect themselves to be able to read, write and understand the Greek language.

Pupils support that their needs in the lesson are entirely fulfilled when the teacher is cheerful and amusing; when he spends time with them trying to assist them; In general, they want the lesson to take part in a stimulating, friendly and happy environment.

The lack of interest and attention on the part of the pupils, the overloaded syllabus, the lack of time and the "Different speeds of learning" appear to be the most important problems and difficulties that teachers encounter.

The most unproductive teaching aids are considered the usage of the board for transcription and the usage of exercise papers, while the most effective ones are considered the computer, the projectors, the videos and the pictures.

About the efficiency and utility of the existing reading books, most of the pupils said that they find them very useful and palpable, at the interviews. However, most of the teachers said that although some of the themes and texts are attractive, most of them are obscure and far away from pupils' interests. At the same time, pupils pointed out that the texts in their reading books are followed by understandable and useful grammatical exercises with sufficient directions and examples. Teachers at the interviews supported that the grammatical exercises of the books usually exhaust pupils. They deem that the grammar of the books does not satisfy them, it is obscure and awkward.

Finally, equal opportunities for participation, the individualised teaching during the lesson and the preparation of different material and syllabus for different learning styles and levels are the most efficient techniques, activities, material and syllabus for SEN pupils and those of different mother tongue.

The main conclusions of my project are the following:

1. Both pupils and teachers love the Greek language lesson, as it is a subject connected to their mother tongue offering them various opportunities for further developing of their personality. They deem that it is a basic and essential lesson; interesting and complex. Teachers are pleased to teach Greek, since they have many opportunities to interact with their pupils and apply flexible approaches.
2. Both pupils and teachers dislike the traditional and mechanical approaches of teaching and the traditional and boring activities. They both support that the teacher has to create an amusing and friendly environment in the classroom and be patient and cheery.
3. Pupils prefer to react and play an active role in the learning process through exploratory approaches and active learning. They prefer the collaborative method and at the same time they need their teachers to come close to them and offer them individualised assistance. They prefer to work on communicative themes.
4. Some important teachers' problems are the lack of interest and attention on the part of some pupils, the overloaded syllabus comparing to the restricted time and the different educational skills of the pupils in a regular class.
5. Both pupils and teachers identified that some teaching aids, like the board, the papers etc., are of limited importance and inefficient, while some others like the computer, assist pupils' attention.
6. Teachers support that the texts in the pupils' books are usually far away from the pupils' interests and real needs. They both agree that the grammatical exercises have little important utility and they are usually boring.
7. Teachers said that they are unable to assist SEN pupils and those of different mother tongue, as essential time is not available for applying individualised syllabus, materials and teaching approaches for these pupils.

My work and my recommendations were reported to people in authority, that is, the office of the director of Primary Education in the Ministry of Education and Culture, for further utilization, hoping that this will help the improvement of teaching the Greek language lesson. I asked that more guidance and seminars on modern teaching approaches are offered and that more visual teaching aids are provided.

I suggested that some kind of freedom is given to teachers in using supplementary books and materials and that the mechanical teaching of grammar is restricted. I also pointed out the need for equipping all school units with visual teaching aids, for limiting the overloaded

syllabus and for the preparation of an appropriate syllabus for SEN pupils and those of different mother tongue.

Afterwards, my recommendations were reported to the persons that assisted me to conduct my research. These are my pupils, my headmaster and my fellow teachers. They were informed about the analysis and the outcomes of my project and I also intend to deliver some demonstration lessons during school time.

I have earned a lot of useful knowledge about my further and future teaching of the Greek language lesson. I improved my knowledge and professional practice and got wiser. I took all the findings into consideration and tried to get more effective and productive in teaching Greek.

This is a summary of a Work Based Learning Project (4861)