Teaching Greek in Multicultural, Primary Classrooms: Teachers' Perceptions of the Challenges in Four Greek-Cypriot Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study investigates the teachers' perspective of the challenges in the teaching of Greek in multilingual classrooms in four Greek-Cypriot (G/C) state primary schools in a large town in Cyprus where students, whose native tongue is not Greek, are part of mainstream classrooms. Teachers of Greek who were interviewed identified many challenges citing a lack of appropriate pedagogical and curricular guidelines, resources and training for teaching diverse students in multilingual classrooms as well as a lack of parental support. The teachers claimed little, if any, knowledge of bilingualism and felt alone in their task. Factors were identified in one school with specialist support as having the potential to create a culture in favour of effective bilingual education. Teachers need opportunities to develop a dialogue with regard to bilingual pedagogy that would integrate language and content and create learning targets and appropriate resources for bilingual students, and to rethink the potential of the linguistic capital in the classroom. At present, the teachers feel inadequately trained, restricted by external pressures and unsupported. Current curriculum review provides an opportunity for a collaborative dialogue.

Keywords: Teaching Greek, Greek as an additional language, dialect, teacher perceptions, bilingual education, challenges, training, resources, agency

Introduction

There were 7 out of 26 pupils who were non-native speakers of Greek in the Greek language class of one teacher who was interviewed in this study. The children had come from Romania, Bulgaria, the Philippines, Sweden and three Middle Eastern countries. She and, indeed, many other teachers across Europe, face new challenges with the increasing number of ethnic and linguistic minority students in terms of inclusion. Since the entry of Cyprus into the European Union in May 2004, the island has increasingly acquired a multicultural character (Angelides *et al.*, 2004; Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou, 2007; Tsiplakou and Georgi, 2008), with students who learn Greek variously as a second/foreign/additional language in school. In this article, aware of the terminological complexity (Little, 2010), but for the sake of simplicity, we mainly use the term bilingual, and sometimes native and non-native speaker where this distinction is required. Some teachers we interviewed used the term 'other language speakers' (OLS) – 'Allo-glossa', as does the

Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) documentation (see MEC, 2002a; MEC, 2002b; MEC, 2010).

The issues affecting the primary classroom need to be seen against the background of Cyprus' history of conflict, which has divided the island since 1974 when Turkey invaded the country. Then, the two most populous linguistic groups on the island, the Greek-Cypriot (G/C) and Turkish-Cypriot (T/C) communities resettled, with the former in the southern part of the island and the latter in the northern part. There are continuing issues of contestation today between the communities. The G/C educational system is institutionally monolingual and monocultural and highly centralised (Hadjioannou, 2006). Primary education cultivates awareness of and respect for the national identity emanating from the Greek language and culture and the Christian Orthodox religious tradition (MEC, 2011a). The MEC controls both the curriculum and the textbooks used in schools (Angelides and Gibbs, 2007). It also controls the schools via the offices of its school inspectors and headteachers.

With the advent of multicultural trends, objectives on intercultural sensitivity, acceptance and respect have been included. The organisation of a programme called *Intercultural Education* has been put into practice by the MEC since 2002 and incorporates measures for language support and for the integration (not assimilation) of a multicultural group into mainstream classrooms. The intervention model that is being implemented is a mainstreaming programme, whereby non-Greek speaking students learn in the same classrooms as native speaker pupils, who already know how to use the language for communicative purposes (Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou, 2007). Students attend the grade level based on their age group (Tsiplakou and Georgi, 2008). In harmony with the Annual Report of the MEC of 2010 (2011b), the Department of Primary Education attempts to distribute students evenly among schools and provides supportive language instruction in Greek for several hours a week. These lessons are taught by regular monolingual teachers and their frequency varies from school to school, depending on the allocation to each school by the MEC (Hadjioannou, 2006).

The MEC has provided all schools with materials produced by the Greek Pedagogical Institute. Schools have adopted a test developed by the Greek Pedagogical Institute to assess students' competence in Greek. The Institute has also organised optional in-service training seminars for teachers about intercultural education and teaching Greek as a second language (L2): 'to fill the gap created by the teaching population's inexperience with diversity both theoretically and practically' (*ibid.*, p. 6). Thus, for example, a two-page circular was sent to schools in August 2006, reporting on the seminar *Intercultural Education: Teaching Greek as an L2 or a FL*,[1] organised by the Centre of Intercultural Education of the University of Patra in Greece (MEC, 2006); a seminar 'Agkaliazw' [Αγκαλιάζω = I hug] was organised in February 2007, during which there was a lecture on bilingualism (MEC, 2007). Several other programmes such as afternoon

1 FL: abbreviation for 'foreign language'.

remedial classes in Greek for primary and secondary students and adult education classes in Greek have been organised (Eurydice, 2004; Hadjioannou, 2006), and the Department of Primary Education has created materials for teachers' use.

Schools have been deeply affected by demographic changes. According to recent statistics from the Directorate of Primary Education, during the school year 2010-2011, the number of foreign-speaking pupils attending primary schools in Cyprus amounts to 6,047 out of a total of 50,292 students, representing about 12% of the student population of elementary schools (MEC, 2011c). Against this background, and the wider framework of the EU's commitment to inclusive practices and to improving the quality of education provided to students from linguistic minority backgrounds, we wanted to explore the teachers' perceptions of the challenges that they confront in teaching Greek as both a mother tongue (L1)[2] and as an additional language in the same classroom, thereby adding a layer of teacher voice to the debate in the field. We also wanted to investigate to what extent teachers felt supported and adequately trained to tackle these challenges. As Ingrid Gogolin (2007, p. 1), German academic and researcher in the field asserted: 'Bilingual learning does not fall from the sky' [Bilinguales Lernen fällt nicht vom Himmel].

Changing Perspectives and Practices in Bilingual Education

It is the expressed aim of the Greek Cypriot educational system to provide foreign students with the necessary support to reach a satisfactory level of fluency in Greek that will enable them to successfully attend mainstream classes. The nature of the support and of bilingual education across the whole of Europe has been subject to much debate over recent decades. The Council of Europe has established the goal of the promotion of plurilingualism resonating with other policy directives concerning children's entitlements, equal opportunities and human rights (Field *et al.*, 2007). McPake *et al.* (2007, p. 102) comment that 'linguistically diverse societies need to invest in formal educational provision to support and develop people's competences in the various languages to which they have access'. A key policy shift has taken place from the previously predominant model of segregation and withdrawal (intensive language tuition seen as a way to provide pupils with subsequent access to academic learning) to mainstreaming of additional language learners (pupil engagement with curriculum activities in the language), reflecting a shift to a pedagogy of integration, inclusion and participation. The rationale behind mainstreaming education is tied to the concept of equality of educational opportunity, on sharing the same experiences with target-fluent learners in order to develop cognitively and academically in a language-rich, student-centred classroom practice and on eliminating racist abuse (Hadjitheodoulou-Loizidou and Symeou, 2007). This type of integrated schooling model is suggested for all European countries with immigrant influx (Eurydice, 2004).

2 L1 refers to the 'first language'.

Mainstreaming has been widely embraced by the additional language learning community of practice. Leung (2010), however, queries the pedagogic basis and viability of the above policy's interpretation of mainstreaming and asserts that participation and interaction alone should not be taken as indices of learning. He identifies the pedagogical assumptions that underpin mainstreaming. These include the belief that the target/additional language is best achieved through naturalistic engagement with curriculum activities and that the children's first language can aid the development of the additional language. Furthermore, it is assumed that the additional language does not need special language provision and pedagogical intervention. Clegg (1996) has argued that when mainstreaming education is applied, it usually fails to support bilingual students since it is difficult for teachers to adjust to mainstream practice, and even though the bilingual learners are in school for the same reasons as all other learners, these children need targeted support. Pull-out classes have been seen as one solution in a wider programme of diagnostic and recuperation activities (Tanini, 2000), but whilst aiming at integrating children into regular classrooms, they can deprive them from sharing the same educational experiences resulting in discriminatory practice (Leung, 2002). The Council of Europe's Green Paper (2010) argues against segregation and in favour of school policies that counteract segregation and that promote an integrated approach.

The EU project, the European Core Curriculum for Mainstreaming Second Language Teacher Education (2010) supports a move towards an 'inclusive education' as part of a mainstreamed second language education in which it is recognised that teachers need to help diverse pupils to learn to use the school language within a national context for academic purposes. Their argument is that 'in order fully to benefit from their education, language minority students need to engage with the subject knowledge of the curriculum so that learning a language and learning a subject do not become unhelpfully separated' (*ibid.*, p. 9). The report calls for 'creative solutions' (*ibid.*) in involving learners' existing language knowledge and skills. The project's training instrument, Inclusive Academic Language Teaching (IALT), proposes an approach and associated pedagogy for teacher training that would make provision for all teachers to be trained in competences to enable them to engage effectively in a mainstreamed, bilingual education, although it is stated that it would be reasonable for each school to have a specialist adviser, given the demands on teachers.

The project report stresses the need for the framework to be contextually sensitive. The case of Cyprus should be seen in the context of, for example, its history, its recent influx of children with migration backgrounds and its own language diglossia. The educational system in Cyprus seems to lack standardised curricular guidelines for teaching bilingual students and as Brinton *et al.*, argue, 'the responsibility for developing instructional guidelines falls to the individual school or even to individual teachers' (1992, p. 13). Angelides *et al.*, conducting a case study in a G/C state primary school, concluded that the MEC is not 'giving the necessary emphasis on in-service training of teachers to enable them to develop a multicultural approach to their teaching' (2003, p. 61), nor does it have any official planning for dealing with the situation. This finding concurs with

the results of similar studies (Skourtou, 1995; Hadzidaki, 2000; Angelides *et al.,* 2004; Hadjioannou, 2006) conducted in Greek and G/C contexts; different contexts but not dissimilar in the challenge to make effective bilingual provision.

The present study focuses on four schools in the G/C context. The G/C community is considered to a great extent diglossic, since Standard Greek (SG) language is taught at school and used for written or formal public oral communication, whereas the G/C dialect is usually acquired naturally, and used for informal daily communicative purposes (Tsiplakou, 2006), and it does not have a standardised writing system (Hadjioannou, 2006). The coexistence of two linguistic codes in Cyprus raises the issue of bilingualism/diglossia of G/C people, and the presence of non-native speaker students in G/C schools raises the issue of these students' bilingualism and the particularity of learning Greek for the curriculum and acquiring the G/C dialect, which is used extensively in daily life. This is in addition to the opportunities bilingual children might have to use and develop knowledge of their mother tongue. In a long-standing debate, it has been asserted that knowledge of L1 can facilitate the acquisition of certain features of L2 (Brinton *et al.*, 1992: Johnson, 2001). Thomas and Collier (2000, p. 32) claim that depriving students from using their L1, slows down their learning and students 'lose several years of cognitive and academic growth while focusing on acquiring the second language'. Papapavlou (1999), conducting a case study in a G/C state primary school, concluded that even though students did not face major communication problems, attention must be paid to the home languages and their use, for they contribute to the development of students' self-esteem and promote cultural enrichment.

When rhetoric and policies are translated to practice and then articulated as expectations for teachers in their schools and classrooms, the issues pose considerable challenges for teachers and especially for language teachers on whose shoulders considerable expectation and responsibility for the language learning of the children often fall. External demands and teacher accountability put pressures on teachers and large classes. Unmotivated students, syllabus requirements, examinations or anxiety about inspections hinder teachers from adopting new practices. Theodorou (2010, p. 12) concluded that 'language issues posed the greatest challenge in [teachers'] work with bilingual children'. Mainstream studies examining what L2 and FL teachers think, know, believe and do in their classrooms, indicate that their own personal experiences as L2/FL/AL[3] learners justify their choice of teaching activities, materials and classroom organisation (Fenstermacher, 1994; Borg, 2003). However, teachers need to adapt their role as language teachers to a diverse context which requires the necessary training to support a reappraisal of new mixed classrooms and linguistic and cultural diversity (Council of Europe, 2010). It is against a backdrop of these considerations and this context that our research was aimed: at first exploring perceptions of what teachers in four G/C primary schools perceived as the challenges they faced in teaching Greek in diverse classrooms, and secondly documenting the extent to which they felt prepared to cope effectively

3 AL refers to additional language.

with diversity, for drawing on Gogolin's image (2007), effective bilingual teaching does not fall from the sky either.

Research Methodology

As an exploratory study, a qualitative approach was deemed to be the most appropriate to explore teachers' perceptions of the challenges. To assess teachers' perspectives we sought to gather data from interviews with a small number of teachers to provide illuminative insights into their multiple realities. We opted for semi-structured interviews as the data-collection strategy following Marshall and Rossman's assertion that such insights and realities are best 'captured through face-to-face interaction' (2006, p. 53). The decision to use interviews reflects the view of Ely *et al*., who state that 'qualitative researchers want those who are studied to speak for themselves, to provide their own perspectives in words and other actions' (1991, p. 41). The semi-structured format allows the interviewer to ask more complex questions and the interviewee to expand and elaborate on their responses. It has been suggested (Nunan, 1991; Johnson, 2001) that a weakness of this format is that respondents may choose to provide what they think the researcher wants to hear, or offer more positive responses than what they really believe in. In this study in which we, the researchers, took as neutral a stance as possible, our respondents gave robust and often emotionally charged responses that conveyed every indication of personal conviction. Subsequently, interviews were judged to be the strategy fit for the purpose of addressing our research questions in order to yield findings about the perception of challenge and identify teachers' beliefs, strategies and solutions in a valid way.

The Sample

Our study comprised four state primary schools chosen on a convenience sampling basis that illustrates different contexts of provision for bilingual students who are in mainstream classrooms. The pupils were in mainstream classes, with some pupils being given extra support in 'pull out' time. Policy arrangements are summarised below:

Table 1: School Policies According to the Percentage of Bilingual Students

School	Percentage OLS students	School Policy
A	15-20%	Supportive language teaching by the school teachers
B	15-20%	Supportive language teaching by the school teachers
C	40%	Supportive language teaching by a specialised language teacher in a special classroom according to a fixed timetable divided into five different language levels
D	45%	Part of the Zone of Educational Priority, additional support hours, teachers trained on multiculturalism, teaching of Turkish language and culture to T\C students

Schools A and B represent two cases of schools with a small percentage of bilingual students in mainstream classrooms, where teachers provided support for a few hours each week in the form of personalised tuition. Teachers did not necessarily have specialised training but found their own ways and resources to help the children. Schools A and B represent the most common scenario of Cypriot schools, albeit slightly differently within each context: school A with a population of younger pupils aged 6-8 (1st, 2nd and 3rd grades), and school B with pupils aged 9-11 (4th, 5th and 6th grades) both with 15-20% of bilingual students as part of the mainstream classes. There was no specific bilingual education policy in evidence in the schools according to the teachers, apart from the provision of language support by regular teachers.

Schools C and D were included in an arrangement whereby schools with large numbers of bilingual students belonging to the same language group are placed in a Zone of Educational Priority (ZEP). Extra measures are provided for these schools such as smaller groups of students per classroom plus additional hours of support language instruction. In school C, there was a specialist teacher who had received some training in the role of providing support for the bilingual students, with timetabled special classes of some two or more hours depending on the students' needs. School C provided a very specific scenario with 40% of all students being bilingual, the majority of whom were immigrants. In this school, a special classroom had been created for these students and there was a support teacher for Greek as an additional language. The students were divided into five levels of development that related to their language skill level – level 1 being the stage at which maximum support was needed. In light of this assessment, the students attended an appropriate support language class.

School D, with a large number of bilingual students, was included in the ZEP arrangement and attracted additional support. Notably, T/C students also had assistance with their native tongue and there was close collaboration between the T/C and the G/C teachers, with the help of an interpreter to teach both languages. School D again presented a different situation to the others with 45% of bilingual students being T/Cs, i.e., members of the largest language minority in Cyprus. In this school, two T/C primary teachers were employed to teach the Turkish language and culture to T/C students daily for forty minutes. As the school belonged to the ZEP programme it received funding which enabled it to provide additional support hours and training seminars on multiculturalism as well as advice on teaching methods for teachers.

The teachers in the sample (three from each school) were all G/Cs, and their total teaching experience varied from two to thirteen years; their experience with bilingual students varied from one to six years. All had Greek as their L1 and had learnt English as a foreign language. The schools were named ScA, ScB, ScC and ScD and the teachers from the schools interviewed were identified as T1, T2 etc, specifying their school.

Permission to undertake this research was given by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Cyprus as well as by the head teachers of the schools. A formal comparison of the schools is beyond the scope of this research as our main focus was to obtain data from multiple sources in

order to determine what concerns, if any, were shared across the sites and to identify any potentially effective and transferable practices particular to any of the school contexts.

Data Collection and Analysis

For the purpose of data collection, an interview schedule was prepared for the teachers. The interview schedule was in three parts: the first to ascertain personal details and teaching experience of the teachers involved; the second to hear the views of the teachers about language use in the classroom, the use and knowledge of the children's L1 and the role of the dialect, for example, and in the third part, to ask about training experiences, available resources and parental support.

The interviews were carried out in the summer of 2008 and were conducted face-to-face in Greek. On average they lasted approximately 45 minutes. While interviewing, the researchers had 'a sequence of themes to be covered, as well as suggested questions' (Kvale, 1996, p. 124) relating to each of the key themes. They were all tape-recorded, transcribed and faithfully translated to English with cross-checks by a fellow native Greek speaker, and then analysed. Following Blaxter *et al.*'s (2006) suggestion, the transcripts of the interviews were examined 'question by question' to compare the teachers' responses. Working on an open-coding basis, in a method of progressive focussing, (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), we highlighted issues arising and were then able to identify the key challenges as perceived by the teachers and which are presented in this article. At the end of each interview, an informal de-briefing took place with the participants regarding the interview and the research in general.

If the number of students taught by each teacher is observed – whose native tongue is not Greek – together with the range of languages spoken, then the extent of the challenge in the language classroom becomes apparent. The table opposite presents an overview of the multicultural classroom environment for our sample of twelve teachers in the four schools marked as ScA, ScB, ScC and ScD.

Striving for Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose terms they consider appropriate to qualitative research such as 'credibility' and 'transferability' as criteria for the 'trustworthiness' of research. It was judged that undertaking this research in four schools would provide credible data from a triangulatory point of view and that by highlighting strategies with potential transfer value that are effective in supporting bilingual children to engage successfully in their learning, would enhance the trustworthiness of the research.

Following Silverman (2005), all interactions were transcribed in full and made available for respondent validation. A comprehensive account of the research was maintained and the procedures and conditions, including our thinking at each stage of the research, was documented in depth, to leave what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call an 'audit trail'. With two researchers independently making transcriptions and interpretations, this allowed for a further dimension of

triangulation. As Creswell (2007, p. 208) writes, 'Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective'.

Table 2: Data regarding the Student Population in the Participants' Classrooms

	Grade	Number of Bilingual Students	Total number of Students	Origin of Bilingual Students
ScA, T1	B	4	25	Kurdistan, Kirgizstan, Bulgaria, Moldavia
ScA, T2	A	8	27	Syria, Romania, Bulgaria, Russia
ScA, T3	C	7	26	Romania, Bulgaria, Philippines, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Sweden
ScB, T1	F	7	25	Iran, Moldavia, Georgia, Syria, Romania
ScB, T2	E	9	26	Syria, Iran, Iraq, Germany, Sweden, Georgia
ScB, T3	D	7	23	Georgia, Congo, Moldavia, Bulgaria, United Kingdom,
ScC, T1 (specialist language teacher)	Five different language levels	42	42	Bulgaria, Russia, Syria, Poland, Yugoslavia, United Kingdom, Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, Colombia, Iran, Iraq
ScC, T2	A	13	22	Poland, Russia, United Kingdom, Syria, Iran, Iraq
ScC, T3	D	8	18	Georgia, Russia, United Kingdom, Armenia, Serbia
ScD, T1	E	4	17	T/Cs
ScD, T2	D	5	11	T/Cs, Slovakia, Denmark
ScD, T3	A	9	11	T/Cs, Poland, Kurdistan

We have been aware of, and attentive to, identifying any bias and assumption in our research diaries. The focus throughout the research has been on researcher integrity and critical reflexivity. The work was shared with colleagues acting as critical friends as well as in presentations subject to questioning. Every effort was made to achieve validity through the scope of data collected. We made 'thick' (Geertz, 1967) and honest descriptions of all that was observed and heard. By repeating the research in four different sites, iterative analysis was undertaken to provide internal coherence of analysis. As a whole, such a reflexive approach provided credible grounds for the findings we claim from this research and which we discuss in the next section.

Findings

In this section, we present and discuss key findings drawing on the interview data from the three sections of the interview schedule.

Section 1 – The Teachers and Their Teaching Experience

The table below gives information in response to the questions on section 1 of the interview schedule.

Table 3: Details of Teachers' Experience

School	A			B			C			D		
Teacher	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Country of origin	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus	Cyprus
Sex	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	M	F
L1	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek	Greek
FL(s)	English	English	English	English	English	English French	English	English	English	English	English	English
Teaching experience (years)	7	10	5	8	7	4	2	8	13	2	12	4
Teaching OLS students (years)	3	5	5	6	6	4	1	3	2	1	5	4

It can be seen that reflecting the general trend for language teachers, 11 out of 12 are female. They all have English as their foreign language. There is some difference between the years in teaching and the years of experience in teaching bilingual children for some of them, noticeably for several of the most experienced teachers. We bore such contextual information in mind when reflecting on the findings regarding the challenges.

Section 2 – Languages in the Classroom

In this section the discussion which derived from questions, generated key issues from several perspectives in relation to languages in the classroom.

a) Student Use of L1 in Lessons

This issue came up often in the interviews and gave rise to very mixed views. Teachers generally claimed that they did not allow students to use their L1 in the language lesson, either orally or in writing. One teacher asserted that:

> 'We insist on the use of Greek! We make it clear that in the classroom, we talk only in Greek' (ScC, T1)

because the instructor said that she supported maximum exposure to the Greek language. Another teacher believed that using the L1 would not be helpful to the learners:

> 'Since we, as teachers, do not understand and cannot communicate in their languages, we cannot really help them in this way, so, there is no need to let them use their mother tongue' (ScC, T2).

The focus on the acquisition of basic knowledge in Greek, both orally and in writing, was thought to facilitate communication and support students' progress. This view was justified by T2 in ScA who claimed that knowing some Greek has an impact on the children's inclusion and feeling of well-being:

> 'Learning the language is very important. The students feel better, more comfortable; they are more included, more attentive' (ScA, T2).

Some teachers allowed students to write the translations of some words into their L1 but only one teacher in ScB actively encouraged students to use their L1 in the lesson, based on her observation that the children seemed to enjoy it. Some teachers suggested that the use of the L1 could be a helpful tool – for example in classes with several students of the same language group where the most competent pupil in Greek can serve as translator for both the other students and the teacher. One teacher in ScD had discovered similarities between Bulgarian and Greek that she said had facilitated the learning of Greek by Bulgarian speaking children.

Our data indicate that teachers believed that learners should be exposed to Greek as much as possible, given the language context (Greek as the language of instruction and the official language) and also because they considered that learners were able to cope without recourse to the L1 which they regarded as a possible hindrance. It was noted by T3 in ScB that when bilingual children made apparent progress in Greek, they were visibly proud and their self-confidence increased. A few of the teachers saw benefits for pupils using the L1 to support their learning and in encouraging pupils to support each other by using their L1.

b) The Use of the G/C Dialect in the Language Lesson

Dialect use was discussed animatedly and posed a different kind of challenge with opposing views expressed. The data show that although the declared intention was to use Standard Modern Greek in lessons by the majority of the teachers, much of the classroom language and language of interaction was in fact in dialect. The majority of comments made by teachers on this point – 15 out of 22 – considered that the dialect might impede the students' written expression in Standard Modern Greek:

> 'This is the correct written form of our language. If the students listened to the dialect even in the classroom, then, they would face more difficulties than they already do in writing syntactically correct sentences' (ScB, T2).

Furthermore, T2 in ScD and T2 in ScC considered that the Greek language itself posed enough challenge and was an especially complex and difficult language to learn, especially as an additional language, and so should be the exclusive focus.

Although all teachers stated 'Greek' to be the language they used in their lessons, they also said that they used dialect, either when joking, explaining, correcting and building interpersonal relationships, or during vital authentic communicative learning contexts and in substantive parts of the lessons. One teacher from ScC thought it important to use the dialect:

> 'It's important, because students write in the same way they talk, that is why they write words in the G/C dialect, even though we want them to write in Greek' (ScC, T1).

Teachers said that some students, both native and non-native speakers became confused at times, but learnt to distinguish between the two linguistic codes in context (Ioannidou and Sophocleous, 2010). Four teachers also stressed that students should be exposed to dialect because, as ScD, T3 asserted,

> 'We cannot exclude the dialect. It is needed in our daily life to communicate with the others, even for the non-native speaker students. The dialect is everywhere'.

A strategy emerged from the data which was considered useful by many teachers to promote the learning of Greek by adopting a collaborative learning style and working in groups during the language lesson. Some teachers organised their students for pair work according to speakers of the same language:

> 'I allow non-native speaker students who speak the same language to work together so that they can help each other during certain activities in the lesson' (ScC, T1)

or speakers of different languages so that they could support and teach one another while doing an activity:

> 'I implement collaborative learning. I divide the non-native speaker students into different groups so that they can get help from their peers and do not need my personal support all the time' (ScB, T1).

This, the teachers argued, gave them the flexibility to support students' individual needs.

The teachers informed us that some students, when in mixed groups, sometimes spoke in dialect to communicate and to mediate their learning in parallel with the formal Greek instruction. These students would 'hop' from one language to another, code-switching to suit their need by using Greek with dialect in a versatile way as native speakers do. Although the teachers observed that the bilingual students expressed themselves more in Greek than in the G/C dialect, the G/C students, in contrast, favoured the dialect.

c) The Plethora of Languages Present and Knowing Something about the Students' L1

The teachers identified this issue as a major challenge with the number of different languages in one class alone presenting a logistical challenge in itself. With regard to the teachers' knowledge of, or about, the children's L1, a variety of differing, sometimes opposing, opinions were encountered. As can be seen below some teachers saw potential benefits:

> 'It would be ideal if the teacher was bilingual and knew the languages of his students' (ScD, T2)

and, perhaps, more realistically from a teacher who had knowledge of some of the children's L1:

> 'It is helpful to know the linguistic structures of the languages' (ScD, T1).

One teacher thought that the learners were flexible enough to cope by using different modes to find meaning in her teaching approach:

> 'Students learnt, even if I didn't speak their mother tongue, because there is always an alternative way to follow what is going on' (ScA, T1).

The teachers referred to strategies that they used to circumvent instances when the children's L1 was unknown. For example, they used visual aids during the language lesson such as pictures, flash cards, films and presentations with the use of computers and projectors or realia, such as fake fruits, to make the meaning clear. These aids, as Leung (2000) suggests, render language lessons more interesting and challenging and are more effective in achieving specific linguistic goals. One teacher advocated that:

> 'When the teacher does not speak the MT of the students, the pictures help both teacher and students to communicate' (ScA, T3).

Visuals were also useful to ensure that students understood what was being asked of them:

> 'When they do not understand what they have to do, I try with pictures, with signs to help them as when they do not understand, they are indifferent and inattentive' (ScD, T1).

Additionally, ScD, T3 commented that

> 'It's a sort of communication without words that both sides possess'

identifying what she perceived to be a dimension of shared non-verbal communication.

The majority of the teachers believed that a minimum knowledge of each student's L1 was ideal in order to be able to support them effectively, yet, they pointed out that it would be impossible to know something of every language spoken by the students:

> 'We have to deal with six-seven or even more different languages' (ScC, T1).

In contrast, T3 in ScC thought that it was not necessary to know the students' L1 exclaiming that:

> 'We are in a Greek school!' (ScC, T3).

Overall, our analysis of their views indicate that whilst teachers thought it would be useful to know something of the children's L1s, it was impossible to do so and they, therefore, used visual or other means of communication to help children understand.

Section 3 – Training and Resources

Discussion from questions and probes in this section gave rise to the following challenges being identified.

a) The Materials Provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture

The materials provided were deemed to be unsuitable by all of the teachers. They expressed considerable anxiety and dissatisfaction in their comment and tone. Most, but not all, of the teachers were aware that there were some textbooks provided by the MEC, but they considered them inappropriate for the students' levels. Teachers said that the bilingual learners needed to have additional worksheets or specific simplified exercises to do, and should read and write less than the native speaker students. One teacher explained her view:

> 'Many cognitive levels, many different levels, different goals for every pupil! I have nine different cognitive levels in my classroom, I cannot come to the school with just one worksheet. I have to prepare one for every level. Extra work at home, more work at the school, in the classroom, I must always run from one student to the other ... Not enough time!' (ScD, T3).

Angelides and Gibbs, (2007, p. 64) stated that teachers '... felt alone in professional matters', which was in accord with the teachers' remarks, i.e:

> 'You are left on your own! ... They just sent some books; actually they threw the books in the school without extra help or support ... And the teacher is flying blind (ScC, T2), and 'You are just struggling on your own, to prepare worksheets, to borrow books in order to teach them basic Greek. You have a huge responsibility and you have to find time to support these students' (ScD, T2).

Teachers felt that the lack of appropriate resources and direction impeded their job, but their real issue was a perceived lack of guidelines to enable them to exploit and adapt the materials for teaching non-native speaker students alongside native speakers:

> 'They keep sending us circulars, they send us books, to do this, to do that, they send, they send, they send ... but it would be good to use them if they showed us how to use them' (ScA, T2).

Some teachers had strategies to deal with their feeling of being 'alone'. The teachers in ScB and ScC assisted each other by exchanging material that they used for support language teaching. In ScC, T1 stated that she used teaching material she had used for the A grade (first grade of G/C Primary Education), even though she was unsure of its suitability for teaching Greek as an additional language. She adopted these materials because of her dissatisfaction with the textbooks she was supposed to use:

> 'There are textbooks, but their content is not satisfactory at all. We have them, but we do not give them to our students, because they are not suitable' (ScC, T1).

She continued:

> 'Many textbooks have been sent, but most of them are useless. They contain texts that are out-of-date, they include words that we do not use anymore; the activities are not satisfactory. I may photocopy a couple of pages, but even then, I need to modify them. The content is not at all satisfactory. They [the books] need to be changed' (ScC, T1).

This teacher, who put together her own teaching materials, claimed to observe progress in learning, and found her goals for the students successful. She said that she spent considerable time on studying some basic grammar with the children, enabling them, for example, to correctly write complete small sentences.

All teachers in the sample, however, stated that the native speakers also needed a different kind of provision in terms of materials to progress their reading and writing skills and their knowledge of grammar rules and orthography. One teacher found that some bilingual children could not keep pace with the teaching rhythm or reach the same linguistic level as native speaker students and, as Theodorou (2010) also found, she tended to lower her expectations for all students as a result. Generally, it was felt that there was not enough time to deal with the needs of all students, and

> 'some teachers felt guilty' (ScB, T3)

because, it was claimed that some students invariably were neglected or disadvantaged.

> 'In the end, somebody misses something' (ScD, T2).

The teachers created their own materials but blamed the pressure of inspections for having to work within constraints. One teacher, for example, was of the opinion that during an inspection, differentiated teaching for bilingual children would not be taken into consideration:

> 'When the inspector comes and checks me, he will not evaluate what I do with the other language-speaking students, but he will want to see what I mostly do with the native-speak[ing] students and how much of what the curriculum suggests I have taught' (ScD, T1).

The lack of suitable materials, guidance and support, together with anxiety regarding inspections, formed the main source of comment from the teachers. They attributed poor assessment results to these factors in which learning goals were rarely achieved by the non-native speakers and, moreover, they believed that these students would not be 'ready' to transfer to their next grade. Undoubtedly, there might have been weaknesses or a lack of imagination in the teaching, but as lesson observation was not part of this stage of the research, comments on this area were not possible.

b) Parental Support

The teachers formed the view that the parent's perception of education affected their children's attitude towards learning Greek. In ScC and ScD – with a large number of T/C students – all

teachers concluded that parents' indifference and lack of support towards their children's education had a considerable impact on them as the following indicate:

> 'It is a matter of culture and mentality. In the environment in which they live and grow up, they do not care about education, they just want to survive and they just need the language to be able to communicate, nothing more than that. They do not care to reach the level of the other students in the classroom. And we don't really know their parents. They never come to see us at school, not even when we [have] asked to see them' (ScC, T1).

> 'Many non-native speaker students consider that school is just a place to keep themselves busy while Mum or Dad is at work' (ScD, T2).

The teachers' observation of the vital role of parental support meshes with the findings of Coll *et al.* (2002), and Skourtou (2005) who also writes that when students do not study at home or receive no parental support, linguistic problems are more common in the classroom. In ScC, T2 described her case:

> 'I send letters, I try to call parents, to show them how to support their children, but I cannot press them. There are children who keep coming to the school as tourists, their parents are totally indifferent ... and this is soul destroying' (ScC, T2).

Skourtou (*ibid.*) stressed in her research that when parents do not know how to help their children to do their homework and do not speak Greek, then it is difficult for them to prioritise their children's education. Similarly, a teacher in our study proposed:

> '... programmes for parents ... to help them learn the language, how to support their kids ... to get involved in the system ...' (ScA, T2).

One teacher suggested that if the parents' relationships with the school were better,

> 'This would help students' relationships with the school ... because many kids come to school and they do not understand why they come to school ... they need to be motivated' (ScC, T2).

Some teachers at schools A, B and C claimed that relationships were better with the parents of quite a large number of pupils who came from families with high socio-economic status, which the teachers linked to a more active interest in their children's education. Where the parents provided support and encouragement for their children, the teachers were able to identify children as effective learners of Greek, identifying some of them amongst their best students. This was especially the case where one parent understood Greek. One teacher suggested that

> 'We should organise reception classes for the parents, too. Actually, firstly for the parents and then for the students' (ScB, T3)

thus reinforcing the necessity to reach out to those parents in need of support and provide continuity of learning (Coll *et al.*, 2002).

c) Training to Support Learners Effectively in the Greek Language Classroom

Teachers were unanimous in their perceptions of a lack of effective provision of institutionalised or formalised training by the MEC, and in training that they had undertaken which, according to them, did not meet their needs. Teachers informed us – as Hadjioannou (2006) found – that student teachers, as part of their pre-service education programme, are expected to teach Greek to all students in mainstream classrooms, but lack the professional know-how as to how to do so. In ScC, T1, who was recently qualified said:

> 'The question is not to write about bilingual students in a book but to show us, teach us how to do this and how to do that'.

The teachers affirmed that although they felt unsupported, most of them tried their own techniques to find ways to teach Greek in mainstream classes. With up to seven non-native speakers in a classroom some teachers found that having so many different language speakers was an overwhelming situation. A small number found strategies that were relatively successful, but none of them believed that their initial training had prepared them for the diversity in their school rooms:

> 'We study for four years to become teachers and finally, we end up in schools teaching weak and foreign students' (ScB, T2,) and 'My knowledge of bilingualism is what I heard or studied on my own. I attended a seminar but most of the information was theoretical. There wasn't any guidance on what to do in practice when there are non-native speaker students in your class' (ScC, T3).

None of the teachers claimed to have any knowledge about bilingualism. A couple of articles on this subject had been read by T3 in ScB during her studies and another two – T1 in ScD and T3 in ScA – stated that they had attended a course during their pre-service education that included a lecture on bilingualism. Furthermore, three teachers had attended a seminar on bilingualism and the teaching of Greek as an additional language during an in-service programme but none of them found any of the courses useful or effective. For example:

> 'They are very theoretical, they do not show you how to put theory into practice, what to do when you have foreign students in your classroom' (ScA, T3).

Whilst the support teachers had received some focused training, the other teachers claimed that they were unaware of seminars on this topic or had not been invited to attend any:

> 'I haven't had any training so far! Let's hope I will – that we all will!' (ScC, T2).

In the light of these comments, it was decided to probe what they might 'hope for' in terms of training and support. Their responses are summarised in table 4.

Table 4: Suggestions for Improved Training and Support

	School A			School B			School C			School D		
	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
Reception Classes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
Increase in supportive language hours	✓	✓	✓					✓				
Appropriate teaching materials			✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Decrease in student number		✓	✓									
Use of dictionaries									✓			
Assistant teacher		✓			✓			✓				
Parental support				✓		✓				✓	✓	✓
Bilingual teachers					✓	✓					✓	
Curriculum design	✓						✓	✓		✓		
In-service training			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓				

All teachers in both ScA and ScB and one teacher in ScD suggested the provision of reception classes for intensive language teaching – for example,

> 'Reception classes will contribute to the smooth integration of the students into the mainstream classrooms' (ScA, T1).

Moyer (2004, p. 43), argues that with regard to early language learning 'younger does appear to imply better' and Jones and Coffey (2006, p. 4) state that young language learners are able to 'maximize their advantages' in language learning. Larson-Hall (2008. p. 58) holds that studies with young immigrant populations found evidence that starting at a very young age 'makes a modest difference to both phonological and basic morphosyntactic abilities', even when children are exposed to a minimal formal language input of say, twice a week. Teachers participating in Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou's (2007) research in Cyprus claimed that bilingual students at a younger age achieve better academic results than older students do, although other personal and

socio-economic factors also affected their performance to some extent. The existing body of research on early-learning lends some credence to the teachers' views.

Four teachers considered that support hours should be increased and that curriculum content be better organised with specific goals. Half of the teachers recommended the need to provide appropriate teaching material to suit the different cognitive levels and the requirements of students. It was suggested by some teachers that these might include reference to the students' L1s. One-quarter of the teachers stated that it would be helpful to have an assistant in the classroom who could speak the L1 of students, particularly in the reception classes. In-service training was considered essential, but in a form where trainers would:

> 'talk to us, show us what to do and how to put it into practice' (ScC, T2).

This concurs with Darling-Hammond *et al.*'s (2009) research which indicates that teachers are more likely to develop classroom practices that they have observed and tried out during professional development sessions. This necessitates school environments and organisational structures to promote reflective and critical teacher inquiry (Fullan, 2001).

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The data show a high level of shared teacher perceptions of the challenges present in their multilingual classrooms although some issues were contested and differently experienced by the teachers. Nonetheless, for all teachers, the number of different languages represented in their classes was overwhelming. Teachers felt that it was logistically impossible to know something of each of the children's languages and focused instead on finding pragmatic ways to help the pupils understand the language of instruction such as the use of visual aids and of collaborative work that teachers believed aided comprehension. They considered it advantageous for the students to interact, to share the same experiences with native-speaking students and to be continuously in contact with language stimuli in Greek, resonating with the teachers' assertions in the research of Panayiotopoulos and Nicolaidou (2007).

The most contested issue relates to the data which indicate a patchy exploitation of the children's L1 in the classroom as a way to support learning and learners. Cable (2000), supported by Leung (2000), suggests that the teachers' lack of knowledge of bilingualism theories or of policy, results in their paying scant attention to the potential for students to make connections between the languages and make strategic use of their linguistic repertoire. Teachers perhaps undervalued the L1 as a linguistic resource (Cook, 2001) and as a means to mediate learning, increase the confidence of the learners and increase language use communicatively; hence reflecting the view of Cummins (2000) that the primary goals for bilingual students need to be oriented to comprehension and communication. Exploiting the L1 could also provide rich opportunities to develop intercultural understanding in an authentic context (Barrett, 2007) and towards this aim, some teachers described some cultural events in their schools.

Most teachers claimed the use of dialect could be an obstruction to learning Standard Greek, yet extensive use was made of dialect in the primary classroom (Ioannidou and Sophocleous, 2010). Only a few teachers explicitly made a case for pupils to develop bilingualism in both Greek and dialect (4 out of a total of 22 comments on the topic). From the teachers' remarks about code-switching, it appeared to be undertaken in a rather confusing and covert way rather than as a 'set of rich and multidimensional communicative strategies for teachers and students alike' (Tsiplakou and Georgi, 2008, p. 197).

The data showed that the teachers felt insecure and untrained for diversity, resonating with Hadjioannou's finding (2006) that teachers were inadequately prepared for working with diverse students. Even though the MEC and other institutions have made efforts to provide materials and training opportunities, they do not meet the teachers' immediate needs which are practical support and applications. Our findings support those of Trimikliniotis (2004, p. 16) who found that teachers were lacking the resources and training to offer 'a genuine multi-cultural education even when keen to do so', as was the case with the majority of teachers, including the most experienced teachers and the more recent entrants to the classroom.

Overall, from what teachers recounted in the interviews there was a measure of unimaginative teaching but lesson observation was not part of this research, and whilst teachers were justifiably focused on developing the children's competence in Greek, teachers did not articulate any explicit theorised bilingual language pedagogy in support of their pedagogical choices. Indeed, though most of the teachers taught in the way they had always taught or been trained to teach, they found themselves with unsuitable materials, supplementing these as necessary and sometimes differentiating provision and learning objectives, giving individual support when time allowed in a rather *ad hoc* way. This, they claimed that they did in the face of a perceived complete lack of support, or suitable training and resources while experiencing considerable behavioural and classroom management issues. Teachers in all four schools made similar claims, even those in the ZEP programme with specialist support. The monolingual and monocultural pressures they felt, did not allow them to develop new, flexible and responsive teaching approaches. Crucially, we found that the teachers in our interviews wanted to teach the children in a more effective way, but without having been shown appropriate ways, they were experiencing a strong sense of isolation in their task and were limited in what they could do on their own.

Reflecting on the Data from the Four Schools

Our research is not based on the intention to formally compare the schools; instead we examined and reflected on the data from each of the four schools to identify factors with potential transfer value to other schools. If we look at claims regarding pupils' progress in language, it was asserted by all teachers that the bilingual pupils had progressed by the end of the academic year. The teachers reported that the majority of them still faced difficulties in orthography, grammar and syntax in Greek, yet they were able to communicate and get meanings across. The specialist language teacher

in school C claimed some considerable success with the bilingual pupils. Much seems to depend on this teacher and the provision of a special school timetable for teaching the bilingual children, according to their language level and knowledge in Greek. She said:

> 'Some students in this school have the chance to be taught the Greek language for 80 or 40 minutes daily, which is not the case in other schools where there is no specialized language teacher. Other schools only get this per week. I have students who did not know how to speak and communicate in Greek in September, but before the Christmas holidays, they had learned to understand Greek, speak and even write in Greek, because they had had daily teaching of Greek as a FL' (ScC, T1).

This teacher also thought it important to develop the children's writing skills at a basic level to develop confidence.

Another teacher in school C commented on the good efforts of some bilingual students and the need to commend them, hence emphasising the need for positive feedback (Scarcella, 1990; Hattie and Timperely, 2007):

> 'They need to hear "Well done!" from you even for the little they can do in Greek' (ScC, T3).

Other factors identifiable in the data from school C that are worthy of consideration regarding tentative import for diverse classrooms include:

- having a reasonably balanced intake of pupils and the appropriate level of support, to include employing specialist support staff who have had bilingual education training
- the availability of a range of suitable resources
- opportunities for teachers to discuss strategies and share materials
- incorporating peer teaching and group work into lessons and giving pupils encouragement and feedback on their learning
- keeping expectations high for all pupils
- making constructive use, as appropriate, of the dialect for multiple purposes in the classroom but keeping a focus on maximising exposure to Greek
- teacher agency in making decisions about pedagogical issues in the multilingual classroom.

In school C, students had the provision they needed to be able to make progress and, crucially, the teachers worked together and not alone, although some of the strongest comments about the challenges came from these teachers. Nonetheless, such factors as indicated above, and especially the teachers' emergent agency that counteracted, in part, their sense of isolation, and which we would like to highlight as an important insight from this study, can help create a culture for managing and coping with challenge and change. The other three schools also had aspects of good practice, but these need to be shared amongst all the schools. Effective support from leadership, and parental cooperation would be the basis for any of the factors listed to be sustainable. The factors

would also respond to the need to meet the aims of the G/C educational system of enabling students to reach a satisfactory level of fluency in Greek to be successful in mainstream classrooms. Moreover, being able to speak the dialect would assist their inclusion in daily life, and supporting their mother tongues would ensure a part of their heritage and lifelong learning, engaging the learners in all the 'linguistic spaces' (Little, 2010, p. 90) that intersect in their schooling. Likewise, this would also include the exciting opportunity to learn a foreign language (Eurydice, 2008).

Conclusion

We concur with Theodorou (2010, p. 16) that teachers need to take an active part in reassessing and reviewing the needs of students, and in 'navigating institutional constraints'. This would involve subscribing to defining a curriculum and targets that reflect the needs and development of bilingual students at different levels in a way that has already been done for native-speaking children, rather than settling for lower expectations as Theodorou (2010) similarly found. When teachers, however experienced, are confronted with new and urgent situations requiring new skills and ways of teaching, then the data suggest it is imperative to empower teachers to develop confidence in their own ability to improve the effectiveness of their work and to integrate new ideas into their existing experiences and personal theories (James, 2001; Johnson and Golombeck, 2002). The data indicated few opportunities for shared discussion about their work. Teachers, we suggest, need space for professional dialogue and opportunities to exchange ideas, activities and strategies with colleagues as part of meaningful training (Karagiorgi *et al.*, 2008). This would beneficially include the parents to enable them to provide their children with support for their school work, in a more effective home-school partnership in the way that the teachers argued. The 'navigation' through constraints that is needed cannot be done by language teachers alone, for they need whole school backing, for example, in the form of language support from all teachers across the curriculum, citizenship education (Philippou, 2007) and effective leadership (Sergiovanni, 2001; Harris and Lambert, 2003). Teachers would not then be so 'alone' in the job and would feel qualified to undertake agentive action to improve bilingual education for learners in their multilingual classrooms. Current reviews of the curriculum in Cyprus suggest an opportune moment for teachers to explore a more collaborative and effective integrated language and content approach in the mainstreaming policy that would, along with the valuing of cultural diversity, permeate whole school policy and practice and take the factors we highlighted into consideration.

End Note

On a final note, the teachers told us that often the primary children played together and ended up being friends, forming groups with mixed nationalities, and that any problems among students were not caused by different nationality, but by students' individual characters, as in any other mixed playground in any other school. Teachers reported that many children found their own ways of dealing effectively with difficulties, and some students progressed really well in their learning

and social skills, testifying to their resilience and ability to find some successful coping strategies in class and in their multicultural and multilingual playground, thus highlighting the role of student agency in the multilingual environment. A next step would be to listen to the pupil voice about their multifold language learning experiences.

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