Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning

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EDITORIAL

While this issue is not a special issue on any particular area of applied linguistics or English as a foreign language, there seem to be two main areas of interest: one focusing on teachers (their attitudes, development, perceptions about their learners and the curriculum), and another one focusing on learners. Of all the papers, six have an interest in the former, ten on the latter. Of the papers the focus on learners, nine (the vast majority, in other words) are situated in the primary level (which is always an area which particular interest for all teachers, especially in the Greek context) and three involve classes with adolescents. Finally, of all the papers in the volume, five have a particular interest in the implementation of technology.

Let us have a more analytical look at individual papers in the volume. Tsoulou’s paper kicks off the volume with the implementation of a peer observation framework for EFL teachers employed in a Greek secondary education context. The author gauged participant teachers’ attitudes towards peer observation as a means of professional development. The study showed that teachers are favourable towards peer observation and recognize it as a means of prompting systematic reflection as well as promoting their active engagement in the training process that encourages constructive feedback and collegiality. Her paper is followed by an informative review of Greek state-school and private EFL teachers’ viewpoints regarding their understanding of how their status is perceived by the broader community, including peers, learners and learners’ parents. In that paper, Lykoudi finds that state teachers’ self-perceptions about their status rank lower than their colleagues’ in private institutes and links these self-perceptions with their motivation levels. Lykoudi suggests that one way of boosting state-school teachers’ self-confidence would be to raise the acceptance level of EFL teaching in state schools by introducing formal EFL certification structures in the state school system. Following a different direction, but still remaining in the domain of teachers’ attitudes, Karkoulia’s paper focuses on the perceptions of 135 Greek EFL teachers regarding the integration of Web 2.0 tools in their practice. Her study shows that, while teachers approach the level of normalisation in their implementation of such tools as YouTube, Google Sites, blogs, and wikis, ‘the frequency with which teachers use them, the lack of training/technological equipment in many cases, and the fact that Web 2.0 technologies are not part of the syllabus indicate that Web 2.0 tools have not taken their rightful place in education yet’.

Two papers focus on teachers’ attitudes. Vrettou, Psaltou-Joycey and Gavriilidou report on the pilot implementation of a carefully developed questionnaire that they used with 58 Greek primary and secondary state-school EFL teachers in order to investigate the strategies they employ to enhance their learners’ strategic learning. The authors comment extensively on participant teachers’ reaction to the questionnaire and suggest ways in which the teaching strategy inventory (embedded in the questionnaire) can be fruitfully integrated in in-service teacher education. Then, Kavvadia presents the most favoured vocabulary learning strategies according to Greek primary school teachers and learners. She also briefly highlights vocabulary learning strategies showcased in the textbooks used in the same
context and underlines the importance of the adoption of appropriate strategies in teaching and learning. Kidonia’s paper concludes this section focusing on teachers and their perceptions by gauging the extent to which the cross-thematic curriculum of Greek all-day primary schools, which emphasises the need for experiential learning, is acknowledged and practised in these contexts. The author asks the opinions of school advisors and teachers and concludes that it is not, and goes on to suggest ways to promote the integration of experiential learning in all-day primary school settings.

We are fortunate to include in this volume two papers addressing the same issue, namely, the integration of phonics and whole language approach in the development of young learners’ early literacy skills. Damianou’s paper documents an action research project that includes teacher journals, class recordings, a battery of reading tests and learner questionnaires. Her data show the interesting ways in which young learners interact with texts and highlight their preferences and early reading strategies. Then, Konstantopoulou proposes a story-based syllabus integrating the phonics and whole language approaches to early reading literacy. Her study uses 8 teaching sessions at a Greek third-grade state-school class and finds that this balanced approach enhanced learners’ motivation and comprehension.

The remainder of the papers document very interesting and informative research that focuses on the primary level and highlights the development of the reading and writing skills. Al-Bulushi and Al-Humaidi shed light on the spelling strategies of a large sample of EFL students of grades four and ten in Oman. Their data show that grade-four learners prioritized rule use whereas grade-ten learners prioritized the visual checking strategy. Interestingly, both groups showed less preference for the kinesthetic strategy, which is attributed to the unwillingness of teachers to engage learners with activities involving movement. Stratigou’s paper shows how young learners’ close collaboration in process writing activities can improve both their engagement and their performance. Her study used a control and an experimental group, the latter using pair-work process-writing activities, the former using individualized writing tasks, and showcases the superiority of the experimental group (despite the challenges that this experiment posed to its participants) in terms of fluency, complexity, accuracy, content and organization. In Manoli’s study, 20 Greek-speaking 11-12 year-olds were involved in a three-month-long period where they received explicit multiple-reading strategy instruction under the Direct Explanation framework (which aims at enhancing learners’ declarative knowledge about each strategy). Among the other extremely interesting results, delayed post-test measurements showed the maintenance of learners’ comprehension gains after the end of the lessons, which has important implications for ESOL teaching.

Four papers have a marked focus on the integration of innovative technologies. Of those, three concentrate on the primary level, and one on adults. Avgerou and Vlachos present the advantages of using blogs in foreign language learning. They see blogs as a means of improving learners’ writing and research skills, as well as their intercultural awareness. Their data come from a state junior high school context, includes learner questionnaires and a teacher’s journal and highlight the ways in which blogs can be fruitfully integrated in the foreign language classroom. Deligianni-Georgaka and Pouroutidi propose a way of boosting young learners’ (6th graders’) motivation and participation in writing tasks by involving them in developing digital comics. They used observation, interviews and questionnaires to show these learners’ active engagement in these tasks. Their research further shows that learners gain through their engagement with technology because they are prompted to be more collaborative and creative. In Makrogiorgou and Antoniou’s study, forty 6-graders
participated in a WebQuest-oriented lesson that involved them in engaging with a variety of web-based texts, in an attempt to supplement the compulsory textbook with new ICT skills and strategies. The authors found that these young learners were particularly keen in implementing key reading comprehension strategies, such as goal-setting, monitoring, rereading, scanning-skimming, and inference-making, which render WebQuests an invaluable tool for the state primary ESOL classroom. Last but not least, Katsanis’ study focuses on adolescent learners’ perceptions regarding the impact of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in foreign language learning. Her context is a Greek vocational school and the research instrument she uses is a WebQuest, interviews, and observations. She concludes that CALL raises learners’ motivation and facilitates cooperative learning.

Nicos C. Sifakis
Editor-in-Chief
Attitudes towards conducting peer observation for teacher development purposes within the Greek state school teaching context

Georgia TSOULOU

Peer observation is a practice suggested as an appropriate means for promoting teacher development through observation of and exposure to the teaching practices of colleagues. Although widely implemented in tertiary education, peer observation is not equally practiced in secondary education. That being given, a study was conducted to investigate the attitudes of teachers towards implementing peer observation as a teacher development practice within the Greek state school teaching environment. A combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were employed, which showed that Greek EFL teachers are quite familiar with the notions of teacher development and peer observation and, thus, are in a position to provide an informed opinion regarding peer observation as a developmental practice. It was suggested that Greek EFL teachers hold a positive attitude towards peer observation as a practice that incorporates the elements of active participation in the training process, systematic reflection and the provision of constructive feedback, all delivered in an encouraging environment of collegiality. Overall, although Greek EFL teachers have little practical experience of peer observation, it is asserted that they are willing to employ it on a regular basis as a self-directed practice that facilitates teacher development. Thus, the way is paved for investigating how teachers can be encouraged to incorporate peer observation in Greek teaching reality in their effort to improve as practitioners and as people respectively.

The allhlopaparatérhsh (peer observation) einai mia praktikh praxevnvmh n ws katallhlo meos proódhshs tis ekpavdeutikh anaptvshs (teacher development) meos tis paratérhshs kai tis ekvdshs se didaktikhs praktikhs svndélwv. Párdlo pou einai evreós diadédymen h sthn tritovádia ekpaidevsh, h allhlopaparatérhsh de evaromhsetai se idio vadmo kai sthn deuterovádia ekpaidevsh. Dedoménou autou, diezíghch meléth me
Tsoulou / Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning 7/1 (2016) 7-26

1. Introduction

Teacher development is a central issue in any debate pertaining to the constant endeavour of practitioners to grow both professionally and personally, so as to keep abreast with evolving trends in EFL teaching and, consequently, improve their own teaching as well. Development is a continuing, life-long process that mandates the employment of any practice that will aid teachers in their struggle to ameliorate their teaching style and become more effective. To this end, peer observation has been presented as a practice that can be readily applied by all practitioners in their own individualized teaching environment, with the aim to promote teacher development by engaging a variety of developmental features, such as, reflection, self-direction, active collaboration, integration of theory with practice and utilization of personal experience. Recognizing the fact that peer observation has been minimally implemented in practicum within the secondary education environment, the aim of the study presented was to investigate teacher attitudes towards peer observation as a source for teacher development and its application as such within the Greek state school context. The decision to explore teacher attitudes on peer observation lies primarily in the conviction that peer observation can indeed be adopted as an effective developmental practice and that perhaps teachers’ perception of how observation is mostly employed for reasons of evaluation of performance can be altered. In this light, two main research questions are posed:

• whether Greek state school teachers in both primary and secondary levels of education are familiar with the notions of teacher development and peer observation and with the concepts pertaining to both and

Key words: attitudes, teacher development, peer observation
• whether teachers hold a positive attitude towards employing peer observation in order to promote their development.

A mixed approach of data collection methods was employed through combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, such as, distributing an attitude measurement questionnaire and conducting five face-to-face interviews respectively, in the hope of reaching safe conclusions regarding the research questions initially posed.

2. Theoretical considerations on teacher development and observation

This paper will initially attempt to provide a comprehensive outlook of the theoretical considerations underpinning the notions of teacher development and peer observation. The existence of a dichotomy between teacher training and teacher development as different facets of teacher education is briefly discussed, with connection to distinct models of teacher education as well. Theories and concepts relative to teacher development are presented, whereas a more elaborate presentation of the peer observation practice and its implications for teacher development will take place, along with the opportunities for development and instances of observation within the Greek state school teaching context.

2.1. Teacher training versus teacher development

The close interrelationship among teacher education, training and development is manifested in the language teacher education literature in different forms. On the one hand, teacher training is presented as a contrasting concept to teacher education. Training tends to the transference of discrete and trainable skills to be invariably implemented, whereas, education diverges from prescribed practice and seeks to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying principles of language teaching (Richards, 1987; Widdowson, 1984). On the other hand, Freeman (1989) proposes teacher training and teacher development as differing functions of teacher education, where training poses as direct intervention by the educator, while development involves encouraging teacher learning autonomy (p.39).

Respectively, teacher education models are differentiated by the degree of involvement of the teachers themselves in planning, delivering, and evaluating the activities in which they are involved (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003). There are three prevalent teacher education models, as those were presented by Wallace (1991): the Craft Model, the Applied Science Model and the Reflective Model. In the Craft Model, the trainee imitates a master teacher and obeys the latter's directions for improvement. The Applied Science Model is usually followed by academics and researchers, where trainees are being taught research-based theories and then apply them in practice. Finally, there is the Reflective Model, where teachers learn by reflecting on their own experience and newly-acquired knowledge in order to develop their professional abilities further.

In this light, teacher development will be mostly encouraged by education models that are more trainee-centered, such as, Wallace’s Reflective and Ur’s (1997) Enriched Reflection models where the implication is for teachers not to blindly accept all external input, but to process it through their own experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation and to construct their own understanding of it.
2.2. Exploring teacher development


To this purpose, assuming personal responsibility is pivotal. Developmental teacher education models focus on teachers and encourage their active participation in the learning process, thus promoting teacher autonomy. As a result, becoming an active participant in the development process harbors the notion of the teacher as a researcher. The aspect of the teacher researcher can be considered in connection with the dichotomy between theory and practice. In less developmental teaching models, particularly the Applied Science model, the dichotomy between theory and practice is clear. Practitioners are asked to incorporate theories and methods that have been disseminated by theorists and which may not correspond to the idiosyncrasies of everyday teaching. Hence, the idea of the practitioner is put forward, not as ‘a consumer of theory’, but rather as a researcher, that treats findings with circumspection and develops the relationship between theoretical principle and practical technique (Bolitho, n.d.).

Another concept central to teacher development considerations is experiential learning. Experiential learning refers to utilizing practical experience that teachers have accumulated over time (Richards and Nunan, 1990; Schön, 1983) and incorporating it in the development process. Previous knowledge does not only help construct personal theories in combination with research-based theories, as mentioned above, but also constitutes the basis for self-reflection. Overall, experiential learning emphasizes the central role of experience and is differentiated from behaviorist theories of learning that deny any role of subjective experience in the learning process (Kolb, 1984, p.20).

A concept overarching all aforementioned facets of teacher development is reflection. Reflective teaching is a concept that has been recurrently addressed in literature as a way for teachers to improve by consciously and systematically reflecting on their teaching practices and by questioning received knowledge to lead to restructuring of more informed practices (Akbari, 2007; Bartlett, 1990; Crandall, 2000; Cruickshank and Applegate, 1981; Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Schön, 1983; Valli, 1997; Wallace, 1991). The reflective process is fundamental in teacher development, since practitioners who do not reflect upon their practices ‘will be likely to teach as they were taught and, thus, ineffective teaching strategies will be replicated’ (Braun and Crumpler, 2004, p.61), whereas, reflective practitioners will feel more confident to re-evaluate their teaching and adopt different practices.

On a different note, the development process cannot be thought as disconnected from an environment of collegiality and cooperation. The practice of and reflection upon new ideas should take place in a collaborative situation where teachers can receive support and feedback (Bell and Gilbert, 1994, p.494, in Evans, 2002, p.127). Shared perception and mutual reflection will expose practitioners to differing views and varying teaching styles, leading to enriched experiences and an expanded knowledge base.

Therefore, to be able to respond to new educational paradigms teachers should opt to engage in activities that encourage engagement in self-reflection, development of
specialized knowledge about theory and issues of teaching, creation of new roles and collaborative relationships with other teachers.

2.3. Developmental observation: the peer observation technique

According to Maingay (1988), observation can serve training, assessing or developmental purposes (in Beaumont, 2005, p.81), while Malderrez (2003) also adds observation for research (p.179). Observation for training/assessing purposes focuses on evaluating teaching competence, while observation for developmental purposes is directed towards creating an autonomous teacher (O’ Brien, 1981, p.56). Peer observation is presented as a developmental mode of observation that aims at improvement of performance by identifying strengths and weaknesses through reflection and provision of feedback in a collaborative environment (Cosh, 1999).

2.3.1. The peer observation procedure

Peer observation refers to fellow teachers observing each other’s language lessons in order to gain insight of some aspect of teaching, learning, or classroom interaction and it entails reflecting on peer performance in actual teaching situations, in order to gain a deeper awareness of the processes and principles being employed (Richards, 1987). Peer observation is normally described as having three stages: pre-observation, observation and post-observation (Munson, 1998):

• The pre-observation stage aims at identifying a focus for the observation and agreeing on a specific procedure. Both peers set the agenda and determine the goals of the observation (Cosh, 1999; Mann, 2005).

• During the actual observation session, the observer is an non-invasive presence in the classroom that uses the observation form created according to the pre-set criteria during the pre-observation conference to note down what is actually happening, with the agreed focus in mind(Gosling, 2002, p.3).

• Once the observation visit is concluded, peers come together for the post-observation conference, where the observee leads the discussion to engage in self-reflection of the teaching situation recorded, while the observer provides feedback when invited. The data gathered through the observation tool are analysed and, during the ensuing discussion, explicit feedback is provided in a non-judgmental manner (Edge, 1992; Gosling, 2002; Hendry and Oliver, 2012).

2.3.2. The implications of peer observation for teacher development

The peer observation practice encompasses many features crucial to teacher development. First of all, the fact that peer observation is self-instigated ensures the teacher’s active participation in every aspect of its planning and implementation without the direct involvement of administrators. It is a self-directed process that relies on teachers’ volition to improve their teaching and, thus, is far more motivational than any other externally imposed mode of observation.

As far as reflection is concerned, the peer observation process promotes a more systematic and focused approach to it. Teachers are expected to demonstrate the ability to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, to take steps to remedy the latter, and to carry out effective self-evaluations of their own teaching (Scrivener, 1994, pp.195-9, in Brandt, 2008,
p.43). The observer can compare his/her own teaching practices against the ones observed and might be encouraged to implement different strategies, while, the observee can reflect on-action and receive constructive feedback. The feedback received will help identify ill practices, resulting in improving teaching skills, while persuasive feedback on a teacher’s ability to teach well will also result in enhancing teacher self-efficacy (Donnelly, 2007), thus, leaving teachers more confident to implement more groundbreaking techniques.

The value of feedback for trainees is influenced by the quality of the observed-observer relationship, where teachers are less likely to feel threatened when observed by a peer than when supervised or observed by someone they do not trust. In this light, peer observation is a practice that is open to cooperation and discards the notion of teaching as a profession of isolation. Peer observation is different than other modes of observation, because it allows teachers of equal status to engage in a process of mutual and interpersonal support, where learning naturally happens through observation and a unique opportunity for contemplation is provided (Richardson, 2000). The social function of professional development relies on the development of a teacher through collaborative interaction with colleagues (Edge, 1992), where peers help each other develop through non-judgmental listening and response.

2.3.3. Peer observation in the Greek State school teaching context

In Greece, teacher education is mainly ministry-initiated and centrally-designed. Pre-service training for state school teachers of English in primary and secondary education is realized through a mandatory induction course, realized in Π.Ε.Κ., which aims at building a corpus of general knowledge and basic skills (Ayakli, 2005, p.216), whereas, in-service training in Greece mostly comprises of half-day seminars organized by school advisors in schools of their jurisdiction. In-service short-term teacher development seminars are also offered by institutes, organizations and associations under the supervision of the Greek Ministry of Education, which are periodically realized and not accessible to all teachers. However, in all aforementioned cases, the content of each course is broad, decontextualised and can by no means cater for all the needs of teachers within their individual teaching situations, since ‘externally developed solutions will not fully work in specific classroom contexts’ (Little, 1993, in Elmore, 2002).

Classroom observations have in the past served as a tool for assessing teacher competence and performance, but, nowadays, observation is used as a means of exposing teachers to suggested styles of teaching. However, Greek EFL teachers still seem to assign negative connotations to even developmental instances of observation, such as peer observation. They tend to associate it with the more traditional modes of supervision that prevailed in the Greek state school teaching context. Kotsiomyti (2010) has asserted that the overwhelming majority of teachers have never participated in a peer observation process, while those having participated in one have done so only once (p. 264), thus leading to the formation of attitudes based on little or no experience on the subject, accounting for the creation of the association aforementioned. Moreover, peer observation is considered to have been executed poorly, with the pre- and post- stages of the observation being inadequately realized or entirely absent from the process (p. 265).

Generally speaking, teacher development in Greece tends to encompass more reflective approaches. Nonetheless, practitioners are not given ample opportunity to engage in sustained improvement of their practice. They are daily faced with challenging conditions, for which their prior training and experience have not prepared them and for which they are
mostly presented with generalized solutions to be uniformly applied. (Clarke and Silberstein, 1988).

3. The research methodology and procedure

3.1. The research questions

The current research aims at measuring EFL teacher attitudes towards the developmental use of the peer observation technique. Teachers’ beliefs and attitudes are closely linked to teachers’ choice of strategies for coping with challenges in their daily professional life (Freeman, 1989, p.32) However, before asking people to express their opinions or attitudes about a particular issue, it is often a good idea to assess the respondents’ knowledge about that issue, as people often base their opinions on inaccurate factual knowledge (Neuman, 2006, in Krosnick and Presser, 2010, p.252). To this end, the research questions focused on: a) the degree of familiarity of research participants with the notions of teacher development and peer observation and b) whether the research participants hold a positive attitude towards the idea of using peer observation for developmental purposes. By positive attitude, it is meant that respondents identify benefits of peer observation for their professional development, distinguish it from other modes of observation as more consistent to concepts central to teacher education and are willing to implement it as a practice.

3.2. Research methodology and sample

The particular research implemented a mixed-method approach which combines alternative approaches within a single research project by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach ‘seeks convergence and corroboration of results from different methods’ (Greene et al., 1989, p.259) and is in line with the principles of triangulation, which conduces to the validity of results. The traditional method of measuring attitudes is by means of attitude statements, the purpose being to place each respondent on an attitudinal continuum (Oppenheim, 1992, pp.151, 163).

That being given, in terms of quantitative analysis, an attitude measurement questionnaire was constructed and distributed as a highly structured data collection instrument (Taylor-Powell, 1998). The sampling approach employed was that of simple random sampling, where each element has the equal probability to be selected as a sample and is bias free. The sample used for the attitude measurement questionnaire consisted of 72 EFL state school teachers, of ages 25 to 45 and over, almost equally from primary and secondary education, all of whom were approached electronically via an online questionnaire completion request. In terms of qualitative analysis, semi-structured interviews that consisted of both closed- and open-ended questions were conducted to serve as an exploratory agent and refine the selection for the research questionnaire items to be included from the initial item pool (Dörnyei, 2003, p.52). The sample was selected purposively as a typical representative of the population, with the goal to exploit ‘information rich’ cases that would ‘provide the greatest insight into the research question’ (Devers and Frankel, 2000, p.264). To this end, five EFL teachers were selected as interviewees, with whom the researcher was personally acquainted, so as to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and confidence. Moreover, their postgraduate studies ensured they had certain prior knowledge on the subjects of teacher
development and peer observation, hence, their participation could really provide accurate and trustworthy responses.

3.3. The research instruments: the attitude measurement questionnaire and interviews

A common way of measuring attitudes quantitatively is through rating scales. The present questionnaire designed implemented the Likert rating scale, which consisted of items each constituting one attitude statement with five possible responses. A favourable attitude statement is scored with five (5) for ‘strongly agree’ down to one (1) for ‘strongly disagree’, whereas, an unfavourable attitude statement is scored vice versa. Then, the item scores are added to obtain a total score. The total score in a group of statements will signify whether those statements are viewed favourably or not (Oppenheim, 1992, pp.196-197).

The questionnaire comprised of four sections with thirty question items in total. Apart from the first section that focused on gathering demographic data, the second and third section were concerned with determining the sample’s general degree of familiarity with the central concepts of teacher development and peer observation and exploring their personal experience in teacher development practices in general, if any, and, their possible involvement in peer observation practices. The fourth and largest section of the research questionnaire included the actual Likert scale items, measuring attitudes towards teacher development concepts and characteristics and attitudes towards the pre- and post- stages of the peer observation process. It also included attitude statements referring to: a) peer observation features that are consistent with teacher development traits, b) possible constraints in conducting peer observation, c) comparison of peer observation to other modes of supervision, d) the implementation of peer observation in school training courses and, finally, e) teachers’ willingness to regularly employ it as a developmental practice.

Correspondingly, the semi-structured interview included a similar set of open-ended questions in a similar sequence that followed the outline of the attitude measurement questionnaire, so as the data collected can be evaluated in correlation to the attitude measurement questionnaire results, hence, their combined interpretation would serve to substantiate the research findings.

4. Presentation of research findings

The research conducted for the purposes of this paper rendered data subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. More specifically, the closed-ended items and Likert scale data recovered through the questionnaire were computer-coded and analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program to be interpreted through frequency tables, statistics graphs and reliability tables. On the other hand, interview responses were tape-recorded and transcribed and were processed through content analysis by being grouped according to certain categories that were directly related to the research topic.

4.1. Presentation of attitude measurement questionnaire results

The vast majority of respondents were female, aged 31 to 45, of sufficient teaching experience, employed in an almost equal degree in primary and secondary education. Most
respondents hold a university degree, while postgraduate degree holders amount to thirty six per cent (36%) and PhD holders to five per cent (5%) of the research sample.

Regarding respondents’ familiarity to what teacher development is, the overwhelming majority stated being familiar with the term with a percentage of eighty eight (88%). Teacher development was frequently referred to as an effort to improve or redefine already used teaching practices, while, similarly, the need for keeping up with recent trends in teaching methodology and trying out new teaching techniques was a regular response.

The next step in investigating teachers’ familiarity with teacher development was to construct a Likert scale that explored whether teachers agree or not with certain attitude statements that describe attributes associated with teacher development (see Figure 1 below):

The total score of the Likert scale was 41,51, while the mean total was 30. Therefore, it is evident that teachers are highly informed of crucial features associated with teacher development. More specifically, teachers agree that teacher development is a continuing process they engage in voluntarily, that aims at promoting effective learning and expanding knowledge base, encompasses active reflection, self-analysis and inquiry, enhances the ability to work with colleagues and refers to personal and social development as well.

In response to stating familiarity with peer observation, seventy nine per cent (79%) of teachers confirmed being familiar with the technique, as opposed to twenty one per cent (21%). When asked to define peer observation, respondents described it as the situation when a teacher is being observed by a colleague with the aim of improvement. Moreover, a low percentage associated it with evaluation of performance, however, very few respondents connected it to reflection as well. Teachers also mentioned identifying strong and weak points and learning through watching as traits inherent to peer observation.

In addition, fifty eight per cent (58%) have never witnessed a peer observation session and sixty six per cent (66%) have never employed it. The frequency with which teachers have employed peer observation can be seen in Figure 2 below:
In order to investigate teachers’ familiarity to the peer observation technique to a greater extent, two more Likert scales were constructed. The first one was associated with the pre-observation stage of the process and rendered a total score of 15,89, with the mean total of the specific scale being 12, thus depicting a positive measurement and indicating the respondents’ sufficient understanding of the function of the pre-observation session. The second Likert scale regarding peer observation emphasized on the post-observation stage. The total score of this scale was 21,64, with the mean total of the scale being 18. The outcome indicates a positive measurement when investigating respondents’ acknowledgement of the traits pertinent to the post-observation stage of the process.

In individually analyzing each attitude statement concerning the post-observation stage, a staggering ninety six per cent (96%) agreed that the post-observation discussion should be carried out in a friendly and encouraging manner. However, respondents were mostly undecided when asked whether the observee should lead the post-discussion, while a percentage of twenty nine (29%) stated that the observee should not lead the discussion and only nineteen per cent (19%) acknowledged the observee’s leading role.

On a different note, respondents were more clear regarding the observer’s role during the post stage of the peer observation process. Most teachers agreed that the observer should have a facilitating role and not correct the observee’s practices, but the majority agreed that the observer should evaluate the observee’s performance (see Figure 3 below):

![Figure 2: ‘Have you ever employed the peer observation technique?’](chart)

![Figure 3: ‘Do you think the observer should evaluate the observee’s performance?’](chart)
Finally, a third Likert scale was constructed with regard to the overall attitude towards peer observation. The total score of this Likert scale was 43.18, with the mean total being 33, indicating a greatly positive attitude towards peer observation (see Figure 4 below):

![Figure 4: Attitude towards peer observation Likert scale measurement](image)

More specifically, the majority of teachers agreed that peer observation promotes collaborative work, exposes teachers to different teaching styles, integrates theory with practice, encourages reflection and improves teaching skills, thus, enhancing confidence and proving beneficial for both peers. On the other hand, thirty nine per cent (39%) agreed that peer teachers are not qualified to comment on colleagues’ practices (see Figure 5 below):

![Figure 5: ‘Peer teachers are not qualified to comment on colleagues’ teaching practices’](image)

Another high percentage stated that the process is too time-consuming in planning and executing, while upon comparing peer observation with other observation practices, fifty five per cent (55%) responded that it deviates from the one-way model of supervision, however, forty six per cent (46%) of respondents indicated that peer observation is not as reliable as supervision in providing valid feedback (see Figure 6 below):
On a similar note, the opinions on whether peer observation is related to evaluation of performance show that forty seven per cent (47%) of respondents view this statement favourably as opposed to thirty four per cent (34%) who disagree.

With regard to peer observation in Greek state school reality, a great percentage of teachers believe school administrations do not endorse this practice, while many remain undecided as to how school administrations view implementation of peer observation. In addition, teachers consider peer observation to be a relatively unknown practice in Greek state school education, but positively agree to its inclusion as a teacher development practice in state training courses.

Apart from employing methodological triangulation to ensure validity of results, the results presented were also checked for reliability purposes. Reliability and validity of a Likert scale can be defined by measuring its internal consistency by using Cronbach’s alpha. Cronbach’s alpha is a measure that indicates how closely related a set of items are as a group (Santos, 1999). Any index measurement above .06 is considered as indicative of a scale being reliable. The internal consistency index was measured for all four Likert scales used in the research questionnaire. The reliability tables show that the Likert scales concerning teacher development, overall attitude towards peer observation and the pre-observation stage score a high Cronbach’s alpha measurement, with .768, .685, and .723 measurements respectively. However, the scale regarding the post-observation stage barely scores .31, which shows that this scale’s items are not internally consistent, thus posing a lack of reliability issue.

4.2. Presentation of interview data

Five state teachers of English working in primary and secondary education schools were interviewed, so as to recover some qualitative data regarding teachers’ familiarity with teacher development and peer observation and, then, explore their attitudes on employing the latter for developmental purposes. Their responses were transcribed and manual content analysis was performed to reach a conclusion regarding their overall attitude. More specifically:
• All five interviewees defined their understanding of teacher development as improvement of techniques and knowledge and as generating change.
• All interviewees referred to the affective factors of the process, namely the fact that observees feel safe being observed in a ‘friendly’ and ‘stress-free environment’, where support and mutual respect are promoted.
• Respondents referred to the difference between supervision in the current teaching reality and peer observation. Supervision is associated with feelings of intimidation and stress to perform well in a situation that is connected to evaluation of performance.
• Reflection was also indicated as a prominent feature, mainly ‘reflection on practice’.
• Experiential learning was also mentioned as being incorporated in peer observation.
• Providing feedback was viewed as extremely beneficial to both peers and more valid when based on background theory and pre-defined criteria.
• There was discord as to the validity of the feedback generated, since respondents deemed feedback provided by either peers or supervisors ‘valid on both cases’, whereas respondents consider peer observation ‘a less formal or valid method’.
• All respondents referred to lack of time and reluctance of colleagues to cooperate. Colleagues’ hesitation to participate as a result of misinformation regarding the benefits and value of peer observation was even mentioned.
• Finally, reluctance of school administrators to allow for it was referred to as well.

Overall, when asked if they consider peer observation to be an effective practice and whether they would employ it on a regular basis, they all unanimously agreed.

4.3. Interpretation and discussion of research findings

The overwhelming majority of questionnaire respondents and all interviewees claimed familiarity with teacher development and were able to adequately describe it. Moreover, the Likert scale constructed for that purpose clearly indicates that EFL practitioners participating in the research are able to recognize certain distinct features associated with teacher development. Greek EFL teachers recognize that, to achieve development, self-inquiry and reflection on already possessed and newly-gained experience must be encompassed in an encouraging and collaborative environment, a view consistent with the teacher development and reflective model of teacher education paradigm (Akbari, 2007; Bartlett, 1990; Bell and Gilbert, 1994; Crandall, 2000; Cruickshank and Applegate, 1981; Richards and Lockhart, 1994; Schön, 1983; Wajnryb, 1992; Wallace, 1991).

Greek teachers are also clearly familiar with peer observation as a developmental practice, although their knowledge on the particular practice remains on a theoretical level. A limited minority of primary and secondary educators have actually employed the technique, as peer observation has been systematically employed mostly in the tertiary level of education for more than a decade now (Bell & Mladenovic, 2006; Cooper, 2012; Davis et al., 2008; McMahon et al., 2007). The research has shown that Greek state school teachers recognize peer observation as a self-directed practice where colleagues observe each other to their mutual benefit with the aim to improve as teachers through sharing ideas, exposure to differing teaching styles, active reflection and provision of constructive feedback, a finding that supports theory on peer observation incorporating developmental features (Cosh, 1999; Donnelly, 2007; Gosling, 2002; Munson, 1998; Richards, 1987; Shortland, 2004; Stillwell, 2008).
Regarding their general attitudes on peer observation, Greek state EFL teachers of both primary and secondary education hold a positive attitude towards the use of peer observation as a means for teacher development. The contrastive analysis of questionnaire and interview findings corroborates the above statement. The Likert scale measurements were positive and, both in their questionnaire and interview responses, respondents stated their willingness to employ peer observation on a regular basis and suggested its inclusion in Greek state school training courses.

More specifically, the present study highlights teachers’ acknowledgement of developmental features embedded in the peer observation process. Greek EFL teachers recognize the benefit for peers engaged in the process when it comes to improving their knowledge of their subject matter and keeping abreast with recent methodological trends. Moreover, they acknowledge the role peer observation plays as a means for learners to explore their experiences, enabling an understanding of the learning/teaching process and its impact. This deeper understanding of the learning process stems from the implications reflection has within the peer observation practice. Greek state EFL teachers positively agree that peer observation encourages active reflection on own practices more systematically, thus resulting in reframing assumptions and ultimately generating change.

However, as Brandt (2008) stated, reflection is ‘a social activity’ and it should be combined with feedback in ‘reflective conversations’ (p.43). The post-observation stage embodies the idea of reflective conversation, which, nonetheless, has to be carefully conducted. Teachers place great emphasis on the affective factors associated with the act of observing and provision of feedback. The main barrier to using observation as a learning instrument is the anxiety it raises among participants, since it ‘encounters the issue of power imbalance that may exist between individuals’ (Swain, 2007, in Davys & Jones, 2007, p.246). Researchers have stressed the fact that teachers feel uneasy when observed, because they tend to associate it with evaluation (Bax, 1997; Gebhard, 1984; Wajnryb, 1992; Wallace, 1991). In this respect, the current research has clearly shown the positive attitude teachers have towards peer observation in comparison to other modes of observation employed within the Greek state school context. In their responses, teachers consider that peer observation enhances their ability to work with colleagues by creating an environment of collegiality and cooperation, thus, promoting their personal and social development along with upgrading their professional status. But more importantly, they stress the fact that peer observation creates a relaxing and encouraging working environment, in direct opposition to the sentiments of criticism, evaluation and judgment traditionally associated with observation, as this is conducted within the Greek state school environment. Peer observation creates such conditions that enhance teachers’ confidence and self-efficacy and allow for experimentation on novel practices without the fear of judgment.

Consequently, of great importance for the establishment of such an encouraging environment is the way feedback is provided. The research has shown that Greek EFL teachers agree that the feedback provided through peer observation should be structured and given during a amicable post-observation discussion where the observer has a facilitating role and is by no means used to correct the observee’s practices.

However, this is the point where the research has identified an inconsistency in teachers’ perception of the beneficial role of peer observation in providing useful feedback. Greek EFL teachers involved in the current research consider their fellow teachers to be unqualified to effectively comment on their colleagues’ teaching practices and also feel that peer observation feedback lacks validity in comparison to supervision.
In addition, Greek EFL teachers do believe that peer observation is associated with evaluation of performance, like other modes of observation, and have an obscure understanding of the role of the observee during the feedback session. Teachers think that the observees should not initiate the discussion and that the post-observation session is mostly beneficial to them rather than to both peers. This attitude towards the feedback session probably stems from the fact that, as reported, Greek teachers are accustomed to being involved in observation, as either passive recipients of criticism, when observed, or mere receivers of expert knowledge after having observed model teaching sessions.

Moreover, the research findings indicate that teachers believe that peer observation is an unknown practice in Greece, and those who are informed of it are receiving fragmented information, mostly through their own initiative in taking up postgraduate studies or reading teaching-related material. The view that teachers are probably uninformed of peer observation is further supported by the fact that one of the constraints all interviewees mentioned in conducting peer observation within the Greek state school context would be their colleagues’ reluctance to participate in the process.

Generally, EFL teachers in Greece do not have a clear view of how peer observation could be implemented in practicum within the already tight daily school schedule. Considering the fact that, as in similar researches (Al-Habsi, 2004; Jensen and Ayegbayo, 2011; Lassagabaster and Sierra, 2011), lack of time for planning and realizing the observation process was unanimously reported, teachers remain undecided or even pessimistic as to the reaction of school administrators to a self-directed practice that is not formally endorsed by the Ministry of Education and that will require more of the teachers’ already limited time for planning and implementation. Even teachers themselves expressed the opinion that peer observation should be incorporated in formal ministry-run training courses, probably because it will gain wider acceptance and increase in validity that way.

All in all, it is safe to say, that despite Greek teachers’ lack of actual experience with peer observation, they hold a positive attitude towards employing it in hope of further development. Although they have a tendency to label the feedback session as reminiscent of traditional and less trainee-centered modes of observation, they are able to acknowledge peer observation’s benefit as a powerful developmental tool. Greek EFL teachers recognize the fact that peer observation encourages their empowerment through an actively reflective process that enhances their theoretical knowledge and enriches their repertoire of teaching methods and strategies to use. Peer observation renders practitioners actively involved in the process of their own development, not in exclusion from their teaching environment, but through collaboration and exchange of ideas, resulting in the development of a more confident, informed and motivated teacher.

5. Implications of the research findings for EFL teacher development

The interpretation of the research findings asserts the fact that EFL practitioners have a positive attitude towards and are willing to employ peer observation. This conclusion is an indication that Greek teachers are actively interested in ameliorating their skills and practices within the Greek state school context through a practice that is self-directed and is placed outside the official repertoire of developmental activities offered. Pinpointing the acceptance of peer observation as a collaborative and reflective practice by the great majority of teachers involved in this research may lead to the consideration of observation as a practice that should not necessarily be associated with evaluation and feelings of
intimidation and could alter negative attitudes towards observation in a more global sense. Therefore, if teachers are encouraged to consider an alternative mode of observation in place of the more trainer-centered models currently employed, they would be more motivated to implement observation on a more regular basis, instead of being obliged to attend observation sessions externally sanctioned by other stakeholders, thus, systematically incorporating this developmental practice in their professional lives and establishing an attitude of life-long learning.

Furthermore, the present research has highlighted the significance of cooperation within the school environment through creating bonds between people who share common goals and aspirations, since 'an increased sense of collegiality is a critical factor in the development of learning communities; (Schuck et al., 2008, in Byrne et al, 2010, p.11). The inherently collaborative nature of peer observation is a key component in establishing relationships within the teachers’ professional environment that will strengthen the school community as a whole and help teachers evolve personally and socially as well.

On a more practical note, the conclusions reached in the present study regarding the effectiveness of peer observation in exposing teachers to differing teaching styles and practices indicate that peer observation allows for teachers to become familiar with recent trends in methodology through observing and learning from each other, something not always feasible through individual study, considering the existing tight time frames of school life and preparation at home.

In addition, when considering the fact that observation is one of the suggested means for realizing the official evaluation process for teachers in all fields, the emergence of peer observation as a non-threatening collegial practice will help practitioners familiarise themselves with observation, develop their observation skills and be in a position to identify their strengths and weaknesses in an environment that will actually help them improve rather than promote evaluation of performance.

Overall, the study at hand aims at contributing to the exploration of the Greek state school environment in being receptive to the future application of peer observation as a systematically employed developmental instrument by clarifying and pinpointing Greek EFL teachers’ positive attitude towards it. Consequently, peer observation arises as a powerful, self-directed development activity that embraces diversity through interaction and increases motivation for development in a collaborative environment.

6. Limitations and suggestions for further research

The main limitation of this study is that its findings apply to the group of teachers involved in the process of this small-scale research and can by no means be used to represent the entire population of Greek state school teachers of English. In order to gather a larger pool of data that would offer greater insight to teacher attitudes, a grander-scale research should have been carried out with a far larger number of participants and a more diverse method of data collection, a possibility that is beyond the current researcher’s means and luxury of time. In addition, the low score of the post-observation stage Likert scale with regard to its internal consistency renders the measurement of the specific scale as lacking in reliability.

With regard to suggestions for further research on the subject, the current study attempted to shed some light to teacher attitudes towards peer observation within the secondary
education teaching environment, but the issue is still minimally addressed, therefore future research should address a larger teacher population across the Greek state, so as to paint a clearer picture of teacher attitudes on the topic of developmental peer observation. Moreover, particular attention should be given to the post-observation phase of the process in order to compensate for the lack of internal consistency of the results regarding the general attitude towards that stage of peer observation.

Also, further research could concentrate on the provision of feedback during peer observation, as the particular aspect of the process surfaced as a potential grey area in the implementation of peer observation by Greek EFL teachers in secondary education.

In addition, in response to the teachers’ desire for a more systematic establishment of peer observation as a developmental practice, researchers can investigate ways to support its existence and how the already documented positive attitude towards it can be further encouraged. On a different note, a plan of how peer observation can be included in ministry-fostered training programs can be drawn, however, this idea comes at odds with the notion of peer observation as a self-directed practice, as this was described in the present study.

7. Conclusion

The continuous struggle towards professional and personal improvement requires that EFL practitioners employ practices that raise the quality of their teaching and facilitate life-long learning. Learning is a social process whereby the participants need to interact with each other to gain an alternative perspective and become exposed to diversity. Peer observation is such a collaborative practice that offers opportunity for interchange and whose power resides in its collegial orientation and its exposure of colleagues to a variety of experiences through exchange of ideas (Marshall, 2004, in Donelly, 2007, p.29).

The paper at hand aimed at investigating teacher attitudes on peer observation and has managed to demonstrate that, despite the traditionally held perceptions associated with the act of observing, observation can function as a springboard for practitioners to evolve. The positive attitude held towards peer observation as a teacher development practice indicates a willingness to deviate from prescribed formulas of training and to engage in self-directed initiatives that incorporate active participation, through which, as Shortland (2004) has noted, a collective learning strategy and the acquisition of personal and professional competencies can be facilitated. What remains is to incorporate peer observation in our teaching reality through becoming more practically familiar with its implementation and designing individualized peer observation schemes that will address our particular needs and become a permanent addition to our teacher development agenda.

References


Bartlett, L. (1990). ‘Teacher development through reflecte

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EFL teachers’ status in state schools versus private language institutes in Greece

Persefoni LYKOUDI

Teacher status has been described as a messy and ill-defined term, which remains a rather uncharted area in the Greek EFL context. Additionally, teachers’ performance emerges from research (Cameron, 2003; Hall and Langton, 2006; Rice, 2005) as an important constituent of teacher status and there is also evidence that motivation and performance are two concepts that are closely connected in the sense that high levels of motivation seem to improve teachers’ performance while low levels of motivation tend to affect performance negatively. This article attempts to compare state school and private language institute EFL teachers’ status in Greece by exploring how they perceive the educational community’s attitudes towards teachers from both educational settings and their motivation levels in relation to their job. It also examines how the potential difference in teachers’ motivation levels in each of the two educational contexts is reflected in their teaching, as evaluated by their students. The research is conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively, by means of a questionnaire and class diaries and the results indicate that state EFL teachers’ status is lower than their colleagues’ in private institutes. Finally, some suggestions are presented that may hopefully initiate further research and help to raise state EFL teachers’ status along with improving the position of EFL in the state curriculum.
κοινωνικής θέσης των καθηγητών αγγλικής γλώσσας στα δημόσια σχολεία και στα ιδιωτικά κέντρα ξένων γλωσσών στην Ελλάδα, διερευνώντας πώς αντιλαμβάνονται τη στάση της εκπαιδευτικής κοινότητας σε αυτούς. Επιπλέον, η παρούσα μελέτη ερευνά την πιθανή αντανάκλαση μιας τυχόν διαφοροποίησης των εργασιακών κινήτρων των καθηγητών Αγγλικής που προέρχονται από αυτά τα δύο εργασιακά περιβάλλοντα στον τρόπο διδασκαλίας τους, σύμφωνα με την αξιολόγηση των μαθητών τους. Τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας κατάδεικνύουν ότι η κοινωνική θέση των καθηγητών Αγγλικής σε δημόσια σχολεία είναι χαμηλότερη από αυτή των συναδέλφων τους που εργάζονται σε ιδιωτικά κέντρα ξένων γλωσσών. Τέλος, διατυπώνονται προτάσεις με την ελπίδα να πυροδοτήσουν περαιτέρω έρευνα και να συμβάλουν στη βελτίωση της κοινωνικής θέσης των καθηγητών Αγγλικής σε δημόσια σχολεία καθώς και της θέσης της γλώσσας στο πρόγραμμα σπουδών των δημόσιων σχολείων.

**Key words:** EFL teachers’ status, state vs. private sector of education, EFL education in Greece, teacher motivation, teacher performance, self-determination theory

1. Introduction

The overall aim of this article is to present the findings of a research study on EFL teachers’ status in state schools versus private institutes in Greece. Although there has been some research on the multidimensional notion of teacher status in general (Teacher Status Project in New Zealand, Cameron, 2003; Hall and Langton, 2006; Teacher Status Project in England, Hargreaves et al., 2007), there seems to be lack of research with regard to EFL teacher status in particular either in the state or public sector. As far as the Greek context is concerned, teacher status remains an underresearched issue and in this paper it is described through the constructs of teacher performance, teaching styles and teacher motivation *par excellence.*

The present article begins with a description of teacher status through the perspective of significant factors that affect it. More specifically, it is presented through its main constructs, namely teacher performance and motivation, and with regard to the state and private domain distinction and special conditions of the Greek educational context. Then self-determination theory is presented (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2004) as the theoretical tool chosen for the present research, followed by the description of the research design and the method used. Finally, the findings of the research are presented and discussed along with some suggestions that intend to initiate further research and could also help to improve the status of both state EFL teachers and EFL teaching generally.

2. Teacher status: Some key issues

There has been a lot of discussion surrounding the multidimensional notion of teacher status. It seems that elements, such as respect and trust, showed by students and parents (Kane and Mallon, 2006), coupled with personal development opportunities, flexibility and autonomy in teaching and working conditions are identified as key features of high status professions (Hargreaves et al., 2007). Apart from these characteristics, which are often regarded as important factors shaping the general public’s perceptions of teachers,
teachers’ performance also emerges as dominant in research (Cameron, 2003; Hall and Langton, 2006; Hargreaves et al., 2007; Kane and Mallon, 2006; Rice, 2005), an important constituent shaping teacher status. Moreover, there has been a lot of research focusing on the correlation between motivation and teacher performance. In what follows, I consider each of these issues in some detail, as they form the framework of the present study.

2.1. Teacher performance and motivation as constructs of teacher status

Hargreaves et al. (2007) acknowledge that performing a trusted high performance profession constitutes a significant component of teacher status and can be described in terms of the extent to which people entrust teachers with performing a service for the community such as education. Moreover, teachers’ impact on their students, on their learning, teachers’ skills and their performance are seen in Rice’s research (2005) as structural elements contributing to the perceptions of teacher status. Similarly, Hall and Langton (2006) mention an interplay that teacher status has with features such as teachers’ skills and expertise. Clear reference to teachers’ capability and performance as factors affecting teacher status is made by Cameron (2003). She claims that improvements in teacher capability are likely to improve teacher status.

Effective teachers are construed mainly in terms of affective personality attributes which enable them to build caring relationships with their students (Kane and Mallon, 2006). As far as EFL teachers in particular are concerned, Curtis and Cheng (2001) suggest that successful teachers have deep knowledge, exceptional skills and unique personality characteristics. Brown (2001) also provides four categories of good language-teacher features: technical knowledge, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills and personal qualities. The question that arises is “what factors really account for the differences in teachers’ performance”? Ozoemena (2013) suggests that there are two variables affecting teachers’ performance: varying degrees of skills and abilities that teachers exhibit and teacher motivation.

It seems that both state and private EFL teachers could actually display some or all of the skills and abilities that a ‘good’ teacher should possess, hence the second variable; their motivation levels remain to be explored. Research shows that teacher performance can be affected by teacher motivation. More specifically, motivation for teaching is investigated mainly by questioning teachers about varying types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Canrinus et al., 2011). According to this distinction (Brown, 2007; Deci, et al., 1991; Pintrich and Schunk, 1996; Vallerand and Ratelle, 2004; Williams and Burden, 1997), intrinsic motivation is the motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake, out of pure pleasure and interest in it, while extrinsic motivation is the motivation to perform a task for external, tangible or psychological rewards.

There is evidence that highly motivated teachers are more likely to engage in professional development courses and implement innovative programs to increase student learning (Cave and Mulloy, 2010). Similarly, Inayatullah’s and Jehangir’s research (2012) on the effect of motivation on job performance in public and private schools in Pakistan revealed that there was a positive relationship between teachers’ motivation and job performance. To put it differently, as argued in Analoui (2000), low teacher motivation is reflected in deteriorating standards of professional behaviour and poor professional performance. Consequently, Analoui’s research (2000) implies that potential differences in teachers’ motivation levels may contribute to different teacher and student performance.
2.2. Teachers’ work motivation levels in the state versus private sector and the case of the Greek educational context

There are few studies that focus on the comparison of public and private EFL teachers’ motivation levels and most of them show that intrinsic motives are more important than extrinsic ones. This is supported by Yau (2010) in her examination of the motivation levels of ESL teachers who are employed in English language schools operated by private entities and state tertiary institutes in New Zealand. Among her findings was that intrinsic motives were more important than extrinsic ones for both public and private school teachers. Webb’s study in the UK (n.d) comes to add student motivation and student disciplined behaviour as important intrinsic motivators of EFL private language school teachers in the United Kingdom. As Webb’s research (ibid, p. 2) reveals, “when teachers have unmotivated, difficult or rude students and need to take on the role of disciplinarian, they become frustrated and unmotivated, and become less self-determined”. Students’ behavior towards their teachers and students’ attitudes towards EFL teaching in general emerges as an important factor that motivates teachers in an intrinsic way. Also, Kassabgy et al (2001) characterize EFL teachers in Egypt and Hawaii as idealistic teachers, based on the findings of their research.

The close connection of teacher motivation and performance and the effects that motivation may have on it is further explored through research on the relationship between teacher motivation and instructional behavior. According to Thoonen et al. (2011), most of the variance in teachers’ involvement in professional learning activities is explained by dominant constituents of teacher motivation, thus showing the connection between teachers’ motivation and teaching styles. Jacques (2001, as cited in Yau, 2010: 30) tried to explore teacher motivation through an interplay of teachers’ and students’ preferences with regard to instructional practices. Thus, differences in the motivational levels of public and private school teachers as presented above can be seen as resulting in different instructional behaviour in the public or private sector.

As far as the Greek educational context is concerned, English language learning takes place mainly in state schools and foreign language institutes. Most of the students start to attend a foreign language institute just before their official English language learning begins (Gheralis-Roussos, 2003). Thus, students come to their official English classes at state primary schools having already been introduced to English in language institutes, which often makes them feel that there is no reason to pay attention to English at school (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2001, as cited in Gheralis-Roussos, 2003: 10). Additionally, most teenage students in Greece choose to sit for an examination to certify their language proficiency at a private institute since state school does not offer them this opportunity.

According to Karavas (2010), low motivation levels of Greek state EFL learners, their negative attitudes towards English at school and their undisciplined behaviour affect their teachers’ motivation, quality of work and performance. On the other hand, EFL teaching at private language institutes seems to be mostly exams-based, as the curriculum is built around a fundamental aim, that of helping learners obtain a certificate of proficiency in English. Consequently, it becomes evident that the exam orientation of private language institutes does not allow Greek EFL teachers at private language institutes to be creative and flexible and adopt more autonomous instructional practices. Furthermore, their performance is quite measurable as a notion since it seems to depend on how many students are successfully certified. The situation formed in such a setting largely affects teachers along with their students. These are the effects of language testing on teaching and learning that are usually referred to as ‘washback effects’ (Alderson and Wall, 1993).
More specifically, Greek students who attend both educational settings find it difficult to cope with the different character of the state English class because they are used to the exam orientation of private language institutes. They often feel frustrated at the fact that their English class at school may constitute a more autonomous learning environment than their class at their private language institute but does not provide them with a clear goal (Gemelou, 2010; Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Karavas, 2010). In fact, Greek students are part of a society that believes that it is worthwhile working towards a goal only if, at the end, the whole effort and the ensuing results can be certified in some way (Prodromou, 1992). Since this is not the case with state English classes, Greek state students tend to become indifferent and unmotivated and the source of their lack of motivation derives from society’s attitudes towards what constitutes effective language learning along with the status of the subject within the public school curriculum (Karavas, 2010). Taking into consideration the importance placed on the certification of proficiency in English as a professional qualification, one can assume that EFL private language teaching might enjoy an increased status. Thus, the educational community’s attitudes towards EFL teachers and EFL teaching in general emerge as an important factor as far as teachers’ motivation is concerned.

All in all, we could argue that teachers’ motivation emerges as a unifying construct that links together notions such as teacher status, teacher performance and teaching styles. The diagram that follows is a display of how these notions are connected and the importance of teacher motivation as a factor affecting teacher status. As has already been discussed, high levels of teacher motivation have a positive effect on teacher performance. Furthermore, research has shown that different teacher motivation levels may result in varying instructional behavior, which, in turn, represents an important aspect of teacher performance. Finally, teacher performance, which is largely influenced by teacher motivation, seems to be a fundamental constituent that shapes teacher status:

![Diagram showing the relationship between teacher status, performance, and motivation]

**Figure 1:** Teachers’ motivation and performance as factors shaping teacher status
More specifically, with regard to the Greek context, EFL teachers and students at state schools and private language institutes and the characteristics of both educational environments may affect the status of English language teaching a great deal. Based on and expanding the existing research (see 2.1. Analoui, 2000; Cave and Mulloy, 2010; Inayatullah and Jehangir, 2012), potential differences in teachers’ motivation levels can be argued to possibly contribute to different teacher and student performance and, thus, according to the present study, varying teacher status in the two educational settings. Therefore, it becomes mandatory to explore state and private EFL teachers’ status with regard to their motivation levels in these two different professional contexts, taking into consideration the crucial role of the educational community.

The complexity of the phenomenon of teacher status, as illustrated in the figure above, led to the adoption of self-determination theory as the motivation theory which underlies the theoretical framework of this study and makes it feasible to research EFL teachers’ status through its particular constituents.

3. Self-determination theory

As already noted, teacher motivation is a multidimensional construct that seems to have a serious effect on teacher status (see Figure 1). Thus, a substantial part of the study reported on here is devoted to the research of Greek state and private EFL teachers’ motivation, which, it is hypothesized, will shed light on teacher status as well. Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2004) specifically, among other motivation theories, has been chosen as a theoretical tool for the analysis of teacher status in the present work.

What makes it particularly relevant to this study is the fact that, apart from dealing with different types of motivation, SDT also explores the social conditions that promote and maintain it. More specifically, it focuses on the effects of social, cultural conditions and context on volitional and self-determined behaviour (Black and Deci, 2000; Deci et al., 1991; Dörnyei, 2001; Ryan, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Wenying, 2012). SDT provides a continuum of internalization, as the focus, according to this theory, should be placed on the process of internalization of various extrinsic motives. More specifically, in a specific educational setting, teachers could be motivated extrinsically because they feel satisfied with their salary, while their teaching may also be dictated by their inner self and, thus, they may be intrinsically motivated towards their work. In the middle stages of the continuum one can find introjection (engaging with tasks to avoid feeling guilt or gaining the educational community’s approval) and identification (individuals choose to follow the teaching profession because they have identified with the value and importance of educating young people) (Ryan, 2009).

Finally, as research suggests (Deci et al., 1991; Ryan, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2004), the various types of motivation found along the internalization continuum differ in their relative autonomy, with extrinsic motivation being the least autonomous form of motivation, when teachers do not act out of their inner self, and intrinsic motivation the most autonomous one, in the sense that teachers’ actions are dictated by integrated values they accept. Thus, in the case of the present study, data can indicate differences between various kinds of motivation among state school and private institute EFL teachers and a potential difference between their levels of intrinsic motivation in particular would imply a difference in their feelings of autonomy as well.
Moreover, SDT presents three psychological needs, needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness as basic elements that not only initiate and sustain motivation but are also regarded as vital elements of healthy human functioning, of human well-being (Deci et al., 1991; Dörnyei, 2001; Gagne and Deci, 2005; Ryan, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2004). SDT claims that intrinsic motivation can only be accomplished under conditions that support the fulfillment of these basic needs, which hints, in relation to the present research, at the importance of teachers’ relationships with their educational community.

More specifically, Greek EFL state teachers often have to come to terms with the fact that they are treated as second class teachers, which opposes the satisfaction of the needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness, which SDT regards as essential for promoting and sustaining motivation and self-determination. According to Ranjan and Hobson (2002), pressure from below by unhelpful colleagues, indifferent and undisciplined students and lack of intellectual challenge tend to hinder teachers’ basic needs satisfaction, lower their self-determination, impair their performance at school and hurt society’s image of them along with their status. In contrast, EFL private institute teachers seem to teach under better conditions (Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Karavas, 2010). The present research explores the extent to which Greek EFL teachers’ satisfaction of these needs is accomplished and then their motivation levels. On the basis of the above, then, SDT emerges as a more adequate theoretical framework for this study.

4. Research design and methodology

4.1. The method

A mixed methods approach was adopted in an attempt to examine the results of the study jointly to synthesize the broader picture of Greek EFL teachers’ status. The particular approach provides triangulation of collected data through different methods and over a period of time (Yau, 2010). More specifically, quantitative and qualitative research methods are combined to “bring out the best of both paradigms while also compensating for their weaknesses” (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011: 205). The research presented involved both a questionnaire and class diaries. The questionnaire used is web-based, was created with the help of Google docs software forms and consisted of five sections and 17 questions in total.

The initial sections aspired to explore how participants perceive the Greek educational community’s attitudes towards EFL teachers at state schools and private language institutes while the final sections of the questionnaire attempted to compare EFL teachers’ motivation at both working contexts. Each of these two sections consisted of a series of 10 Likert type statements, focusing on different types of motivation, as these are dictated by SDT.

As far as class diaries are concerned, all students were provided with three ready-made leaflets corresponding to each week of diary keeping. These leaflets were in the form of diary pages and included pre-designed questions to help them focus on certain aspects of their EFL learning at both educational settings. These questions, which remained the same throughout, led students to reflect on their feelings concerning their EFL learning. The participants were also supposed to comment on the structure and the variety of their lessons, the interactional patterns that dominated their class and its character (student or teacher-centred). Finally, it was hoped that valuable assumptions could be made through the students’ answers on the degree of their learning autonomy, their teachers’ instructional practices, the extent to which integration of skills was promoted, and the exam or non-exam orientation of their EFL class.
Given the conceptual framework presented above, this study aims to compare Greek EFL teachers’ status in state schools versus private institutes. More specifically, the present research explores:

a) Greek EFL teachers’ perception of the Greek educational community’s attitudes towards state and private EFL teachers.
b) How motivated Greek EFL teachers of both the state and the private sector feel in relation to their job.
c) How the potential difference in teachers’ motivation levels in each of the two educational contexts is reflected in their teaching, as evaluated by their students.

4.2. Participants

The participants were Greek EFL teachers who were employed or had at some point been employed either (or both) in state primary or secondary education or (and) at a private language institute. They were selected through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling (Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei and Csizer, 2012; Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010). The final number of EFL teachers that completed the questionnaire was 141. 84 participants stated that they still worked as state EFL teachers while 42 answered they were private EFL teachers. The rest stated a different employment status.

In accordance with the scope of the third research question of the present study, 45 EFL students at state schools and 15 EFL students at a private language institute were asked to keep a diary related to their English class for a period of three weeks. The sample from state schools consisted of 25 students in the sixth grade of a primary school in an urban area (B1 level) and 20 students in the third grade of a lower secondary school (B2 level) in a rural area of Greece. As for the participants from the private language institute, they were 8 C class (B1 level) and 7 FCE class students (B2 level). Homogeneity in age and level was sought wherever possible so that validity and reliability could be achieved.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. The questionnaires

5.1.1. The Greek educational community’s attitudes towards EFL state and private institute teachers

Colleagues’ attitudes

The data analysis (see Table 1 below) reveals important differences as far as collegial networks in both educational settings are concerned. State EFL teachers seem to receive a rather disrespectful treatment from their colleagues, whereas feelings of respect and equality seem to dominate private institute EFL teachers’ relations with theirs. Almost half of the participants (46.6%) answered that their colleagues in the state sector always or usually believe EFL teachers spend less time than they do preparing their classes while in the private sector there was only one participant that believed her colleagues have such an opinion of EFL private institute teachers.

Assuming there are no personal differences among EFL teachers and their colleagues at state schools, the disrespect that EFL teachers often receive from their colleagues derives from the inferior position English holds as a subject among the others in the Greek state.
curriculum (Gemelou, 2010; Gheralis-Roussos, 2003; Karavas, 2010). This is clearly supported by the results of the present research. What is indicated through the results in relation to EFL teachers’ perceptions of their colleagues’ attitudes towards them is that the majority of EFL teachers who worked or had worked at state schools felt that their colleagues considered English as a subject to have a rather subsidiary role in the curriculum. Therefore, we can only deduce, in accord with our hypothesis, that EFL state teachers’ needs for relatedness and respect cannot be satisfied in such a collegial environment, with possible negative effects on their intrinsic motivation according to SDT (Deci et al., 1991; Dörnyei, 2001; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2004; Wang, 2008) and, as assumed by the present study, further effects on their status. By contrast, the support, respect and recognition private institute teachers receive from their colleagues and the major role English holds in the private institute sector, according to the results of the study, may affect EFL teachers’ motivation towards their work and their status positively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your colleague teachers believe that:</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. You spend less time preparing your classes than they do</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. English is an easier subject to teach compared to theirs</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. English is not as important a subject as the others</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Colleagues’ attitudes towards EFL State and Private Institute Teachers

Parents’ attitudes

As far as parents’ attitudes towards EFL teachers are concerned, the status of English as a subject taught in both state schools and private institutes apparently plays a significant role in shaping EFL teachers’ relationships with their students’ parents. The data analysis (see Table 2 below) indicated that parents showed a disrespectful behaviour towards state EFL teachers by taking hardly any interest in their children’s progress in English, by pursuing no communication with these teachers and providing hardly any support for their learning with regard to the particular subject. The absence of fruitful cooperation between teachers and their students’ parents deprives them of an important motivational ally in their attempt to engage students in active learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Rahimi and Nabilou, 2011).

Students’ attitudes

The conclusions drawn from the results of the research also reveal that students think highly of private institute teachers and English as a subject taught by them while their disrespect towards state EFL teachers and English at state schools is obvious through their school
behavior, that is their lack of discipline, indifference and low interest in the life of state EFL class (see Table 3 below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your students' parents:</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. are interested in their children’s progress in English</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. get to know you and discuss with you any learning problems their children have</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your students:</td>
<td>Always</td>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a1. believe that studying English at school is unnecessary because they will not get a certificate</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. display undisciplined behaviour</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1. do not find time to do their homework because they have a lot to do in the private institute</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.** Parents’ attitudes towards EFL State and Private Institute Teachers

The conclusions drawn from the results of the research also reveal that students think highly of private institute teachers and English as a subject taught by them while their disrespect towards state EFL teachers and English at state schools is obvious through their school behavior, that is their lack of discipline, indifference and low interest in the life of state EFL class (see Table 3 below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Your students:</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a1. believe that you are not as good a teacher as their private institute teacher is</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. display undisciplined behaviour</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c1. do not find time to do their homework because they have a lot to do in the private institute</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.** Students’ attitudes towards EFL State and Private Institute Teachers
The situation described above reflects low motivation levels in relation to EFL learning at state schools, unlike what happens in private institutes. Coupled with the fact that students’ motivation towards learning can affect their teachers’ motivation towards teaching (Deci et al., 1991; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011; Pelletiar et al., 2002), this situation suggests state EFL teachers must have low motivation levels as compared to their colleagues at private institutes. This is further supported by the fact that state EFL teachers’ needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence seem to remain unsatisfied, due to their students’ apparent contempt and indifference, thus depriving them of any chance to boost their intrinsic motivation.

**Management and school’s attitudes**

As was stated by the vast majority of EFL teachers who responded to the questionnaire (71%), English is always or usually taught during the last hours of the daily schedule. State school students are usually tired during their English classes while the school management’s decision to teach English among other subjects during the last hours of the timetable indicates the position the subject holds in state education. Private institute respondents’ answers, by contrast, suggested the opposite, which shows the better conditions under which English is taught in the private sector. As far as the teaching facilities available at state EFL classes are concerned, EFL teachers expressed their dissatisfaction, only one third sounding positive, while private institute teachers seem to be quite satisfied, 88% arguing that EFL class facilities were always or usually adequate. Lack of facilities in the state school context is bound to enhance contempt, since the learning process cannot easily be made attractive. As can be inferred, their colleagues at private institutes have the chance to make use of the necessary facilities to accomplish their teaching goals.

5.1.2. EFL state and private institute teachers’ motivation

Private institute teachers appear to be more motivated than their colleagues at state schools generally. According to the results (see Table 4 below), the private context apparently gives them the opportunity to feel more related to the educational community, and more competent in their work. Although over half the state EFL teachers feel that their working context provides them with autonomy to experiment on new teaching practices, while the positive responses to this statement reach 31% of their private sector counterparts (see Table 4 below), the difference between the degree of autonomy both EFL teacher groups feel is not the one that could have been assumed on the basis of the controlled and exam-oriented character of private institute classes. Given the fact that state EFL teachers work in an environment where there is no pressure of accomplishing certain standards of performance, as required in an exam-oriented classroom, we had hypothesized that the numbers indicating state EFL teachers’ feelings of autonomy would be higher. Similarly, private teachers’ answers, in relation to their autonomy, contradicted the assumptions that one would have made based on the exam-oriented character of their working environment.

Given that basic needs satisfaction contributes mostly to the shaping of intrinsic motivation, according to SDT, as presented earlier, and that private institute teachers do not regard limited autonomy as an obstacle to their job and their needs for relatedness and competence are more satisfied than state school teachers’, based on the results of the present research, we can only deduce that the former are more intrinsically motivated than the latter.
Furthermore, private institute teachers showed higher levels of motivation with regard to all of the types explored in accord with SDT. Their levels of identified and integrated regulation\(^2\), which constitute the most typically intrinsic types of motivation, were higher as well (see Table 5 below). Consequently, according to the results, private institute EFL teachers were more motivated and more self-determined than state EFL teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As an EFL teacher:</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I feel that the educational community respects me</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I feel competent and effective in attaining my professional goals</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I can experiment on new teaching practices</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. EFL state school and private institute teachers’ basic needs satisfaction according to SDT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As an EFL teacher:</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. I enjoy teaching English because my students think I am good at it</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. I enjoy teaching English because I think I can make a difference in my students’ lives</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26.4%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. I experience an ongoing feeling of completeness and well-being</td>
<td>EFL State School Teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFL Private Institute Teachers</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. EFL state school and private institute teachers’ levels of motivation according to SDT
These reduced levels of motivation do not permit state EFL teachers to fully take advantage of their flexible working framework. To put it differently, private institute teachers’ fulfillment of basic needs for competence and relatedness (Deci et al., 1991; Dörnyei, 2001; Gagne and Deci, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2004; Wang, 2008) and their high motivation empower them to feel more autonomous than one would expect, despite their exams-oriented teaching environment, which usually offers them a strict curriculum to comply with and high student performance standards to meet (Tziava, 2003).

Similarly, low motivation levels also apparently affect state teachers’ will to search for, find and get engaged with teacher development courses. The difference in relation to EFL teachers’ involvement in teacher development courses may not lie so much in the availability of these courses but in the teachers’ motivation and will to actually get engaged with them (see Table 6 below):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Usually</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. At Greek state schools there are opportunities for teacher development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>65.4%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. At Greek private language institutes there are opportunities for teacher development</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>39.6%</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. EFL teachers’ attitudes with regard to teacher development opportunities at state schools and private institutes

5.2. The student diaries

The reduced levels of state EFL students’ motivation, which were presented as key results in the quantitative part of our research, are further supported by the school diaries kept by 45 students from state schools and 15 from a private language institute (B1 and B2 level). State EFL students, more often than not, believe that state EFL classes do not contribute much to their learning because they already know English from their private institute classes (27% of the student participants mentioned they had not learnt anything new in their EFL class as they already knew English from the private institute they attended). Therefore, they usually feel bored (47%) and become undisciplined. Moreover, as they are used to a particular exam-oriented, teacher-centred and controlled type of private institute teaching, with a form and accuracy focus, promoted through a great amount of grammar and vocabulary practice, the more student-centered and autonomous character of the state EFL class often causes frustration and resentment along with contempt.

Thus, while student-centered and autonomous school contexts seem to promote student motivation, according to the literature (Deci and Ryan, 1987; Öztürk and Ok, 2014), this does not seem to be the case with the Greek state EFL context. This situation has severe effects on state EFL teachers’ motivation as well, influences their teaching practices and their performance in general, and finally shapes their professional status.

More specifically, qualitative research shows that state EFL teachers usually adopt a facilitative teaching role and attempt to create an autonomous class atmosphere, most probably due to the particular contextual factors that dominate the state EFL class (Deci and Ryan 1982a, 1982b, as cited in Deci et al., 1982: 852). More than half of the state EFL students mentioned that their teachers’ role was facilitative. Additionally, 82% of the
students participating in the study noted that their lessons were not identical to the previous ones. They mentioned: “we did something new, a computer project” and “we played new games”. Teachers’ teaching goals are mostly communicative and there is no evident pressure to bring measurable results, as is the case with their counterparts at private institutes. However, results show that their low motivation along with the washback effect distort the autonomous character of the state class, leaving less room for students’ initiative than we would have expected (the EFL students who stated that they had an initiative in the state context (22%) were more than their private context counterparts; yet their behavior was not representative of the majority of state students, as expected), impairing teachers’ performance and their status.

On the other hand, private institute teachers display an authoritative role as a result of the exam-oriented character of their class and the pressure they feel with regard to the performance goals imposed on the particular educational context. In the private context almost every student noted that they usually worked on their own. A student actually noted that: “I work on my own because it is important to know everything I did was thanks to me and not the others”, emphasizing the competitive atmosphere that characterizes the teacher-centred private institute classroom. Nevertheless, their students’ intrinsic motivation is not affected negatively (Deci and Ryan 1982a, 1982b, as cited in Deci et al., 1982: 852), probably thanks to the washback effect, thus preserving private institute EFL teachers’ high motivation intact as well, since they are usually treated as unique sources of knowledge and are considered to be effective in their work. Students showed their trust towards private institute EFL teachers. Some wrote: “I don’t want to change anything” and “I wouldn’t change anything. They are teaching with a method that it’s best for students”. It is evident that, under the conditions described, EFL teachers’ status in private institutes emerges as considerably higher than that of their colleagues in state schools in Greece.

More specifically, the high status of English as a subject at private institutes and private institute teachers’ increased levels of motivation along with the effects of these factors on their performance, as evaluated by their students, have made them members of a respected profession in comparison with their colleagues in state EFL education. With the exception of motivation in relation to their financial rewards\(^1\), which constitutes a severe complaint among EFL teachers from both educational settings, private institute teachers scored highly in all the other types of motivation.

The present research has also shown that things are rather different when it comes to state EFL teachers and learning. The educational community’s attitudes towards state EFL teachers and English as a subject taught at state schools rank it as inferior compared to the private institute context described above. Most importantly, students often disregard their EFL teachers’ role at school, and, more often than not, display undisciplined behaviour with destructive results as far as state EFL teachers’ motivation levels are concerned (Webb, n.d).

6. Concluding remarks

Results show that the washback effect, an important feature operative in private EFL classes in Greece, appears to lure students into a ceaseless training procedure for the sake of becoming accustomed to the norms and coping with the demands of various examinations. Such is the value accorded to success in such an examination (Alderson and Wall, 1993; Bailey, 1996; Cheng, 1997; Clapham, 2000; Gashaye, 2012; Prodromou, 1992; Senel and Tutunis, 2013) that, in some cases, according to our qualitative research, students even seem to crave for more examination practice. The fact that private EFL students are devoted
to a highly respected and challenging goal increases their active involvement and interest in the private institute class, affects their teachers’ motivation and performance in a positive way and, at the same time, engraves EFL teaching at private institutes in the educational community’s consciousness as a mandatory constituent of Greek students’ education and awards private institute EFL teachers higher status than their colleagues in the state sector.

Additionally, Greek students transfer their learning experiences into their state EFL classes and, thus, state teachers often find themselves struggling to persuade their students to work in a completely different climate, as students’ diaries analysis showed, where rigid exam preparation is replaced by flexible teaching, aimed at active and autonomous learning. However, their reduced levels of motivation along with the absence of a certification at the end of the year seem to distort the flexible, autonomous character of the EFL state class, in the sense that EFL teachers in state schools either insist on adopting more student-centered teaching practices in vain, as their students treat their classes as a pleasant break from their official and demanding EFL learning at their private language institute, or, in the worst scenario, get frustrated at their unmotivated and undisciplined students and end up doing a rather controlled, routine lesson, devoid of challenges for either themselves or their students.

In both cases, the whole situation impairs state EFL teachers’ performance and seems to verify students’ prior assumptions that learning English can take place efficiently only in a private language institute. Private EFL institute teachers in Greece enjoy an enviable status, as opposed to their state school colleagues. Evidently, the whole situation displays characteristics of a self-fulfilling prophecy or of a vicious circle.

7. Suggestions and Conclusion

The study presented in this article focused on the comparison of EFL teachers’ status in state schools and private institutes in Greece but the results and findings of the present research can be useful for any other similar educational context. If we want state EFL teachers to be accorded high professional status, the washback effect on the state EFL classroom should be reduced by highlighting communicative learning goals over performance goals imposed by exam-oriented teaching contexts. Moreover, taking into consideration that, according to this study, the educational community’s contemptuous behaviour towards state EFL learning is due to the position of English as a subject in the state curriculum and the lack of certification structures at state schools, necessary measures should be taken towards this direction. The introduction of a certification exam, coupled with an increase in teaching hours, would help change the educational community’s stance towards state EFL teachers and improve their status. Likewise, the improvement of administrative support and availability of suitable facilities and resources can enhance state EFL teachers’ performance (Koran, 2015; Rosenholtz and Simpson, 1990) and the status of state EFL learning generally. Last but not least, the lack of a rewarding salary emerged through this research as a complaint shared by EFL teachers in both educational settings and, as financial rewards often “reflect the value society attaches to a particular profession” (Gheralis-Roussos, 2003, p. 199) and also seem to improve teachers’ performance (Dee and Wyckoff, 2015), EFL teachers’ remunerations should be increased.

Further research, such as expanding the sample of the qualitative research to encompass more state schools and private institutes or extending the diary keeping spell could shed further light on these issues. Moreover, interviews with non-EFL teachers, students, parents, schools principals and private institute owners could help research the educational
community’s attitudes towards EFL teachers further and then compare them with EFL teachers’ perceptions of the educational community’s attitudes. Furthermore, a teacher development course or a micro-example of what things should be like in the state EFL class could be introduced to provide a more global image of the situation.

What should be left as a concluding remark of the present study is that teachers’ status is in close connection with the status of the subject they teach. Only if the position of English as a subject in the state curriculum improves, will state EFL teachers’ professional status improve. Only when students start to treat state EFL education as the official class for them to master the English language in and parents begin to entrust state EFL teachers with teaching their children English and helping them certify their knowledge, will state EFL teachers enjoy the status they deserve.

Notes

1. The fact that the Greek educational community seem to give importance to both the absence of certification structures in EFL state class and the opportunities for certification that private language institutes provide students with, made it necessary to have the c1-c2 distinction with regard to the last question of the table. Similarly, the different characteristics of the two contexts brought about variation in more questions posed in the two settings (see Table 3 as well).
2. Identified and integrated regulation are the most internalized and autonomous types of behavioral regulation according to the internalization continuum suggested by SDT. Identification refers to accepting the value of the activity as personally important, and integration refers to regulations that are fully assimilated with one’s self so they are included in a person's self evaluations and beliefs. (Ryan, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2000).
3. The majority of state teachers (89%) were unhappy with their salary. And, as for private institute teachers, while they generally outperformed their state school counterparts in terms of motivation factors, when it came to their financial rewards, their motivation level rivaled that of state school teachers.

References


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Teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching

The purpose of this paper is to investigate teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching and whether this integration is close to ‘normalisation’. The research aims at indicating which Web 2.0 tools teachers use, how often and how they use them. It investigates the barriers that restrict teachers from using them in class and possible solutions too. For the purposes of this study a questionnaire was designed and administered to 135 EFL teachers in Greece. According to the research findings, the majority of teachers have positive attitudes. They have realised that since we live in a digital, multicultural world, education should equip students with 21st century skills, New Literacies and promote Cultural Pluralism. Moreover, educators are near ‘normalisation’ and use tools such as YouTube, Google Sites, blogs, and wikis. However, the frequency with which teachers use them, the lack of training/technological equipment in many cases, and the fact that Web 2.0 technologies are not part of the syllabus indicate that Web 2.0 tools have not taken their rightful place in education yet. Teachers’ positive attitudes need to be combined with a series of measures that will facilitate the use of Web 2.0 tools.
1. Introduction

Over the last years the rapid growth of technology has affected our life drastically. The Internet, computers, mobile phones, social media, and all the other tools of the digital age have become an integral part of our daily life. Especially young people, who were born in this digital age, are increasingly competent with technology and have their own style of learning and communicating (Prensky, 2001). Furthermore, this era is characterised not only by the digital revolution but also the rapid growth of multicultural communities. In the digital age of cultural diversity students need to develop several skills and different literacies to cope with the needs of a changing world. Are the EFL teachers aware of this new reality and to what extent do they use Web 2.0 tools to prepare students for this reality?

Several studies have been conducted on Web 2.0 tools and the interest in their pedagogical value keeps increasing (Crook et al., 2008; D’Souza, 2007; Katerini, 2013; Kontogeorgi, 2014; Paroussi, 2014). However, teachers’ attitudes towards Web 2.0 technologies have not been widely investigated in the Greek EFL context. The present research attempts to shed light on teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools and explore whether this integration is close to ‘normalisation’ (Bax, 2003).

2. 21st Century Education

2.1. Digital natives-digital immigrants

As Prensky (2001, p.1) states ‘our students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people our educational system was designed for’. Nowadays, learners are increasingly competent with technology. As a result of this situation, learners think and process information in a different way from the students of the past. Today’s children are known as ‘Digital Natives’ since they were born in a digital age and have their own unique style of learning and communicating (ibid.). They perceive information very fast and feel comfortable when they are in front of a computer. They like challenging, interesting tasks and prefer visuals before text rather than the opposite. In addition, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has broken the world boundaries. The Web enables students to interact with people from all over the world, join online communities and have access to worldwide literature, science, music and other arts (Sleeter and Tettegah, 2002).
In this digital age of cultural diversity students need to develop several skills and different literacies to cope with the needs of a changing world. It is therefore worth investigating whether EFL teachers are prepared to face this reality and meet students’ needs. Educators belong to a more traditional generation. Prensky (2001, p.2) describes them as ‘Digital Immigrants’ since they were not born in the digital world but were familiarised with new technologies at some later point in their lives (ibid.). Educators are challenged to adjust to the new reality, change the way they teach and embrace technology in order to motivate students. Active and collaborative methods of teaching could equip students with necessary skills for their future professional life such as teamwork and project/problem solving (Cameron, 2001; Wang, 2010).

2.2. New literacies

21st century education should focus not only on the development of the traditional literacies but also on the necessary skills and literacies of the digital age. Educators have to cater for the needs of pupils living and learning in a digital, multicultural world and develop ‘new literacies’ too (Sylvester and Greenidge, 2009, p.284). New literacies include the skills, strategies, and knowledge necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing ICT. This kind of literacy allows us to comprehend and interact with technology in a meaningful way (Leu et al., 2004; Coiro, 2003). Moreover, creativity, challenging all forms of intelligence (Gardner, 1993), higher-order thinking, project management, collaboration, teamwork and critical thinking, are necessary skills of modern people.

More specifically, 21st century skills are being described as the combination of digital, global, technology, visual, information and media literacy. Robin (2008, p.5) defines digital literacy as ‘the ability to communicate with an ever-expanding community to discuss issues, gather information, and seek help’; global literacy is ‘the capacity to read, interpret, respond, and contextualize messages from a global perspective’; technology literacy is defined as ‘the ability to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity, and performance’; visual literacy is ‘the ability to understand, produce, and communicate through visual images’ and information literacy is ‘the ability to find, evaluate, and synthesize information’. As far as media literacy is concerned, Kellner and Share (2007, p.4) argue that ‘it involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts’.

Furthermore, Rosenberg (2010) argues that Internet-literate students are aware of the potential dangers of the Internet. They realise that the Internet not only empowers people but it may also lead to their ‘public rejection, humiliation, contempt and oppression’ (ibid., p.8). Pupils may use the Internet inappropriately due to a lack of knowledge regarding how it works, who controls it, and the effect that public information, messages, images or video may have. Therefore, teachers need to prepare students to use the Internet as ‘a safe, just and democratic form of communication’ (ibid.).

2.3. Cultural pluralism

Another essential element of 21st century education is the promotion of Cultural Pluralism and the preparation of students to become effective citizens of a multicultural world. Worldwide migration and globalisation have caused the increase of cultural diversity in several countries around the world, including Greece (Banks and Banks, 2009). The rising number of immigrants...
has changed the composition of student population too (Sakka, 2010). Consequently, a new school reality, with both opportunities and challenges, has emerged.

Cultural diversity provides both teachers and students the opportunity to become familiar with different cultures and opinions (Beckman-Brito, 2003). However, cultural diversity brings challenges as well. For instance, in multicultural communities discrimination and injustice often arise. As a result, the teacher has the responsibility not only to equip students with the basic language skills but also to manage cultural diversity, address possible conflicts, and introduce children to ‘the cultural heterogeneity which should be encouraged and respected’ (Hossain and Aydin, 2011, p.117). As Banks and Banks (2009, p.5) argue ‘The world’s greatest problems do not result from people being unable to read and write. They result from people in the world—from different cultures, races, religions, and nations—being unable to get along and work together to solve the world’s problems’.

Therefore, learners growing and living in multicultural societies have to develop knowledge, values, and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interaction (Hossain & Aydin, 2011; Richards, 2001). Education should prepare pupils to participate in several different cultures and not merely the culture of the dominant social and economic group (Richards, 2001). Cultural Pluralism seeks to redress racism, to raise the self-esteem of minority groups, and to help learners appreciate the viewpoints of other cultures and religions (Uhrmacher, 1993, in Richards, 2001). Multicultural education aims at producing critical thinkers and active members of a democratic society (Hossain and Aydin, 2011).

![Figure 1: Schematic representation of the literature review](image-url)
3. Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching

3.1. Normalisation and CALL

Computer assisted language learning (CALL) could prepare students for this rapidly changing world (see Figure 1). Web 2.0 technologies are some of the most influential CALL applications that can be valuable pedagogical tools. However, they are not enough on their own to enhance EFL teaching. Research into how teachers deal with this innovation and how this operates and becomes integrated into the daily teaching practice is valuable since it could help CALL become more effective (Chambers and Bax, 2006). If teachers are to maximise the benefits of Web 2.0 tools, they need to move towards a state of ‘normalisation’ (Bax, 2003, p.13).

Bax refers to three approaches (2003, p.8): ‘Restricted CALL’, ‘Open CALL’, and ‘Integrated CALL’ (see Appendix II). According to Bax, we haven’t reached the final stage which leads to ‘normalisation’. Bax (2003, p.23) defines this concept as ‘the stage when a technology is invisible, hardly even recognised as a technology, taken for granted in everyday life’. Based on Rogers (1995), Bax lists seven stages of normalisation (2003, p. 24-25): ‘Early Adopters’, ‘Ignorance/skepticism’, ‘Try once’, ‘Try again’, ‘Fear/awe’, ‘Normalising’, and ‘Normalisation’. As far as the Greek EFL context is concerned, a recent research has shown that teachers are in Open CALL and Normalising stage (Spiris, 2014). Teachers gradually view technology as something normal. However, technology is still not embedded in their everyday teaching practice and therefore, not normalised (Bax, 2003).

3.2. Uses and benefits of Web 2.0 tools

Some of the most recent and influential CALL applications that can be used in education and equip students with 21st century skills are the Web 2.0 tools. Over the last years there has been growing interest in the use of Web 2.0 tools and the teachers’ perceptions of their pedagogical benefits (Yuen and Yuen, 2008). Hundreds of Web 2.0 tools have emerged offering limitless opportunities for creative interaction and their number keeps increasing (Anderson, 2007; Tunks, 2012).

To begin with, the term Web 2.0 was introduced in 2004 by Dale Dougherty during a conference brainstorming session about the Web. He noted that ‘the web was more important than ever, with exciting new applications and sites popping up with surprising regularity’ (O’Reilly, 2007, p.1) and then O’Reilly attempted to clarify what they mean by Web 2.0. According to D’Souza (2007), there has been a shift from a World Wide Web that is ‘read only’, to a Web that is being described as the ‘Read Write Web’. Web content used to be for the most part static but now users have the opportunity to develop it collaboratively. The Web is evolving to become more like an area for social and idea networking.

More specifically, in the Web 2.0 era the Web has been transformed from a Web page publishing venue to a global network community where all users are invited to create content (Yuen and Yuen, 2008). This sense of community makes Web 2.0 technologies valuable pedagogical tools. Web 2.0 tools attract students’ attention and allow them to learn as equal members of a community in which they interact with other users, share knowledge, information and edit web content from anywhere, any time (Hossain and Aydin, 2011). Belonging to a community of learners creates a sense of trust, an obligation to the group and determination that the goals can be achieved (Parker & Chao, 2007; Tunks, 2012).
Moreover, research has shown that online communities provide a less stressful learning environment in which students, especially those who are usually shy or passive in the traditional class, are motivated to participate and develop a wide range of skills (Sumakul, 2014).

More specifically, Web 2.0 tools not only increase language input/output, but also develop a variety of life skills. According to research, they promote sharing, collaboration, interaction, socialisation, creativity, autonomy, and therefore, allow teachers to empower students and create an active, motivating and exciting learning environment (Kontogeorgi, 2014). Furthermore, Web 2.0 tools promote New Literacies and equip learners with 21st century skills. In particular, they enhance creative and inventive thinking, challenging all forms of intelligences, higher-order thinking, communication, teamwork, project management (Fleming, 2000), research skills, and enduring understandings.

In addition, Web 2.0 tools increase students’ motivation. The more motivated students are, the more the chances they will do well in English. Most researches actually confirm that there is a high correlation between motivation and achievement (Nunan and Lamb, 1996). Learners are motivated since they have the opportunity to use digital tools they are familiar with and get involved in authentic tasks. They express their own voice, create materials and share them not only with their classmates but also with the whole world. Moreover, communicating with a real global audience makes students more creative and thoughtful in content and structure of an assignment (Godwin-Jones, 2003; Vlachos, 2006; Warschauer, 2010). Furthermore, this openness and collaborative nature of Web 2.0 tools offer unlimited possibilities to promote Cultural Pluralism. Web 2.0 tools expose students to different cultures and promote mutual understanding, tolerance, respect for identities, and cultural diversity through more effective international communication (Hossain and Aydin, 2011; Richards, 2011).

It is evident that Web 2.0 technologies are valuable pedagogical tools since they could equip students with all the above mentioned skills and values. However, according to prior research, the majority of teachers rarely integrate technology in their teaching practice (Katerini, 2013; Spiris, 2014). When they do, they mainly use Social Networking Sites and especially YouTube (Spiris, 2014; Yuen et al., 2011). A small number of teachers use other tools such as blogs, wikis, Google Drive, Google Sites, and Skype.

3.3. Teachers’ attitudes

All the benefits of Web 2.0 tools that have been discussed so far cannot be realised without considering teachers’ attitudes. Integrating ICT in teaching is a complex process that requires careful consideration. Bullock (2004) argues that teachers’ positive or negative attitudes can serve as enabling or disabling factors that affect the successful integration of technology in EFL teaching. Player-Koro (2007) supports the idea that attitudes guide behaviours. Therefore, teachers who have positive attitudes are more likely to use Web 2.0 tools in class (Albirini, 2006). On the contrary, negative attitudes limit the potential of Web 2.0. For instance, if teachers see little connection between technologies and their pedagogical use, they are hesitant to use Web 2.0 tools and view conventional methods of teaching as more effective (Albion, 2008, in Kale and Goh, 2014).

According to prior research, most teachers have positive attitudes towards educational technology (Spiris, 2014; Hadjirigas, 2012) and particularly Web 2.0 tools (Crook et al., 2008;
Katerini, 2013). Crook et al. (2008) found that 53.9% of teachers in England agree that Web 2.0 tools support effective collaborative learning and 58.5% believe that popular Web 2.0 tools should be used more in class. Furthermore, a recent study by Katerini (2013) showed that the vast majority of Greek EFL teachers have positive attitudes as well. Teachers agree that Web 2.0 tools attract students’ attention, improve their language skills and encourage active participation. Moreover, they believe that web-based lessons support differentiated instruction, increase students’ motivation and enhance collaboration skills.

Nevertheless, a small number of teachers are unsure about the above mentioned statements (ibid.). Furthermore, according to Crook at al. (2008) some teachers believe that the Internet distracts students and generally have a fear that technology has a negative influence on education/society. It is argued that teachers’ attitudes become more positive with training and experience (Chen et al., 2008, in Yuen et al., 2011). Through training teachers increase their abilities, perceive the benefits of Web 2.0 tools in education and are able to prepare students for a demanding, digital world (Simon, 2008, in Yuen et al., 2011; Jones, 2004).

3.4. Barriers and possible solutions

It is evident that the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching is a quite complex and challenging process. As it has already been highlighted teachers’ negative attitudes limit the potential of Web 2.0. However, teachers’ resistance to change cannot be merely the result of their beliefs. Their training, the school equipment, and their working conditions may affect the way they view technology. In other words, their negative attitude ‘is actually only a symptom of other barriers to the use of ICT’ (Jones, 2004, p.17).

According to prior research, a major barrier is the lack of school equipment (Albirini, 2006; Crook, 2008; Hadjirigas, 2012; Jones, 2004; Spiris, 2014). More specifically, the lack of computers in the classroom, the restricted access to computer labs, slow or no Internet access, technical problems, and lack of technical support are viewed as significant problems (ibid.). Furthermore, time pressure and classroom management problems seem to affect the successful integration of technology in teaching (Hadjirigas, 2013; Jones, 2004).

Two more important barriers that teachers indicate are their lack of training and confidence. Teachers who are not skilled enough in using ICTs feel anxious about using them in a class of students who belong to a digital generation and probably are more familiar with technology than they are. Therefore, their anxiety makes them less willing to use new technologies in class (Jones, 2004).

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned barriers, it is evident that several changes are necessary in education. First of all, all schools need to be technologically equipped and provide the necessary support to students and teachers as well (Spiris, 2014). In addition, the use of Web 2.0 tools should be a part of the syllabus. Consequently, teachers would have the necessary time to use Web 2.0 technology and accept it as a normal part of teaching. Last but not least, teacher training would make teachers feel more confident and ready to prepare students for a challenging, digital world.
4. Research methodology

4.1. The research purpose

The purpose of the research is to investigate teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching and whether this integration is close to ‘normalisation’ (Bax, 2003). More specifically, the researcher attempts to give answers to the following questions:

1. Which Web 2.0 tools teachers use in EFL teaching? How often and how do they use Web 2.0 tools?
2. What are the teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?
3. What are the barriers that may restrict teachers from integrating Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?
4. Is the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching close to ‘normalisation’?
5. What are the possible solutions to overcome the barriers to the effective integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?

4.2. The research tool

For the purposes of this research a questionnaire was designed (see Appendix I). The researcher designed the questionnaire after taking into consideration the research questions and the relevant literature review. Questions 11-13 and 15a-15f are based on Bax’s (2001, p.21) key dimensions regarding ‘Restricted, Open and Integrated CALL’ (see Appendix II). Closed-ended questionnaire items enable the researcher to collect specific information, structured data suited for quantitative, statistical analysis (Dörnyei, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007). Few open-ended clarification questions were included too. The questionnaire was pilot-tested on a small number of teachers before taking its final form. Piloting is an essential part of the questionnaire construction since it increases the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire (Dörnyei, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007).

4.3. Sample selection, questionnaire administration and statistical analysis

Concerning the selection of an appropriate sample, the researcher opted for a non-probability sample. ‘A non-probability sample deliberately avoids representing the wider population; it seeks only to represent a particular group, a particular named section of the wider population’ (Cohen et al., 2007, p.110).

The questionnaire link along with a cover letter was sent to EFL teachers in Greece via email. Totally 135 educators (both from public and private sector) participated in the research. 96 teachers answered that they use Web 2.0 tools in teaching while 39 stated the opposite. The data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS 19). It was important to estimate the reliability of each Likert scale question concerning teachers’ attitudes. Internal consistency reliability, namely ‘the homogeneity of the items making up the various multi-item scales within the questionnaire’ was measured by the Cronbach Alpha coefficient (Dörnyei, 2003, p.85). The degree of contribution of each question to the coefficient was estimated too. The value of the coefficient ranges between 0 and 1 and depends on the number of questions (ibid.). The reliability level is accepted if it is above 0.70 (Cohen et al., 2007). The items of the fourth section of the questionnaire had high internal consistency since the Cronbach Alpha was 0.889. The results are summarised and presented in the following section.
5. Presentation and discussion of research findings

5.1. Which Web 2.0 tools teachers use in EFL teaching? How often and how do they use Web 2.0 tools?

According to the findings (see Figure 2), the majority of teachers (71.1%) use YouTube. YouTube has been listed as the most popular Web 2.0 tool in prior research too (Spiris, 2014; Yuen et al., 2011). Teachers have a number of reasons to select YouTube since it is a motivational tool that not only supports language learning but also enhances 21st century skills. It creates a learning community where everyone has a voice, participates, shares videos, explores new worlds, and interacts with other users (Duffy, 2007; Mullen & Wedwick, 2008; Watkins & Wilkins, 2011). Teachers also seem to prefer YouTube since it meets several criteria that they consider important. More specifically, it adds fun, creativity to the learning process, it is online, free, easy to use and provides security through privacy options. It is popular among students and provides content appropriate to different ages and levels.

Moreover, a significant number of teachers reported that they use Google Sites, blogs, and wikis. There is no relevant prior research in Google Sites since it is one of the latest Web 2.0 tools. However, some participants opt for the particular tool. It gives students the opportunity to get engaged in collaborative work and share knowledge. On the contrary, in the recent years there has been a growing interest in blogs and wikis and as the findings of the present study indicate as well many EFL teachers in Greece are aware of their
pedagogical benefits (D’Souza, 2007; Fu et al., 2012; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Kontogeorgi, 2014; Parker & Chao, 2007; Yang, 2009; Paroussi, 2014).

![Figure 3: How teachers use Web 2.0 tools in their teaching context](image)

Although Facebook, Twitter, Google+ are three popular sites among young people and potentially powerful platforms for EFL teaching (Halvorsen, 2009), only a minority of teachers stated that they use them. Nevertheless, 21st century education needs to prepare Internet-literate students who use SNSs wisely (Rosenberg, 2010). Learners become aware of the benefits, potential dangers and therefore, critical of their use through working with social media under the guidance of the teacher.

Furthermore, it is worth noticing that although some new technologies can be powerful educational tools only few teachers stated that they use them. A characteristic example is
Google Drive, which despite the fact that it is the home of several Google applications that allow users to create, edit collaboratively, and share various types of files without space and time limitations, a small number of respondents reported that they integrate it in their teaching practice. This situation may be the result of lack of training on the use of different and new kinds of Web 2.0 tools. According to the research findings, the majority of the respondents who reported that they do not use ICTs in class are the teachers that have not attended seminars/courses related to the integration of Web 2.0 tools. Therefore, it is evident that training would prepare educators to adjust to the new digital reality and use a variety of Web 2.0 tools.

Concerning the frequency with which teachers use technology, previous studies in the Greek EFL context (Katerini, 2013; Spiris, 2014) have shown that most teachers rarely integrate it in their teaching practice. According to the findings of the present research this situation seems to have been improved. The majority (41.7%) claimed that they use Web 2.0 tools once or twice a week. However, only a small minority of teachers (7.8%) use them every day indicating that still technology has not taken its rightful place in education (Bax, 2003; Warchauer & Healey, 1998).

As far as the uses of ICTs are concerned (see Figure 3), the relevant literature supports that there is a variety of ways that teachers can use Web 2.0 to equip students with both language and life skills (D’Souza, 2007; Godwin-Jones, 2003; Kontogeorgi, 2014; Paroussi, 2014; Sumakul, 2014; Yuen & Yuen, 2008). According to the research, the majority of the participants are aware of these potentials. In particular, most teachers responded that they use Web 2.0 tools to provide extra listening, speaking, reading, and writing practice, authentic online resources and as presentation tools. Moreover, many teachers use videos, songs and images as writing prompts. Additionally, a significant number of the participants reported that they use Web 2.0 tools to expose students to different cultures and stimulate meaningful discussion. In this way, educators try to prepare students to become critical thinkers and active members of a multicultural, democratic society (Hossain and Aydin, 2011).

5.2. What are the teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?

Another finding that supports prior research (Crook et al., 2008; Katerini, 2013) is that teachers have positive attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching. To begin with, 50.4% of the teachers strongly agree that the use of Web 2.0 tools creates a more interesting and fun learning environment. Moreover, 42.2% agree that Web 2.0 tools promote sharing, collaboration, interaction, creativity, and socialisation. Most teachers (45.2%) also firmly believe that organising authentic tasks with the help of Web 2.0 tools motivates students. In addition, almost half of the respondents think that Web 2.0 tools encourage students to actively construct knowledge (48.1%), enhance learner autonomy (44.4%) and make students more creative and thoughtful in content and structure of an assignment (45.9%). The majority of teachers (44.4%) also support the idea that Web 2.0 tools challenge all forms of intelligence so that all learners can take advantage of their own strengths.

Furthermore, 47.4% strongly agree that since we live in a digital world education should equip students with 21st century skills and New Literacies through Blended Learning. Additionally, most of the respondents (43%) firmly believe that research skills could be developed through the use of Web 2.0 tools and project-based learning. 36.3% agree that
Web 2.0 tools give students the opportunity to express their own voice, however, a significant percentage of teachers do not appear that sure (35.6% neither agree nor disagree). As far as Cultural Pluralism is concerned, 48.9% think that the openness and collaborative nature of Web 2.0 tools could offer possibilities to promote intercultural awareness.

Moreover, the majority of teachers (47.4%) believe that Web 2.0 based lessons increase L2 input and the integration of language skills. Most of the respondents feel as well that Web 2.0 tools develop a sense of community where students communicate meaningfully in real contexts (43%) and encourage shy students to participate (43.7%). Furthermore, most teachers (39.3%) express their disagreement with the statement that Web 2.0 tools distract students. However, a significant number of teachers (31.1%) appear to be unsure about this matter. Prior research supports this finding too (Crook et al., 2008).

Undoubtedly, it is an advantage that educators have favourable attitudes towards Web 2.0. As Bullock (2004) argues educators’ positive attitudes serve as enabling factors that affect the successful integration of technology in teaching. In other words, teachers who have positive attitudes are more likely to use Web 2.0 tools (Albirini, 2006). Teachers’ attitudes could become even more positive through training and experience (Chen et al., 2008, in Yuen et al., 2011).

5.3. What are the barriers that may restrict teachers from integrating Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?

The integration of Web 2.0 tools in teaching is a complex and challenging process which does not depend only on teachers’ attitudes. There are also several barriers that may hinder integration (see Figure 4). Most problems that educators identified are similar to those revealed in previous studies concerning educational technology (Albirini, 2006; Jones, 2004; Crook, 2008; Hadjirigas, 2012; Spiris, 2014). More specifically, most respondents consider the lack of school equipment, time pressure/too much course book material to cover, no Internet access, and lack of training and knowledge as serious problems. In addition, some teachers claimed that they hesitate to use ICTs because of classroom management problems and their lack of freedom to create their own lessons.

5.4. Is the integration of Web 2.0 tools close to ‘normalisation’?

As far as the issue of ‘normalisation’ is concerned, a previous study (Spiris, 2014) placed most teachers in the ‘Open Plus’ group. A tendency towards ‘normalisation’ was also noticed as many respondents were classified in the ‘Near Normalisation’ group. According to the present research, the majority of teachers (37) belong to the ‘Near Normalisation’ group. They appear to be in the ‘normalising stage’ and gradually see Web 2.0 tools as a normal part of teaching (Bax, 2003, p.25). 25 teachers are classified in the ‘Open Plus’ group, 22 teachers constitute the ‘Integrated’ group and 5 educators belong to the ‘Open Minus’ group. It is remarkable that no teacher is classified in the ‘Restricted’ or ‘Near Restricted’ groups. Taking into consideration the findings of both the previous and the present research, it appears that as time goes by the situation gets improved and teachers move towards a state of ‘normalisation’.
The respondents’ teaching practices meet most of Bax’s criteria (2003). The vast majority (86.9%) reported that the use of Web 2.0 tools is a smaller part of their lesson. 72.5% stated that when they use Web 2.0 tools in their lessons there is emphasis on the integration of skills and almost half of them (49.5%) claimed that their students frequently interact with other students and sometimes with the computer. Additionally, 78% of the respondents reported that their type of feedback aims at encouraging learners to think, interpret, evaluate and comment. As far as the role of the teacher is concerned, most teachers (57.4%) claimed that they take up the role of monitor and facilitator, whereas no one stated that the teacher merely monitors students. Moreover, 66.3% reported that Web 2.0 based lessons take place in the classroom. Finally, the overwhelming majority (91.9%) claimed that when they use Web 2.0 tools they feel neither fear nor awe because they view the use of Web 2.0 tools as a normal part of teaching.

However, the frequency with which teachers use Web 2.0 tools, the lack of the necessary equipment in many cases and the fact that 50% of the respondents stated that Web 2.0 tools are not integrated in the syllabus indicate that technology has not been normalised yet. Web 2.0 tools can be successfully normalised only if they are properly integrated in the syllabus and teachers have the necessary technical and pedagogical support (Chambers and Bax, 2006).
5.5. What are the possible solutions to overcome the barriers to the effective integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?

Considering the above-mentioned barriers, the participants suggested several possible solutions (see Figure 5). Most of these solutions have been identified in prior research too (Chambers and Bax, 2006; Spiris, 2014). To begin with, they believe that the use of Web 2.0 tools should be a part of the syllabus. In this way, teachers will eventually accept ICTs as a normal part of their everyday teaching practice (Chambers and Bax, 2006). Teachers also stated that they should be encouraged to create their own materials according to students’ needs. This can be a time-consuming process for the teacher but a valuable addition to the course book that does not always reflect learners’ needs. Furthermore, teachers expressed their desire to be trained on the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching. The research findings showed that training influences both the use of Web 2.0 tools and their position in the lesson. According to the research findings, the use of Web 2.0 tools depends on whether the teacher has attended seminars/courses related to the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching. In particular, 30 teachers who have not been trained on Web 2.0 tools reported that they do not use them in class. On the contrary, only 9 teachers who have attended seminars stated that they do not integrate Web 2.0 tools in teaching. In addition, the position of Web 2.0 tools in teaching depends on whether teachers have attended related seminars/courses. For instance, 48 teachers who have been trained on ICTs stated that the use of Web 2.0 tools is a smaller part of every lesson. On the contrary, the teachers who claimed the same but they have not attended any seminars/courses were less (38).

![Figure 5: Possible solutions](image-url)
However, almost half of the respondents stated that they have not attended any seminars or courses related to ICTs. Therefore, training that focuses both on technical skills and pedagogy is crucial (ibid.). Finally, as far as the technological equipment is concerned, teachers believe that measures need to be taken in order for all students to be provided with laptops.

6. Study limitations and suggestions for further research

The research has revealed some interesting and useful findings. However, there are certain limitations that should be considered. Questionnaires have many advantages but also some drawbacks that limit the depth of investigation. For instance, the time and effort respondents are willing to spend on completing the questionnaire is usually quite short. Hasty participants may omit to answer some questions or produce responses that do not always reflect the truth. Moreover, some participants respond according to what they are supposed to believe rather than what they actually believe. Others may also have the tendency to overgeneralise when their overall impression on the topic is positive (Dörnyei, 2003). The researcher could have avoided such drawbacks through combining different methods of data, such as interviews and observation of teaching practice. Triangulation would have given us a better understanding of teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching, their teaching practices, and the problems they face (Bell, 2005; Dörnyei, 2003).

Furthermore, a small-scale study could not target the whole population. Therefore, a non-probability sample was selected that did not allow the researcher to make generalisations. A large-scale study involving EFL teachers around Greece would bring more representative results (Cohen et al., 2007). Moreover, the number of the participants who work at the private sector was quite low. Consequently, there was no statistically significant difference between the responses of state school teachers and private sector teachers. Further research can be conducted to investigate whether state school teachers have different attitudes from those working at foreign language institutes or private schools. Finally, it would be worth investigating the percentage of syllabi that integrate Web 2.0 tools on a systematic basis.

7. Concluding remarks: looking to the future

According to the research findings, the majority of EFL teachers in Greece have positive attitudes towards Web 2.0 technologies. They use tools such as YouTube, Google Sites, blogs, and wikis to create a motivating learning environment where both language and life skills are promoted. Teachers belong to the ‘Near Normalisation’ group and gradually view Web 2.0 tools as a normal part of teaching (Bax, 2003). Nevertheless, the frequency with which teachers use Web 2.0 technologies, the lack of training and equipment in many cases as well as the fact that ICTs are not integrated in the syllabus indicate that a lot of work still needs to be done until technology is normalised.

In the near future teachers will inevitably reach a state of ‘normalisation’ in which ICTs will be successfully integrated in EFL. More specifically, educators will no longer belong to a traditional generation that was familiarised with technology at some later point in their lives. Both teachers and students will be digital natives and therefore, equally competent with new technologies. They will share the same style of learning, communicating and sharing information. In fact, a new generation of educators, who are in their early twenties, has already emerged. The number of digital tools will keep increasing and teachers will view
their use not as an innovation but as a normal part both of their daily life and teaching practice. Without a doubt, all educators will eventually have the necessary technical skills to use a variety of digital tools. However, technical skills are not enough on their own for the effective integration of ICTs. Teachers need to be trained on combining both technical skills and pedagogy. Active and collaborative methods of teaching, which encourage learners not only to receive but also produce knowledge, should be employed.

Furthermore, new curricula are expected to promote the use of ICTs in education in a more effective way. 21st century curricula will have to reflect progressive ideologies and language theories which can be promoted through the use of Web 2.0 tools. They need to be flexible, creative, challenging, learner-centered and multicultural. Such curricula will consequently lead to the creation of syllabi that promote web-based, meaningful lessons. In this way, teachers will have the necessary time to use digital tools in class on a daily basis and eventually accept them as an essential part of EFL teaching. In addition, educators will have the freedom to create their own activities according to students’ needs and interests.

As far as the school facilities are concerned, the research has indicated that many classrooms in Greece lack the necessary technological equipment. Nevertheless, as the years go by the situation will hopefully get improved. The cost of acquiring and maintaining technological equipment is likely to decrease. Therefore, it will gradually become possible for all schools/foreign language institutes to provide students with the necessary facilities. Teachers and students may also bring their own technological devices at school. Furthermore, education with the help of ICTs, which allow users to collaborate and share knowledge without time or space constraints, is expected to expand beyond the limits of the classroom.

Considering what has been discussed so far, the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching is a complex and challenging process. However, in the near future ICTs will inevitably take their rightful place in education. Teachers’ positive attitudes combined with a series of measures that will facilitate the use of new technologies will hopefully lead to the successful Web 2.0 integration. In this way, educators will be able to prepare students to cope with the needs of a rapidly changing world.

Notes

1. Details about selecting the appropriate tool can be found at the following website: http://etcjournal.com/2011/12/05/choosing-web-2-0-tools-for-teaching-and-learning/.
2. A research is reliable when it demonstrates that ‘if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (however defined), then similar results would be found’ (Cohen et al. 2007, p.146).
3. According to Bell (2005, p.117) validity informs us ‘whether an item or instrument measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe’. Cohen et al. (2007, p.133) argue that ‘validity might be improved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatment of the data’.
4. Questionnaire link: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1jvMX-OhLAd-Pelp_UP9gXrZk2jQcl3DXHIQdcwcZCxQ/viewform?usp=send_form.
References


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Appendix I: The Questionnaire

Cover Letter

Dear colleague,

My name is Christina Karkoulia and I have been working as an EFL teacher since 2009. I am currently working on my dissertation for the Master’s Degree in Education at the Hellenic Open University. The title of my dissertation is *Teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching*.

More specifically, the purpose of this research is to investigate teachers’ attitudes towards the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching and whether this integration is close to the stage when technology becomes unnoticed and is therefore, truly integrated in our teaching practice. The research will explore which tools teachers use, their selection criteria, how often and how they use Web 2.0 technologies, the barriers that may restrict them from integrating Web 2.0 tools in their teaching practice and possible solutions to overcome these barriers.

For the purpose of this research a questionnaire has been designed that addresses all EFL teachers in Greece. I would be grateful if you could follow the link below and complete the questionnaire. It will not take you more than 15 minutes. There are no right and wrong answers and the information provided is strictly confidential.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Kind regards,

Christina Karkoulia
e-mail address: christinakarkoulia@yahoo.gr

Questionnaire link:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1jvMX0hLAdPelp_UP9gXrZk2jQcl3DXHIQdcwcZCxCQ/viewform?usp=send_form
TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN EFL TEACHING

1. PERSONAL INFORMATION

Please click on the appropriate answer.

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2. Age
   - 21-30
   - 31-40
   - 41-50
   - 51+

3. Academic qualifications
   - University Degree
   - Master's Degree
   - Master's Degree in progress
   - PhD
   - PhD in progress
   - Other: ____________________________

4. Teaching experience
   - 1-5 years
   - 6-10 years
   - 11-15 years
   - 16-20 years
   - 21-25 years
   - 26+ years

5. Current employment
   - State school
   - Private school
   - Foreign language institute
   - Other: ____________________________

6. Attendance at seminars/courses related to the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching
   - Yes
   - No
II. SCHOOL EQUIPMENT
Please click on the appropriate box/boxes.

7. Which of the following equipment is available at your school?
   - [ ] One computer for each student in the classroom
   - [ ] A few computers in the classroom
   - [ ] One computer in the classroom, which is mainly used by the teacher
   - [ ] No computer in the classroom
   - [ ] Internet access
   - [ ] Interactive whiteboards
   - [ ] Over-head projectors
   - [ ] A computer lab
   - [ ] Other: ________________________________

III. WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN EFL TEACHING

8. Do you use Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?
   Please click on the appropriate answer. IF YOU ANSWER NO, PLEASE GO TO SECTION IV, QUESTION 16.
   - [ ] Yes
   - [ ] No

9. Which Web 2.0 tools do you use in EFL teaching?
   Please click on the appropriate box/boxes.
   - [ ] Blogs
   - [ ] Wikis
   - [ ] Google Drive
   - [ ] Google Sites
   - [ ] Skype
   - [ ] Facebook
   - [ ] Twitter
   - [ ] Google+
   - [ ] Youtube
   - [ ] Flickr
   - [ ] Slideshare
   - [ ] Other: ________________________________
10a. Which criteria must a Web 2.0 tool meet in order to be selected?  
Please click on the appropriate box/boxes.

☐ 1. It is easy to use. 
☐ 2. It is online and free. 
☐ 3. It provides security through privacy options. 
☐ 4. It is popular among students. 
☐ 5. It is appropriate to students’ age and level. 
☐ 6. It adds fun and creativity to the learning process. 
☐ Other: 

10b. Please write down, in order of importance, the criteria that you selected above. 
Please make a list. For example: 1. ............. 2. ............. 3. ............. etc.

11. How often do you use Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching? 
Please click on the appropriate answer.

☐ 1. Every day 
☐ 2. Once/twice a week 
☐ 3. Once/twice a month 
☐ 4. Rarely 

12. What is the position of Web 2.0 tools in your lesson? 
Please click on the appropriate answer.

☐ 1. The whole lesson is based on Web 2.0 tools. 
☐ 2. The use of Web 2.0 tools is a smaller part of every lesson. 

13. What is the position of Web 2.0 tools in the syllabus? 
Please click on the appropriate answer.

☐ 1. Web 2.0 tools are not integrated in the syllabus and their use is viewed as something optional. 
☐ 2. Web 2.0 tools are not fully integrated in the syllabus. 
☐ 3. Web 2.0 tools are efficiently integrated in the syllabus and adapted to students’ needs.
14. How do you use Web 2.0 tools in your teaching context?

Please click on the appropriate box/boxes.

☐ 1. As online student journals that can be read by their peers.
☐ 2. As diaries.
☐ 3. As online portfolios of students’ work.
☐ 4. As presentation tools.
☐ 5. To create, edit collaboratively and share various types of files.
☐ 6. To encourage process writing.
☐ 7. To collaborate on projects.
☐ 8. To publish students’ work (projects, assignments, videos, digital stories etc.).
☐ 9. To provide extra listening/speaking/reading/writing practice.
☐ 10. To provide authentic online resources appropriate for students’ level (texts, videos, songs, hyperlinks etc).
☐ 11. To stimulate meaningful discussion.
☐ 12. To share information/notes/images etc.
☐ 13. To give students the chance to communicate with peers from other countries.
☐ 14. To expose students to different cultures.
☐ 15. To search on topics and raise awareness on important issues such as environmental problems, racism, poverty.
☐ 16. To use videos, songs, images as writing prompts.
☐ 17. To fill in the lyrics of a song.
☐ 18. To use a group of pictures as a story board.
☐ 19. To accompany assignments/projects with images/links/videos etc.
☐ 20. To post comments.
☐ 21. To exchange messages.
☐ 22. To make a call.
☐ 23. To assign homework.
☐ 24. To submit assignments.
☐ 25. To give/take feedback.
☐ 26. To create online drills and quizzes.
☐ 27. To create/share online games.
☐ Other: [ ]
15. Which of the following answers best describe your teaching situation when you use Web 2.0 tools? Please click on the appropriate answer.

15a. When you use Web 2.0 tools in your lessons:
- 1. there is emphasis on language which is viewed as a system and top priority is given to grammar and vocabulary.
- 2. there is emphasis both on language as a system and skills.
- 3. there is emphasis on the integration of skills.

15b. Your students:
- 1. mainly interact with the computer and not other students.
- 2. interact with the computer and occasionally with other students.
- 3. frequently interact with other students and sometimes with the computer.

15c. The type of feedback:
- 1. is limited to correct/incorrect answers.
- 2. is open, flexible and focuses on linguistic skills development.
- 3. aims at encouraging learners to think, interpret, evaluate and comment.

15d. Your role is usually that of a:
- 1. monitor
- 2. monitor and facilitator
- 3. facilitator and manager

15e. When I use Web 2.0 tools in class I feel:
- 1. fear
- 2. awe
- 3. none of the above because I view the use of Web 2.0 tools as a normal part of teaching

15f. Web 2.0 based lessons take place in:
- 1. a computer lab
- 2. a computer lab devoted to languages
- 3. the classroom
IV. TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE INTEGRATION OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN EFL TEACHING

16. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please click on the appropriate answer (strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, neither agree nor disagree=3, agree=4, strongly agree=5).

1. The use of Web 2.0 tools creates a more interesting and fun learning environment.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

2. Web 2.0 tools promote sharing, collaboration, interaction, creativity and socialization.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

3. Organising authentic tasks with the help of Web 2.0 tools motivates students.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

4. Web 2.0 tools encourage students to actively construct knowledge.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

5. Web 2.0 tools enhance learner autonomy.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

6. Communicating with a real audience makes students more creative and thoughtful in content and structure of an assignment.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

7. Web 2.0 tools challenge all forms of intelligences so that all learners can take advantage of their own strengths.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

8. Since we live in a digital world education should equip students with 21st century skills and develop New Literacies through Blended Learning.

   1 2 3 4 5

strongly disagree ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ ◯ strongly agree

9. Research skills could be developed through the use of Web 2.0 tools and project-based learning.

   1 2 3 4 5
10. Web 2.0 tools give students the opportunity to express their own voice.

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11. The openness and collaborative nature of Web 2.0 tools could offer possibilities to promote Cultural Pluralism.

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12. Web 2.0 based lessons increase L2 input and promote the integration of all the four language skills.

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13. Web 2.0 tools develop a sense of community where students communicate meaningfully in real contexts.

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14. Web 2.0 tools encourage shy students to participate.

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15. The use of Web 2.0 tools distracts students.

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16. I am hesitant to use Web 2.0 technologies because I believe that conventional methods of teaching and learning are more effective.

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V. BARRIERS THAT MAY RESTRICT TEACHERS FROM INTEGRATING WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN EFL TEACHING

17. What are the barriers/problems that restrict you from using Web 2.0 tools in class?
Please click on the appropriate box/boxes.

- 1. Lack of training and knowledge.
- 2. Lack of confidence.
- 3. Lack of school equipment.
- 4. No Internet access.
- 5. Time pressure, too much coursebook material to cover.
- 6. Lack of freedom to create my own lessons.
- 7. Classroom management problems.
- Other: ____________________________

VI. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME THE BARRIERS TO THE EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF WEB 2.0 TOOLS IN EFL TEACHING

18. What are the possible solutions that can help you overcome the barriers to the effective integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching?

- 1. Training on the integration of Web 2.0 tools in EFL teaching.
- 2. Teachers could bring their own laptops at school.
- 3. Students should be provided with laptops.
- 4. Teachers could assign homework which will require learners to use Web 2.0 tools at home.
- 5. The use of Web 2.0 tools should be a part of the syllabus.
- 6. Teachers should be encouraged to create their own materials according to students’ needs.
- Other: ____________________________

Thank you for participating!
Researching the promotion of strategic learning by EFL teachers

Διερεύνηση της προώθησης των στρατηγικών μάθησης από τους καθηγητές της Αγγλικής ως Ξένης Γλώσσας

Athina VRETTOU, Angeliki PSALTOU-JOCEY, & Zoe GAVRILIDOU

L2 learning strategies are those thoughts and actions that individuals use to facilitate their learning, making it faster and more enjoyable. A considerable body of research has identified the factors that affect the use of those strategies, with language proficiency and motivation being particularly prominent among others. Documentation of the usefulness of strategies towards learner autonomy has been recorded while considerable volume of research has examined the effectiveness of strategy instruction or “strategy training” to help learners enhance their L2 performance. After discussing the above issues, this paper will focus on the qualitative data resulted from the pilot testing of an innovative strategy questionnaire designed to detect the types of strategies Greek EFL teachers employ in order to promote strategic learning in their classrooms. Presentation and discussion of these data was felt useful as the teachers’ comments offered informed insights towards the formulation of the final questionnaire.

Key words: L2 learning strategies, strategy instruction, EFL learners
1. Introduction

L2 learning strategies are conscious goal-driven procedures that facilitate a learning task. Strategic learners are metacognitively aware of their thinking processes and realize what a task calls for (Chamot, 2004, 2005). They deploy strategies effectively often combining them with other relevant strategies in chains in a well-orchestrated manner (Oxford, 2011b). Thus, learning can be made easier, faster, more enjoyable (Oxford, 1990), and can lead to furtherance of autonomy, self-regulation, and self-management (Cohen, 2007).

However, not all learners can reach such levels of self-regulation and self-management employing ineffective strategies “in an unorchestrated, random way” (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995: 69). Hence, teachers are called to intervene by instructing their students, especially the less efficient ones, which strategies to use each time, how to combine them for the completion of particular tasks, and how to evaluate their effectiveness.

This article first discusses issues of L2 learning strategy research and instruction and second, presents the qualitative results of the piloting of an innovative teachers’ questionnaire promoting students’ strategy use in the Greek context. Finally, the contribution of the inventory is highlighted and suggestions are made for its application on a wider basis.

2. Research background

2.1. L2 learning strategy research issues

L2 learning strategies have been identified particularly through self-reports, which can clearly provide access to a person’s inner thoughts, in spite of any inaccuracies that they might be accompanied by (Grenfell & Harris, 1999). To be more specific, learners have been asked to describe their thoughts and behaviours while tackling various language tasks in retrospective interviews, diaries and journals, think-aloud protocols, and especially written questionnaires, the most widely applied method of all (Chamot, 2004; White, Schramm, & Chamot, 2007).

Ensuing classification systems categorized strategies in broader groups (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1981). Comparison of these systems showed that Oxford’s (1990) model, which subsumed every strategy mentioned in the literature under memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social sets, was more influential in accounting for learners’ strategy use (Hsiao & Oxford, 2002).

Language proficiency has been among the most powerful variables exerting an effect on reported strategy use with high attainers deploying more strategies more frequently than low attainers in a large number of descriptive studies (Dreyer & Oxford 1996; Goh & Foong, 1997; Griffiths, 2003; Kaylani, 1996; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Psaltou-Joycey, 2003; Psaltou-Joycey & Kantaridou, 2009; Vrettou, 2009, 2011). Motivation has also had a major consistent effect on learners’ strategic preferences with high motivation levels linked to high reported strategy use (Lan, 2005; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Mochizuki, 1999; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Psaltou-Joycey, 2003; Vrettou, 2009, 2011) together with high proficiency in some studies (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995; Lan & Oxford, 2003; Vrettou, 2011). Gender, culture, career orientation, learning styles, and beliefs are among a variety of well-researched influences a learner carries into strategy application (Psaltou-Joycey, 2010).
2.2. Issues of strategy intervention studies

Based on the concept of the teachability of L2 learning strategies, research into “learning strategy instruction” (Chamot, 2004; Oxford, 1990) has been considerable with over 400 empirical, theoretical, and review articles (Plonsky, 2010, as cited in Plonsky, 2011). “Strategy training” (Hassan et al., 2005) and “strategies-based instruction (SBI) and styles-and-strategies-based instruction (SSBI)” are more recent terms (Cohen & Weaver, 2006) together with “self-regulated strategy instruction” (Oxford, 2011b). All formulated models of strategy assistance embrace techniques which teachers can directly implement in order for their students to enhance their strategic use and, thereby, optimize their performance.

Up to date, most researchers have supported direct strategy instruction integrated into the language curriculum rather than separate learning-to-learn courses or programmes (Chamot, 2004; Cohen, 1998; Grenfell & Harris, 1999; Nunan, 1997; Oxford, 2011b; Oxford & Leaver, 1996). As for the language of instruction, the use of the native tongue has been suggested for initial L2 beginning stages (Chamot, 2004; Grenfell & Harris, 1999) or even a combination of the native and target languages, which yielded positive outcomes in some studies (Chamot, 2004).

Despite some doubts emanating from mixed results (Rees-Miller, 1993, 1994), it appears that well-designed research can prove strategy instruction to be beneficial (Plonsky, 2011), at least as far as the short-term effects are concerned (Hassan et al., 2005). In particular, most studies support enhancement of strategic awareness (Manoli, 2013; Nunan, 1997). There has been improved proficiency in certain skills (for example, listening: Graham & Macaro, 2008; Thomson & Rubin, 1996; speaking: Cohen, Weaver, & Li, 1998; Nakatani, 2005; reading: Ikeda & Takeuchi, 2003; Manoli, 2013; writing: MacArthur & Lembo, 2009) as well as in vocabulary learning (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009). What is more, gains in content knowledge, skills, and proficiency have been recorded in the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach model (CALLA, Chamot, 2007) while there has been increased use of L2 learning strategies (Chamot, 2007; Gavriilidou & Papanis, 2009; Harris et al., 2001; Sarafianou, 2013).

Seeking for more effective learners and intervention practices underscores the importance of further strategy instruction research. That quest could be underpinned by another fruitful research area which is “the development of teacher expertise” for integrating L2 learning strategies into instructional practices (Chamot, 2005: 126). Preparation of teachers in that respect presupposes awareness of the strategies they utilize and promote in the classroom, which is the subject of the present investigation.

3. The current study

3.1. Aims and rationale

This research is part of a major project called THALIS, which aims to identify the strategic profiles of EFL primary and secondary educational level students all over Greece as well as the strategic profiles of Muslim students learning Greek as a second language in the area of Thrace and involves large scale surveys of manifold levels. Furthermore, the project aims to explore the teachers’ promotion of strategies in the EFL classroom through their teaching practices and, based on these results, to develop a teachers’ guide which they can consult “whenever they seek information about acquiring knowledge, understanding, and skill regarding implementation of explicit and integrated language learning strategy instruction within every day teaching practices” (Psaltou-Joycey, 2015: 11). In the present study, we provide basic information about the procedure followed for the construction of
the teachers’ pilot questionnaire but focus primarily on the analysis and discussion of the qualitative data that resulted from its testing.

Undoubtedly, “teachers are pivotal in the enterprise of teaching and learning” (Freeman & Richards, 1996:1). However, little research focuses on them (Griffiths, 2007). In addition, in the few early studies exploring teachers’ perceptions of their students’ strategic use, teachers do not seem to be aware of their students’ L2 learning strategies (O’Malley et al., 1985; Palacios Martínez, 1995) while there is no apparent intersection between teachers’ and students’ perceptions of strategy use (Griffiths & Parr, 2001); hopefully, there are indications that the current situation may be changing as teachers attribute great importance to many of the strategies their students reportedly use in a more recent study (Griffiths, 2007).

In the Greek context, teachers do not systematically teach strategies (Manoli, 2013), which are supported in the Greek Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework for Compulsory Education (2003) and in the Integrated Foreign Languages Curriculum (2011) for primary and secondary levels. Equally importantly, strategy promotion in the students’ EFL books for the Greek state primary and lower secondary schools is fragmentary and inadequate as effective strategy instruction should be direct, simple, and primarily task-based (Chamot, 2004; Oxford, 2011b). Furthermore, no systematic guidelines in the state school EFL guidebooks are provided to teachers in respect of implementation of strategy instruction to learners (Psaltou-Joycey, 2014). In general, little is known about teachers’ and learners’ awareness of L2 learning strategies and their conscious employment by students and their instructors during the EFL lesson.

3.2. Instrumentation

The instrument of the study was a newly constructed teachers’ inventory for L2 learning strategy promotion on their part. The novelty of the questionnaire lies in the fact that, at least to our knowledge, there has been no similar measurement in the literature. Notably, the first attempt to find any match between teaching and learning strategies in the Greek context was Psaltou-Joycey’s (2008, 2010: 145-146) “Features of Language Teaching” (FoLT) questionnaire, which also recorded general teaching practices for learner involvement in the classroom and in out-of-class activities.

The formulation of the questionnaire which was used in the present pilot study was based on Oxford’s (1990) ESL/EFL version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and the pilot adapted form of the SILL in Greek wording for primary (aged 10-12) and secondary level students (aged 13-15) for the THALIS project mentioned above. The selection of these questionnaires as a starting point was made deliberately so that the resulting data in the main study would allow comparisons between the teachers’ and the learners’ strategic preferences – matches and/or mismatches – with the view to making solid pedagogical recommendations in relation to strategy instruction.

The ESL/EFL version of the SILL has been utilized in a very large number of descriptive studies (Chamot, 2004). Its basic purpose was the provision of a general picture of a learner’s typical strategy use without focusing on specific language tasks. This particular inventory has been deployed by approximately 10,000 learners around the world and has been translated into more than twenty languages (Oxford, 2011a). Positive correlations between the SILL and proficiency measures have been found in quite a lot of research. There are high internal consistencies or reliabilities of the SILL and its translated forms reported in the literature (Lan and Oxford 2003). Moreover, the concurrent validity of the SILL, that is, its predicted significant relation with other instruments, has been recorded (Oxford 2011b; Oxford & Burry-Stock 1995).
The SILL uses five Likert-scale ratings (1-5) for each strategy item (from “never or almost never” to “always or almost always”). Additionally, based on an initial factor analysis, it comprises six strategy categories: memory-related strategies, which help learners store information so that it can later be recalled when required; cognitive strategies, which learners use in order to manipulate or transform the learning material or solve problems; compensation strategies, which enable learners to use the new language in spite of knowledge limitations in comprehension or production; the metacognitive group, which assists in coordination and management of learning through planning, monitoring, and evaluating; affective strategies, which help learners control their emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values while learning another language; and the social set, which involves working with others and understanding the target language as well as culture.

In the Greek socio-educational context, the SILL has been adapted in various studies for either adults (Kazamia, 2003; Psaltou-Joycey & Kantaridou, 2009), adolescents (Vrettou, 2009), or young learners (Papanis, 2008; Psaltou-Joycey & Sougari, 2010; Vrettou, 2011), exhibiting high internal consistencies or reliabilities as well as ascertained concurrent validity (Vrettou, 2011).

Aside from the original ESL/EFL version of the SILL, an adapted version of the same strategy questionnaire for primary and lower secondary school students, created for a pilot phase of the THALIS project, was employed. The construction of this particular inventory, which included 57 items, followed an appropriate adaptation protocol in order to ensure maximum reliability and validity with the learners as well as cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparability (Gavriilidou & Mitits, in press). More specifically, several stages were followed by an expert committee: the initial translation into Greek, synthesis of translations, and back translation into English, examination and testing of the pre-final version to ensure reliability and validity (Beaton, Bombardier, Guillemin, & Ferraz, 2000; Gjersing, Caplehorn, & Clausen, 2010; Rahman, Iqbal, Waheed, & Hussain, 2003).

### 3.3. Procedure for the creation of the teachers’ questionnaire

A team of seven experts in Applied Linguistics involved in L2 learning strategy research worked independently and together synthesizing their views to adapt the items from the ESL/EFL version of the SILL and the adapted pilot students’ questionnaire. It should be noted that the new inventory was written in Greek as it was constructed for and addressed a specific Greek-speaking population.

Throughout the construction, the team compared the target and source languages and cultures so that the new instrument could be verified cross-culturally (Beaton et al., 2000), taking into account the teachers and the teaching practices in Greece (see examples on the following pages). Besides, as mentioned above, the consulted students’ pilot questionnaire had also been reviewed for elimination of any cultural bias (Gavriilidou & Mitits, in press).

The first part of the teachers’ inventory included background information regarding the participants, namely, main professional capacity, years of service in primary and secondary education, postgraduate studies, and in-service training. The second part comprised strategies which teachers may use to promote strategic learning in their classes. Thereby, words such as “I urge”, “I stimulate”, “I encourage”, “I help students”, “I see that”, “I suggest”, “I recommend” were used at the beginning of many items to show possible promotion of L2 learning strategies on the part of the teachers.

There was lexical, syntactic, and conceptual adaptation of strategy items so that they could address a particular teacher population in the Greek socio-educational context. For instance, SILL No 7: “I physically act out new English words” was constructed as: “When I teach new words, I use facial expressions and body movement to demonstrate their meaning”\(^2\), or SILL No 20: “I try to find patterns in English” was given as: “I help students discover the grammar rules of the English
language”. Apart from the above, there was expansion of meaning of one SILL item, No 19: “I look for words in my own language that are similar to the new words in English”, which was formed as: “I help students find similarities and differences between English and their language in vocabulary and grammar” since this is a common practice in the Greek EFL classrooms. Furthermore, there was removal of SILL item No 26: “I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English” as it could not be compatible with teacher practices. Finally, an item concerning promotion of the use of a glossary or dictionary was added (new item No 53) in accordance with the students’ pilot questionnaire item No 23 while eight extra strategies were added too, coming to a total of 58 items; for example, “I use humour to attract my students’ attention” (No 54), “I use songs, role play, or craft to help my students relax” (No 58), or “I encourage my students to participate in collaborative research projects” (No 57).

At the end of the teachers’ pilot questionnaire, there was an open-ended question where the participants were prompted to make comments of any kind with regard to the questionnaire itself while being assured that their commentary and identity would remain confidential. These comments have formed the qualitative data, which are of primary importance since they could be the source of valuable information concerning the accuracy of the strategic practices explored, and provide feedback with regard to possible changes that could be made to the final form of the questionnaire. Hence, these commentaries will be discussed more extensively below.

3.4. Conduct of the pilot study and participants

The questionnaire was piloted with a sample of 58 teachers in primary and secondary schools in northern and central Greece from November to December 2013. The method of selection was convenient sampling and the method of administration was electronic.

4. Qualitative data and discussion

Extensive statistical analysis of the gathered quantitative data produced satisfactory results in terms of the psychometric properties of the teachers’ questionnaire, but these results are to be reported in another article. Here we focus on the qualitative data yielded from the open-ended question posed at the end of the pilot questionnaire.

Most teachers’ comments had to do with the fact that the items did not make a distinction between teaching practices addressing different student needs according to their proficiency level but were common both for primary and secondary school teachers. More specifically, many teachers felt that statements such as

(No 15) “I urge students to watch English shows or go to the cinema to see a film in English”
(No 16) “I stimulate students to read books or magazines in English as a free-time activity” or
(No 23), “I assign students to write summaries of information they listen to or read in English”

would rather be addressed to teachers who teach older students (i.e., at secondary level) as such strategies are used far more frequently with more proficient students than with young learners, who can use them only to a very limited degree.

The variable of student age also raised another type of comments which had to do with the width of the age range of the students in primary school as different strategies are usually implemented for
the first grades and proportionally different ones for the last ones. For example, teachers stated that one may employ the strategy: “I use a lot of flashcards when I introduce new words” (No 6) in the first and second grades but not at all in the sixth grade and beyond. Therefore, primary school respondents suggested that a note should accompany certain statements in the questionnaire specifying the recommended grade.

After perusal of the above commentaries, the instructions at the beginning of the final questionnaire were altered by making clearer that teachers teaching in primary education should answer the questionnaire only with reference to the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades and not to the lower grades – if they taught those grades as well – as proficiency level and age of younger students would invite different methodological practices.

Another common comment referred to the educational level that the teachers had worked/were working at, either primary or secondary. For example, one of the teachers wrote:

a) “Because alternatively I have worked at both educational levels, I think that some of my answers concern either one or the other level. Certainly, my teaching practices are differentiated according to the students’ age and their proficiency level. This is what I try to do”.

Comments like this brought out respondents’ suggestions that it might be preferable to present some strategies in a different manner for primary and secondary level teachers or else specify the level of the students that some strategies were meant for. This suggestion was adopted in the “instructions to respondents” of the final questionnaire by advising teachers to respond according to the practices they follow in the present state and educational level of their employment.

The variables of age and proficiency seem to be connected in the teachers’ comments. As older and more proficient learners are considered to be in need of different teachers’ strategic handling from the learners’ younger and less proficient counterparts, the teachers raise concerns about the validity of general questionnaires which usually address a wide range of respondents and curving a lot of edges. Ideally, in our case, we should have created different versions of a questionnaire – at least two, one for primary and one for secondary level – for teacher strategic practices according to age and level of the students they teach. However, this would have been uneconomical both for time and distribution of the instrument. Moreover, the results from the teachers’ questionnaire of the main study were, among others, scheduled to be compared to results obtained from the main learners’ questionnaire, which was common for both primary and secondary learners. Therefore, in order to have more informed comparisons about strategies taught by teachers and strategies employed by students, it was felt that the team should stick to “one questionnaire for all”.

So far we have presented and discussed the respondents’ criticism of our pilot questionnaire. None the less, there were several positive comments which showed that the questionnaire made teachers reflect on the practices they had been using and raise their self-awareness while appreciating some modern practices mentioned which conform to current methodological approaches. For example teachers wrote:

b) “Learning strategy instruction is of primary importance and is not a luxury”

c) “The questionnaire is comprehensive and detailed”

d) “Certainly the teacher must leave behind old practices and introduce new ones involving visualization, personification, poetry, project, literature, TPR, contextualization of new lexis, noticing, peer correction, reflection, skimming, scanning, etc”
e) “I also consider blended learning and the use of new technologies a ‘must’ for adopted teaching practices”

f) “Social media (e.g., skype, facebook, twitter, emails), wiki collaborative writing, the storyboard, the interactive board are all useful tools for second language learning”.

Comment (b) shows that teachers are appreciative of strategy use in the classroom. Comment (c) reinforces our attempt to construct such a questionnaire that may sensitise teachers towards more conscious learning strategy instruction. What is more, comments (d), (e), and (f) show that teachers have approved of several statements presented in the questionnaire which attempt to catch current methodological procedures. Some such examples are provided in the strategies below:

(No 4) I introduce a new word through several situations in which it could be used, e.g., dialogues, stories, songs (see “contextualization of new lexis” in (d) above)

(No 7) When I teach I use facial expressions and body movements to clarify their meaning (see “TPR” above)

(No 18) First I ask students to read a text quickly and then I ask them to read it again more carefully (see “skimming”, “scanning” above)

(No 32) I encourage students to find ways to improve their English (see “skype”, “facebook”, “twitter”, “emails” in (e) and (f) above)

(No 57) I encourage students to participate in collaborative research projects (see “collaborative writing” in (f) above)

We would like to finish our presentation and discussion of the teachers’ comments with the following comment (g) as a corollary of q42: “I advise students to keep a diary where they write down their emotions (positive or negative) created by their learning of English”.

 g) I hadn’t thought of the “emotional diary” which I think is a good very idea to end the lesson with.

This comment adds support to comment (c) above and further reinforces our decision to construct an instrument for teachers’ classroom practices.

Finally, further statistical tests run on the quantitative data led to rewording of certain items and exclusion of some others so that a total of 47 items was reached for use in the main study.

5. Contribution and conclusion

The teachers’ inventory was favourably received by the informants of the pilot phase of the research as it was considered to be detailed and comprehensive with handy ideas such as the diary of emotions in L2 learning. It was also viewed as well-aimed, guiding towards a holistic way of teaching. In addition, according to a teacher’s comment, a positive aspect of the questionnaire was urging teachers away from old practices since methods such as contextualization of new lexical items, use of literature, project, and technology are a must in every day teaching. More importantly, a number of participants admitted that the inventory made them reflect on the strategies they can promote through their teaching. That is a first step forward towards raising teacher language strategy awareness, which can lead to more informed teacher training.

Overall, the contribution of the pilot study lies in the formulation of an innovative, reliable, and valid teachers’ questionnaire which will elucidate any match or mismatch between learners’ preference of strategies and teachers’ promotion of them in the EFL classroom. The data selected from the main research, conducted in spring 2014, have proved to be useful information towards the design of a
teachers’ guide for strategy instruction at primary and secondary educational level in the Greek schools (Psaltou-Joycey, 2015), which was within the immediate aims of the THALIS research project. Teachers cannot be left to their own devices but may be guided as to the type of strategies, the frequency, and the procedure they need to follow in strategy intervention, overall and in particular language skills, thus developing strategy instruction awareness and appreciating its positive outcomes.

Furthermore, such an instrument, i.e., the teachers’ final questionnaire, might have the potential to be appropriately used in other cultural contexts as well for deep exploration of any discrepancies between teachers’ and learners’ selection of strategies. This possibility necessarily calls for an official translation of the inventory from Greek into English so that its content can become available to non-Greek speaking teachers and researchers. Such a task is imperative for the dissemination of the experience and knowledge acquired from the composition of the present questionnaire with respective pedagogical implications for EFL learners, and is one of the immediate concerns of the relevant team.

Notes

1. This study is part of the THALES project MIS 379335. It was held in the frame of the National Strategic Reference Frame (Ε.Σ.Π.Α.) and was co-funded by resources of the European Union (European Social Fund) and national resources.
2. The new statements have been translated from Greek into English for the purposes of the current article since there has been no official translation of the instrument yet.

References


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Investigating vocabulary learning strategies of EFL young learners in the Greek primary school

Διερεύνηση των στρατηγικών εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου των νεαρών μαθητών αγγλικής ως ξένης γλώσσας στο ελληνικό δημοτικό σχολείο

Kerkyra KAVVADIA

This article focuses on vocabulary learning strategies as a means of promoting learner autonomy. More specifically, an effort has been made to identify the most favoured strategies used by both EFL teachers and learners in Greek primary schools. The study begins with a review of the current literature on learning strategies, where definitions and systems for the classification of strategies are provided; additionally, the acquisition of vocabulary is stressed and justified and more specific trends on vocabulary learning strategies by various researchers are presented. The next part focuses on the research methodology; the instruments of data collection are two questionnaires administered to primary school teachers and primary school students respectively. The findings of these two questionnaires are then analysed and presented, in order to define the most commonly used strategies but also to discern if those practised by teachers coincide with the ones preferred by learners. Moreover, there is a presentation of various vocabulary learning strategies existent in the primary school textbooks, namely ‘Magic Book’, ‘Αγγλικά Δ’ Δημοτικού’, ‘Αγγλικά Ε’ Δημοτικού’, and ‘Αγγλικά ΣΤ’ Δημοτικού’. Finally, the implications of the study are discussed and some suggestions are made as to the use and application of vocabulary learning strategies in the classroom.

Το άρθρο εστιάζει στις στρατηγικές εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου ως μέσο προαγωγής της αυτονομίας των μαθητών. Ειδικότερα, έχει γίνει μια προσπάθεια να προσδιοριστούν οι προτιμώμενες στρατηγικές που χρησιμοποιούνται και από τους καθηγητές και από τους μαθητές των Αγγλικών ως ξένη γλώσσα στο ελληνικό δημοτικό σχολείο. Η μελέτη αρχίζει με την επανεξέταση της σύγχρονης λογοτεχνίας σε σχέση με τις στρατηγικές μάθησης, όπου παρέχονται ορισμοί και συστήματα για την ταξινόμηση των στρατηγικών-επιπλέον, τονίζεται και αιτιολογείται η απόκτηση/εκμάθηση λεξιλογίου και παρουσιάζονται πιο συγκεκριμένες τάσεις στις στρατηγικές εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου από διάφορους ερευνητές. Το επόμενο
μέρος εστιάζει στην ερευνητική μεθοδολογία. Τα εργαλεία συλλογής δεδομένων είναι δύο ερωτηματολογία που δόθηκαν σε καθηγητές και μαθητές Δημοτικού αντίστοιχα. Στην πορεία, αναλύονται και παρουσιάζονται τα ευρήματα των δύο ερωτηματολογίων, με σκοπό να προσδιορίσουν οι πιο συχνά χρησιμοποιούμενες στρατηγικές αλλά και να οριστεί το κατά πόσο οι στρατηγικές που χρησιμοποιούνται από τους καθηγητές συμπίπτουν με αυτές που προτιμούνται από τους μαθητές. Επιπλέον, παρουσιάζονται διάφορες στρατηγικές εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου που υπάρχουν στα βιβλία του Δημοτικού, δηλαδή στο 'Magic Book', στα 'Αγγλικά Δ' Δημοτικού', στα 'Αγγλικά Ε' Δημοτικού' και στα 'Αγγλικά ΣΤ' Δημοτικού'. Τέλος, συζητώνται οι επιπτώσεις της μελέτης και γίνονται κάποιες προτάσεις ως προς τη χρήση και την εφαρμογή των στρατηγικών εκμάθησης λεξιλογίου μέσα στην τάξη.

**Key words:** learning strategies, vocabulary learning strategies

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1. **Introduction**

Vocabulary is one of the most important elements if we are to talk of successful second language acquisition and is considered central to skilled reading comprehension and the general development of language proficiency. According to Rubin and Thomson (1994), learning the lexis of a language is the very heart of mastering it since learners need to acquire a good amount of vocabulary of the L2 in order to be able to understand what they see or hear and also express themselves appropriately and fluently.

In order to facilitate learners in their effort to acquire the necessary amount of vocabulary we can introduce them to certain vocabulary learning strategies depending on their preferable way of learning, their styles, their aptitude even their interests and needs. On a general note, strategies are, as can be seen below, learner-driven behaviours that facilitate the learning process. Because students actually learn most of the vocabulary independently, we should encourage them to create their own personal plans to become able to expand their vocabulary over time, as also proposed by Graves (1987). Actually, a lot of emphasis is now placed on the importance of the development of autonomous learning strategies on the part of foreign language students (Wan, 2006; Chamot, 2005); in the same vein, a large number of books aimed at teachers include practical advice on the teaching of vocabulary and encourage the application of student language learning strategies (McCarthy, 1990; Nation, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

The present article will attempt to specify which vocabulary learning strategies are promoted by primary school teachers, which are existent in the teaching materials as well as the strategies that are actually used by the learners. For this purpose, an action research was conducted by the writer, including the use of two questionnaires-one for teachers and one for students- and a textbook evaluation checklist.

2. **Theoretical background**

2.1. **Learning strategies**

The term strategy, as defined in the Oxford dictionary, is “a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim”. The following definitions provided by various researchers all imply the use of learning strategies in order to achieve specific goals in the
course of learning. Wenden and Rubin (1987, p. 19) describe strategies as “any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval and use of information”. In Richards, Platt and Platt (1992, p. 209) we find the following definition: “learning strategies are intentional behaviors and thoughts that learners make use of during learning in order to help them better understand, learn or remember new information”. Similarly, another definition provided by O’Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 1) sees learning strategies as “special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn or retain new information”. These three definitions focus mainly on the goals of learning strategies. Oxford (1990, p. 8), more comprehensively, claims that language learning strategies are: “operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information…; specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations”. In her definition Oxford does not only provide a list of goals, expanding that of O’Malley and Chamot, but she goes one step further to explain what changes happen to learning when it is enhanced by learning strategies - ‘easier, faster,….., more transferable to new situations’.

2.2 Vocabulary learning strategies and young learners

Vocabulary learning is considered one of the most important areas of teaching and it is certainly one of the constitutional elements of EFL, since “words are the basic building blocks of language, the units of meaning from which larger structures such as sentences, paragraphs and whole texts are formed” (Read, 2000, p.1). When we think of vocabulary, we do not only talk about merely knowing the meaning of a word, its definition; rather what is essential is knowing how to use a word correctly, having the ability to use the word in spoken and written occasions and also recognizing it and understanding it when encountered in various contexts (Miller & Gildea, 1987).

When it comes to teaching vocabulary, and especially teaching vocabulary to young learners, the situation can prove to be more complex than it might originally seem. There are many factors that need to be taken into consideration and many theories and techniques that need to be integrated in our teaching. Firstly, as Linse (2005) points out, it is important to help expand the learners’ vocabulary knowledge by using both formal and informal instruction (by formal instruction Linse refers to the planned instruction through which the teacher teaches the meaning of the words and ways for the students to discover the meaning themselves; by informal instruction she refers to ‘by the way instruction’ where there is no rule teaching or systematic approach). Furthermore, and most importantly, it is essential that young learners be taught vocabulary learning strategies, so that they can discover the meaning of new words (Linse, 2005). These strategies can prove very necessary in situations both inside the learning context, the classroom, but also outside in the real world, and can help them acquire vocabulary they see or hear. For this reason, vocabulary development should also include Direct instruction – the actual teaching of words and their meanings- and Indirect instruction – the teaching of strategies through which the learners will be able to deduce the meaning themselves. Another helpful strategy for our young students, as the same author suggests, is repetition. For new lexical items to be successfully assimilated by the students, they need to reappear several times after their first occurrence, in different activities, with different skills and for multiple times for recycling to take place. Deep processing is another component that can help students integrate new vocabulary items. Through this strategy, learners can create stronger connections between the new words and the knowledge they already possess; by making the students personally involved
in and connected with the new lexical items, deep processing is enhanced. Some tools that can prove very useful are dictionaries and vocabulary notebooks.

When talking about young learners, Cameron (2001) argues that they have different lexical needs than older learners. More specifically, they need to learn concrete vocabulary, recycling of new lexical items in new contexts is essential and basic level words should be learnt before an attempt is made to teach them subordinate or superordinate vocabulary; additionally, they learn words as collections. When describing strategies that can be used to teach the meaning of new words she makes use of the strategies listed by Nation (1990), such as the use of demonstration and pictures and also through verbal explanation (its analytical definition, the provision of a defining context for the word or its direct translation to L1). She also stresses the importance of strategies (2001) referring primarily to Schmitt’s (1997) and Ahmed’s (1988) studies, pointing out that although both studies were conducted with older learners, the use of strategies has its roots in what happens earlier, at an earlier age. Some of the strategies appropriate for young learners, as she proposes (2001), are guessing meaning from the information in pictures or texts, noticing grammatical information about words, noticing links to similar words in the first language, remembering where a word has been encountered before. Teachers can also model the use of strategies, teach the sub-skills needed to make use of strategies, use classroom tasks with opportunities for strategy use, rehearse independent strategy use and help young learners reflect on the learning process through evaluating their achievements.

Lastly, as proposed by Schmitt (1997), we should introduce our learners to a variety of strategies so that they become available for the learners to use according to their personal learning styles, maybe at a later age. Besides, it is claimed that the strategies that older learners use can be traced back to habits formed at an earlier age, as has already been mentioned, so the sooner they are accustomed to strategies the better for our learners.

3. Aims and research questions

The aim of the present study is to determine which vocabulary learning strategies are applied in language teaching and learning in the Greek primary school. For the purposes of this research the following questions were attempted to be answered:

1. Which vocabulary learning strategies are practised by EFL teachers in primary schools?
2. Which vocabulary learning strategies are favoured by EFL students?
3. Which vocabulary learning strategies are employed in the textbooks provided by the Greek Ministry of Education?

4. Method and design

4.1. Participants

*Teachers’ profile.* The questionnaire addressed to EFL teachers was answered by 54 participants, 50 of whom are female and only 3 male-1 participant skipped the question. The majority is aged 31-40 and are permanent teachers; about 60% of them serve in urban areas, which means that there is a satisfactory sample from both urban and rural areas. To the best part, they have an average working experience of 6 to 10 years and there is a variety in the grades they currently teach, covering all classes of primary school, since every participant teaches multiple grades during each school year. A percentage of 20.75% are
already holders of a master’s degree whereas 64.15% are currently studying towards the acquisition of their master’s degree—this of course happening since most of the participants were contacted through the Yahoo Groups created by the tutors of the Hellenic Open University to facilitate communication with the HOU students.

Students’ profile. The questionnaire was administered to 81 students of a primary school in Gerakas, Athens. 23 of the students were in the third grade, 20 in the fourth, 20 in the fifth and 18 in the sixth grade. Out of the total of students, 36 pupils were boys and 45 were girls. The majority of students were of Greek origin, with the exception of 2 bilinguals of Greek and Albanian and 1 Roma in the 3rd grade, 1 Roma in the 4th grade and 2 bilinguals of Greek and Albanian in the 5th grade. Lastly, in each class there were students with learning disabilities; more specifically, 1 was in the 3rd, 2 in the 4th, 1 in the 5th and 1 in the 6th grade, presenting difficulties mostly in writing.

4.2. Materials

For the collection of data for the specific study the use of the questionnaire was considered as most appropriate.

4.2.1. Questionnaires: from theory to practice

Teachers’ questionnaire (Appendix I). The questionnaire, which was administered to EFL teachers of primary schools, was originally based on Schmitt’s taxonomy. It includes questions that refer both to the strategies used for the presentation of new lexical items and the discovery of the meaning of new words and also to the strategies used for consolidation of already encountered words. Different types of strategies are presented through the questions: ‘determination strategies’, through which the learners discover the meaning of new words for themselves; ‘social strategies’, where the help of someone who already possesses the knowledge is offered; ‘memory strategies’, known also as mnemonics, that involve the relation of the word with some previously learnt knowledge, using imagery or grouping; ‘cognitive strategies’, that involve repetition and mechanical means to study and retain vocabulary in memory (in a way they are similar to memory strategies but do not focus as much on manipulative mental processing); ‘metacognitive strategies’, which can be used by the learners themselves to monitor and evaluate their progress. Of course not all strategies suggested by Schmitt were included in the specific questionnaire not only because of the size it would amount to but also because many of them refer to older learners, since Schmitt conducted his research mainly with older students. Schmitt’s taxonomy was not the only source used in the design of the specific questionnaire. Willis’ work was equally influential; as she suggests (2008, p. 82): “… learning vocabulary building strategies modifies brain functions in systematic, predictable ways as enriched vocabulary becomes evident in reading comprehension, verbal language, and writing”. In her study, and through evidence supported also by scientific data and medical examinations, she proposes a series of strategies that in turn affect the three components of vocabulary, namely resonance, reinforcement and rehearsal. For the aforementioned reasons, a careful selection was once again made as to the proposed strategies by Willis herself, in order to select the most appropriate for the age group under discussion.

Additionally, Oxford’s (1990) taxonomy contributed greatly, not only to the actual design of the questionnaire but also to the general addressing of the vocabulary learning strategies. It is worth mentioning once more that Schmitt’s taxonomy was mainly based on the work done by Oxford. Her ‘affective strategies’, which were not explicitly included in Schmitt’s
taxonomy, are considered very important and helpful to young learners, since they have to do with their emotions, motivation and attitude towards and while learning the language; they are also included in her ESL/EFL version of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), which, according to her study (1995), has proven a highly reliable and valid tool to assess frequency of language learning strategy use. Generally speaking, in order to design the questionnaire not a single taxonomy could be used, since every researcher that dealt with learning strategies had something significant to contribute to work previously done. For this reason, although the basis was Schmitt’s taxonomy, as he focuses primarily on vocabulary learning strategies, it was complemented with various other strategies proposed by researchers also mentioned in the previous chapter.

Students’ questionnaire (Appendix II). The questionnaire which was administered to the EFL learners was designed keeping the same principles in mind as for the design of the teachers’ questionnaire.

One of its main characteristics is that it is by far shorter, since it is addressed to children aged 8 to 12 years of age. Only the main vocabulary learning strategies were used with a view to keeping it as simple as possible, also due to their short concentration span. Furthermore, the Greek language was used, so that it could be understood by all the learners, no matter what their cognitive level is. It is also preceded by a cover letter, through which they are informed about the anonymity of the questionnaire and what is also emphasized is that their contribution is of great importance to the study. In general, the theories taken into consideration in order to design the questionnaire that was administered to the EFL teachers were the ones also used to design the EFL learners’ questionnaire.

Questionnaire description. The first questionnaire (Appendix I) is in English since the participants are teachers of the English language. It was administered in electronic form, which was opted for against the printed form, since in this way the participants would be more easily accessible but also the questionnaire would take less time to complete. It consists of two main parts labeled under the appropriate headings and also separated in two distinct pages.

The first part consists of personal or demographic questions including the gender, the age, the employment status, the working experience, the location of the school, the grades they teach and the studies of the participants. The demographic questions are used in any questionnaire to see how closely the sample replicates the known population: the more closely the demographic distribution of survey respondents matches the population, the more confidence we can have in the data. Since, though, in this specific survey, the greatest sample comes from urban areas (Athens, to be more specific), it is not so much the location of the school that is of importance as the grades each participant teaches, so as to determine the age groups where the particular strategies are practised.

The second part/page of the questionnaire consists of 80 questions, which refer to the different vocabulary learning strategies that teachers use and practise during their lessons. The last question (number 80) is an open-ended one, inviting teachers to suggest any other strategies they might be using.

The second questionnaire (Appendix II), as also mentioned before, is addressed to students and for that reason it is in Greek. It is administered in its printed form, since it would be difficult to reach pupils of this age through the Internet; for this reason it was given for completion at the beginning of the lesson. An additional reason for this is that the students
would have the opportunity to ask any questions that might arise, since their teacher would be present during the whole procedure. It is also colourful, so that its form is more appealing.

Initially, the students are only asked to complete their gender and class, since we already know that they live in an urban area (Gerakas, Athens). The actual questionnaire is intended to investigate three areas: a) strategies used for the discovery of meaning, b) strategies used for the consolidation of a word and c) attitudes/preferences, and consists of three parts. In the first part, learners are asked to respond as to what they do when they encounter new words. It includes determination and social strategies. The second part includes strategies that concern their preferences when they memorise new vocabulary; for this reason, most of them are memory strategies but also some cognitive ones are included. Lastly, the third part refers to their general preferences as to the learning of the English language; it comprises metacognitive, and affective strategies. It should be noted here that not all the strategies from the teachers’ questionnaire were included in that put together for students. The main reason is that some of the strategies are used by the teachers in order to assist students in learning and cannot easily be used by learners themselves; also, because of their age, the children are not ready for all the types of strategies since some of them take longer to develop and be used spontaneously. Additionally, it was not deemed necessary to collect such detailed information from students, so a selection was made.

Evaluation checklist. The last instrument used for the triangulation of data is a checklist (Appendix III), which served for the evaluation of the textbooks used in the Greek primary school. An attempt was made to define the vocabulary learning strategies existing in the textbooks, either implicitly, through the activities and practice they provide to learners, or explicitly, since one of the key features of these textbooks, especially those for the 4th, 5th and 6th grade, is the suggestion of learning strategies for the learners to use.

In order to analyse the data collected through the questionnaires, descriptive statistics was used, to provide summaries about the sample and about the observations that have been made. The analysis of the data is presented in the following chapter.

5. Research findings

5.1. Questionnaires results

An interesting aspect of the data that have emerged through both questionnaires administered arises when we compare the vocabulary learning strategies preferred by learners to those employed by the teachers.

More analytically, understanding or guessing meaning from context is a very popular strategy between both groups; teachers use this strategy and students embrace it as well. Similarly, students engage in guessing meaning from pictures, and teachers promote this teaching technique. Translation in L1 is still often used by teachers, and likewise learners seem to favour this strategy.

In consolidating meaning, vocabulary notebooks are highly celebrated by both groups, probably because the school textbooks are not equipped with extensive glossaries. Another noted strategy for the same purpose is that of matching words with pictures; the exact same results came up with matching words with objects. Using words in sentences to keep meaning in mind is often employed in the classroom and can also be used as homework.
Both parties showed a strong preference for songs and stories and of course games are an all-time favourite for students and are also selected by teachers, since teaching in this way can be more amusing for both and students are more involved in the lesson. Word families were almost equally treated by both groups of participants, with the teachers showing a greater preference for them. As for participation in projects, the learners seem more eager for them but also the teachers quite often engage them in such activities, which are also present in the textbooks. Writing down and sounding out words in order to practice them is quite a traditional strategy that can assist memorization and it is among the most popular ones. Moving on to the metacognitive strategies, teachers always prompt their students to listen to English songs, watch films and cartoons in English, read different texts in English and speak with people who know the language well; the majority of students was also very favourable towards these strategies, with a slight exception to reading, which was not chosen by as many, probably because reading is often considered as the most tedious. Error correction was also regarded by the learners in a more traditional way, since they showed clear preference to immediate correction, probably because they are used to this way of correction in their L1. Teachers discuss learners’ mistakes with them, though not on a regular basis, but more often than not resort to remedial work, in order to help learners recognize and overcome their weaknesses. Rewards for students’ efforts are always practiced and they are also expected by the learners.

The use of bilingual dictionaries is not as much favoured by either group; asking the classmates for meaning is also not selected as a vocabulary learning strategy. A surprising issue is that although teachers often give students sentences including the new words, students do not opt for the specific practice to discern the meaning of a word; synonyms and paraphrases are similarly treated. Also, drawing pictures of words is not popular among students, probably because they feel they have outgrown this strategy, while teachers practise it. The same goes for rhyming and poems; teachers emphasise rhyming but students do not prefer to learn poems to memorise words, probably because rhyming is a technique that appeals mostly to younger children (aged 5-8). Furthermore, although students like crossword puzzles a lot, they are only sometimes engaged in such an activity; this could be explained by the lack of such activities in the textbooks or by the fact that such activities are quite time-consuming to be done in classroom or to be even given as homework. A question with controversial results was that concerning making stories with words learnt; 33.75% of the students answered that they never prefer this activity whereas 23.75% answered that they always do; teachers on the other hand were somewhere in between, with 44.44% answering that they sometimes use the specific strategy. Making stories can prove very challenging for children and depending on the role stories and fairytales play in their lives—whether they are accustomed to reading or hearing them—could give an explanation for the above results. A similarly treated strategy is that of the students creating exercises themselves to give their classmates; the majority of answers from both groups was that they never practise vocabulary in such a way. Quite surprisingly, although students are encouraged to share their feelings while learning a foreign language, less than half actually do (Graph 7), probably because they are not used to or are reluctant of being the epicentre of the teachers’ attention or because children of this age can be quite egocentric and it is difficult for them to share their feelings with others.

5.2. Evaluation of textbooks

Generally speaking, most of the vocabulary learning strategies in the proposed checklist exist in the primary school textbooks. What is quite interesting with the 4th, 5th and 6th grade textbooks is that the book itself suggests learning strategies so that the learners can become
aware of ways in which they can learn and train themselves towards autonomy. Furthermore, in the introduction of these textbooks, addressed to the students, they are informed that the purpose of these books is to guide them through the path of knowledge according to their personal needs and interests and that the use of learning strategies can make their journey easier and more effective.

However, it is evident that not all the strategies from the checklist exist in the books although they are used by both the teachers and the students, as shown by the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaires. For example, the presentation of words with objects/realia or with movements/gestures is not mentioned in the teacher’s notes but it is up to the teacher to use these strategies to facilitate the learners. Also, songs and rhymes are mostly used in the 3rd and 4th grade, which is understandable because they appeal to younger children mostly. Translation in L1 is not as much encouraged in any other grade apart from the 4th; the 4th grade textbook is also the only one that provides students with a glossary in which they need to complete the Greek translation of the words. It is mentioned in the 6th grade textbook that pupils may use the translation of a word, but it is not as much emphasised as for the 4th grade. Furthermore, although the provision of synonyms/antonyms or sentences including new lexis is not direct in all textbooks, it can anyway be used by the teacher to make memorization easier. The use of dictionaries is recommended but not for all grades, probably because it is more difficult for younger learners or because it is not feasible for so many dictionaries to exist in every classroom of the state school. Lastly, writing down and sounding out of new words are again mostly left to the teacher and they are strategies used more often than not, as shown in the previous chapter.

6. Interpretation of results, limitations and implications

6.1. Interpretation of the Results

In general, the vocabulary learning strategies selected and included in the teachers’ questionnaire were met with the approval of the teachers, since most of the strategies are used by the majority to a bigger or lesser extent during their lessons. Moreover, the students stated their preference towards certain strategies through the questionnaire addressed to them, which leads us to the conclusion that they also find the specific strategies helpful and appropriate since they use them. Of course if a closer look at the students’ questionnaire results is taken, it will be realized that the results as to the preferred vocabulary learning strategies change according to the grade; younger students prefer songs and games whereas older pupils opt for projects and crossword puzzles, for example. Lastly, many of the strategies under discussion are proposed implicitly or explicitly in the primary school textbooks, which means that also the authors of the specific textbooks consider them appropriate, since in designing the material the age of the learners was primarily taken into consideration.

Furthermore, the findings of the specific study are validated by the findings of a study conducted by Chamot and El-Dinary (1999); although their study concerned foreign language immersion programmes—which is not the case here—its results showed that children use a variety of strategies to deal with language learning. The quantitative data of the current study proved that learners apply all different kinds of strategies to their learning, namely memory, cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social.
The answers to the research questions that follow will provide the reader with a clearer view as to the aforementioned points.

**Q. 1: Which vocabulary learning strategies are practiced by EFL teachers in primary schools?**

The answer to this question is directly provided through the answers of the teachers to the questionnaire administered to them and can be traced back in the previous part. Furthermore, the evaluation of the textbooks provides an insight as to which vocabulary learning strategies are proposed by the writers and subsequently should be promoted by the teachers themselves, simultaneously giving them the freedom to use any other strategies they consider appropriate according to the students’ needs and personal styles of learning.

More specifically, the teachers seem to be using most of the vocabulary learning strategies proposed in the questionnaire for the discovery of meaning. The use of pictures, gestures and sounds, of dictionaries and flashcards, the provision of the translation, paraphrase or sentence including the new word and the practice of prompting students to guess meaning through context are very common strategies in the Greek classroom, as also suggested by Schmitt (1997). For the consolidation of vocabulary, again there is a variety of strategies used, such as connecting the words with personal experiences, creating an image of the word’s meaning, engaging in group-work activities and using a vocabulary notebook, proposed by Schmitt; also, drawing, matching words with pictures/objects, recycling words in new contexts and using stories and other English-language media. Furthermore, the teachers employ the affective strategies recommended by Oxford (1990) to promote learning in a relaxed atmosphere.

It is crucial that vocabulary teaching strategies be incorporated systematically in every lesson so that the students are equipped in order to cope with the demands of vocabulary learning. According to Sternberg (1987), the main function of vocabulary teaching is to teach learners how to teach themselves and this is where the strategies serve. The fact that they are used by Greek teachers contributes to the facilitation of the learners as to the acquisition of the necessary amount of vocabulary.

**Q. 2: Which vocabulary learning strategies are favoured by EFL students?**

The data collected through the administration of the questionnaire to the learners reveal that their preference to certain strategies varies according to the grade they attend. Looking at the results, it becomes evident that the students show a greater preference towards strategies that have the feel of free-time activities, such as playing games, doing crossword puzzles, engaging in group-work activities, reading stories, listening to songs, guessing meaning from context/pictures, either for the discovery of meaning or for the consolidation of vocabulary.

On the whole though, many of the vocabulary learning strategies they use are the ones existent in their textbooks and practised by their teachers; this means that training the students in the use of strategies, even from a very young age, does have results. Research has shown that learning strategies can be taught to students through training and in this way they are helped to improve their performance on language learning tasks (O’Malley et al., 1985).
Q. 3: Which vocabulary learning strategies are employed in the textbooks provided by the Greek Ministry of Education?

The evaluation of the textbooks in Chapter 4 proved that many of the vocabulary learning strategies do appear in the textbooks of the state primary schools. They are either provided as suggestions for the learners to use or are put into practice through the various activities. At the same time, the teacher has the potential to use other strategies that can facilitate the learners, since not everyone learns in the same way and at the same pace; for this reason the books are equipped with *differentiated activities* that might be more suitable for their individual learning style.

### 6.2. Limitations of the study

It should be noted at the specific point that the study under discussion has certain limitations, firstly those concerning the number and profile of the respondents of the questionnaires. Further research involving more participants on both sides (teachers/students) and from different parts of Greece would be necessary in order to produce more general results. Differences in results would also emerge due to other factors, such as studies, training, own learning experiences and teaching experiences-on the part of the teachers. For that purpose, a larger-scale research and teacher/student interviews or classroom observations (qualitative tools of data collection) could be used. In addition, the evaluation checklist was based on the relevant literature but the final selection of the strategies to be included was made by the evaluator; judged by stakeholders it might be found to have omissions or solecism.

### 6.3. Implications of the Study

It is evident, mainly through the literature review, that vocabulary learning strategies can prove a powerful tool in the hands of the teachers, the students and the authors of textbooks and can help in the design of both the syllabus and the lesson itself.

In that light, the teachers can train their students in the use of not only vocabulary learning strategies but also learning strategies in general, more intensively and systematically in order to help them achieve autonomy. Learners should be made aware of the different strategies they can use in order to find the ones that suit their personal style and individual needs. To that end a needs analysis questionnaire could be administered at the beginning and throughout the school year to identify which strategies should be emphasized more and generally to determine the results of such a practice. At the same time, through systematic and continuous teacher training and professional development, the teachers will be able to make informed decisions as to which strategies are most effective for their learners. Lastly, more or different strategies could be included in the textbooks so that they are enriched by the writers since strategic learning is considered more effective.

For the instruction of strategies, the five-step procedure proposed by O’Malley and Chamot (1990) could be implemented. Briefly, the five steps are the following:

1. Preparation: development of the students’ awareness as to the existence of different strategies through retrospection, think-alouds and discussions.
2. Presentation: development of the students’ knowledge as to the strategies by providing them with the rationale, describing/naming the strategy and modeling its use.
3. Practice: development of the students’ skills in the use of strategies through cooperative learning tasks, think-alouds, peer tutoring and group discussions.

4. Evaluation: development of student ability to evaluate their own strategy use through writing down of the strategies used, discussions and keeping dialogue journals (with the teacher).

5. Expansion: development of the ability to transfer strategies to new tasks by discussions on metacognitive and motivational aspects of strategy use, additional practice and assignments.

Apart from the aforementioned suggestions and since the object of this research is young learners, a final proposal should be made: games and game-like activities need to be used more in the classroom. Although the use of games has gained ground in teaching during the last few years and most textbooks include some, they are often avoided by teachers since they are very time-consuming, difficult to organize and are blamed for chaos in the classroom. However, judging from the students’ responses, game-like activities are at the top of their preferences. Of course, they need to be carefully selected, according to the learners’ age and cognitive demands, and they need to be challenging and intriguing. According to Shen (2003), the activities that make use of wordlists, dictionaries, flashcards, games, mnemonics and analysis of words are useful since the students’ attention is drawn to the vocabulary that needs to be consolidated. Additionally, games need not only be limited to word-level; they can be expanded to also teach chunks of language.

7. Conclusion

The main intention of the present study was to investigate to what extent various vocabulary learning strategies, if any, are applied in the Greek primary school. In order to examine the specific topic, the relevant literature on vocabulary learning strategies was first and foremost reviewed; additionally the research questions were posed. The instruments used to answer these questions were two subsequent questionnaires, one addressed to teachers and another addressed to students, designed according to the vocabulary learning strategies proposed by various theorists. The data collected through both questionnaires was quite encouraging as to the use of strategies not only by teachers but also by the learners themselves. The evaluation of the textbooks was used not only for the triangulation of data but also in order to prove or disprove whether there has been provision of adequate vocabulary learning strategies. The results were quite encouraging since both learners and teachers seem to be using several of the selected strategies in order to manipulate vocabulary; the textbooks themselves also contain many of the strategies, which makes the work of the teachers easier and that of the students more focused.

Conclusively, it is advisable that teachers dedicate as much as time and circumstances allow them to the teaching of learning strategies and to the training of the learners in order to help them achieve autonomy. At the same time, knowing the way their students learn is essential in order to be able to adapt the lesson accordingly and put emphasis on the individual differences and preferences.

References


APPENDIX I

Presentation of the questions included in the teachers’ questionnaire and the strategies they refer to.

DET= determination strategies, MEM= memory strategies, SOC= social strategies, COG= cognitive strategies, MET= metacognitive strategies, AFF= affective strategies

1. I present words with pictures/flashcards DET
2. I present words with sounds DET
3. I present words with objects/realia DET
4. I present words with gestures, pantomime or physical movements DET
5. I categorise words in word families (e.g. animals) DET
6. I categorise words in parts of speech (e.g. nouns, verbs) DET
7. I analyse the affixes and roots of words (e.g. walk-walked, happy-unhappy) DET
8. I emphasise rhyming in words (e.g. night-light) MEM
9. I emphasise homophones (e.g. their-there) MEM
10. I translate words in Greek MEM
11. I use synonyms and paraphrases to explain the meaning of words MEM
12. I give students a sentence including the meaning of words MEM
13. I give students crossword puzzles to help them revise vocabulary MEM
14. I engage students in group work activities to practise the meaning of words SOC/MEM
15. I recycle words in new contexts MEM
16. I use semantic maps (mind maps/spider diagrams) to help students study vocabulary MEM
17. I group words together within a storyline to help students study them MEM
18. I give students gap-filling activities to practise the meaning of words MEM
19. I ask students to combine words to make compounds (e.g. jelly+fish) MEM
20. I ask students to look for loan words in L1 or L2 (e.g. supermarket) DET
21. I ask students to guess the meaning of words from context DET
22. I ask students what words remind them of to help retain them in their memory MEM
23. I ask students to make an image of the words in their minds MEM
24. I ask students to find the meaning of words in a bilingual dictionary DET
25. I ask students to make word lists COG
26. I ask students to repeat words after me COG
27. I ask students to break down words in their individual sounds (e.g. cat in c-a-t) MEM
28. I ask students to blend individual sounds into words (e.g. g-d-o in dog) MEM
29. I ask students to think about situations in their life that relate to the new word (e.g. “What makes you‘happy’?”) MEM
30. I ask students to make examples giving the definition of words MEM
31. I ask students to use words in sentences MEM
32. I ask students to write stories including new words MEM
33. I ask students to match words with pictures MEM
34. I ask students to match words with objects MEM
35. I ask students to match words with their synonyms/antonyms MEM
36. I ask students to draw pictures of words MEM
37. I ask students to study the spelling of words MEM
38. I ask students to sound out words when they study MEM
39. I ask students to write down words when they study MEM
40. I ask students to study words through their wordlists and/or flashcards COG
41. I ask students to study words from the vocabulary section in their textbook COG
42. I ask students to keep a vocabulary notebook to study words COG
43. I ask students to replace previously learnt words with new ones (e.g. excited-enthusiastic) MEM
44. I ask students to make predictions about the content or the follow-up of a text COG
45. I ask students to read the same text repeatedly COG
46. I ask students to read the text with me in chorus COG
47. I ask students to reread the text in small parts after I have read them aloud COG
48. I ask each student to reread (part of) the text aloud COG
49. I ask students to read the text to family members as homework COG
50. I ask students to sound out familiar words quickly MEM
51. I ask students to create their own revision exercises (e.g. words on one list and definitions on another to match) to give their classmates MET/SOC
52. I ask students to participate in projects on a given topic to use the vocabulary learnt SOC/MEM
53. I advise students to ask their teacher for the meaning of words SOC
54. I advise students to ask their classmates for the meaning of words SOC
55. I advise students to interact with native speakers/people who know the language well SOC/MET
56. I help students learn and use formulaic language (e.g. “What does this word mean?”) SOC
57. I help students learn chunks of language through storytelling MEM
58. I help students learn chunks of language through games MEM
59. I help students learn chunks of language through songs/chants MEM
60. I help students learn chunks of language through drama MEM
61. I help students learn high frequency ‘sight’ words (e.g. eight, friend, because) MEM
62. I help students connect words with their senses (e.g. see a drum, hear a drum, tap their hands on the desk as if playing a drum) MEM
63. I prompt students to listen to English songs to acquire vocabulary MET
64. I prompt students to watch English films/cartoons to acquire vocabulary MET
65. I prompt students to read English books/comics/magazines to acquire vocabulary MET
66. I ask students to note down words learnt when they see/hear them outside the classroom (e.g. on signs, products or media) MET
67. I try to create a relaxing atmosphere in the classroom AFF
68. I encourage students to use words even when they are not sure about their correct meaning AFF
69. I encourage students to talk about their feelings about L2 learning AFF
70. I encourage students to write down their feelings in a language learning notebook AFF
71. I reward students when they do well or when they make an effort AFF
72. I correct students’ mistakes on the spot MET
73. I prompt students to spot their own or their classmates’ mistakes, write them down and discuss them with the teacher MET
74. I note down students’ mistakes and do remedial work MET
75. I give students vocabulary tests MET
76. I ask students to monitor their progress in L2 MET
77. I ask students to keep a language portfolio MET
78. I ask students to reflect on their favourite vocabulary learning strategies MET
79. I give students wordlists and ask them to tick the ones they know MET
80. Please suggest any other vocabulary learning strategies you might be using with your students
APPENDIX II

Presentation of the questions included in the students’ questionnaire and the strategies they refer to.

DET = determination strategies, MEM = memory strategies, SOC = social strategies, COG = cognitive strategies, MET = metacognitive strategies, AFF = affective strategies

Όταν βρίσκω μια καινούργια λέξη:
- Προσπαθώ να καταλάβω τι σημαίνει από την πρόταση DET
- Προσπαθώ να καταλάβω τι σημαίνει από τις εικόνες DET
- Ψάχνω τη σημασία της στο λεξικό DET
- Ζητάω από τη δασκάλα να μου πει τι σημαίνει στα Ελληνικά SOC
- Ζητάω από τη δασκάλα να μου πει μια πρόταση με την καινούργια λέξη SOC
- Ζητάω από τη δασκάλα να μου πει ένα συνώνυμο SOC
- Ρωτάω τους συμμαθητές μου SOC

Όταν μαθαίνω καινούργιες λέξεις προτιμώ:
- Να γράφω τη λέξη και τη σημασία της στο τετράδιο μου MEM
- Να βλέπω την εικόνα της MEM
- Να βλέπω ένα αντικείμενο MEM
- Να ζωγραφίζω μια εικόνα με τη λέξη MEM
- Να γράφω προτάσεις με την καινούργια λέξη MEM
- Να ακούω τραγούδια με τις λέξεις στα Αγγλικά MEM
- Να διαβάζω ιστορίες MEM
- Να μαθαίνω ποίημα MEM
- Να παίζω παιχνίδια MEM
- Να κάνω ασκήσεις MEM
- Να λύνω σταυρόλεξα MEM
- Να φτιάχνω οικογένειες λέξεων MEM
- Να φτιάχνω μια ιστορία με τη λέξη αυτή MEM
- Να κάνω εργασίες μαζί με τους συμμαθητές μου SOC/MEM
- Να φτιάχνω ασκήσεις και να τις δίνω στους συμμαθητές μου MET
- Να γράφω τις λέξεις πολλές φορές COG
- Να λέω τις λέξεις δυνατά COG

Μου αρέσει:
- Να ακούω τραγούδια στα Αγγλικά MET
- Να βλέπω ταινίες ή κινούμενα σχέδια στα Αγγλικά MET
- Να διαβάζω βιβλία, περιοδικά ή κόμικς στα Αγγλικά MET
- Να μιλάω με ανθρώπους που ξέρουν Αγγλικά καλά SOC/MET
- Να επιβραβεύσω για τις προσπάθειές μου όταν μαθαίνω Αγγλικά AFF
- Να εκφράζω τα συναισθήματα μου όταν μαθαίνω Αγγλικά AFF
- Να συζητάω με τη δασκάλα μου για τα λάθη που κάνω εγώ ή οι συμμαθητές μου MET
- Να με διορθώνει η δασκάλα μου αμέσως μόλις κάνω ένα λάθος MET
APPENDIX III

EVALUATION CHECKLIST

1. Presentation of words with pictures/flashcards
2. Presentation of words with objects/realia
3. Presentation of words physically
4. Presentation of words with songs/rhymes
5. Categorization of words in word families
6. Translation in L1
7. Provision of synonyms/paraphrases
8. Provision of sentences including meaning
9. Discovery of meaning through pictures
10. Discovery of meaning through context
11. Use of bilingual dictionary
12. Recycling of words in new contexts
13. Relation of words to students’ personal experiences
14. Prediction activities to activate previously learnt vocabulary
15. Listening activities to practise vocabulary
16. Crossword puzzles, semantic maps, gap-filling/multiple choice exercises
17. Creation of wordlists with meaning
18. Matching of words with pictures
19. Matching of words with synonyms/antonyms
20. Drawing
21. Writing down of words
22. Sounding out of words
23. Doing projects
24. Teaching of formulaic language
25. Teaching of chunks of language through games, stories, drama or songs
26. Playing games
27. Reading stories
28. Self-assessment

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Experiential learning of English in Greek All-Day Primary Schools: investigating curriculum implementation

Η βιωματική εκμάθηση της αγγλικής στα ελληνικά ολοήμερα δημοτικά σχολεία: διερεύνηση της εφαρμογής του αναλυτικού προγράμματος

Zaharenia-Irini KIDONIA

This paper investigates the teaching of English in the afternoon programme of Greek All-Day Primary Schools. According to the Curriculum, the teaching of English can facilitate the “opening of school to society” by means of experiential activities that promote creativity, self-direction and cooperation. The paper, following anecdotal reports, explores the hypothesis that experiential activities are not commonplace in the afternoon programme, through a survey among 9 School Advisors and 11 Teachers of English. The analysis focuses on the extent to which All-Day Schools implement the Curriculum and reveals some challenges. It shows that the experiential curriculum suggestions are implemented to some extent, not only because of issues that policy-makers need to consider, but also because most of the teachers are not familiar with the principles of “creativity”, “self-direction” and “cooperation”. The paper concludes with methodological suggestions and examples of cross-curricular projects that aim to encourage the successful implementation of the Curriculum.
«δημιουργικότητας», της «αυτορρύθμισης» και της «συνεργασίας». Το άρθρο καταλήγει με μεθοδολογικές προτάσεις και παραδείγματα διαθεματικών σχεδίων εργασιάς που στόχο έχουν την ενθάρρυνση της επιτυχούς εφαρμογής του Αναλυτικού Προγράμματος.

Key words: experiential learning, plurilingualism, multilingualism, ability to learn, cross-curricular approach, project work

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of the study

The present study focuses on the Institution of “All-Day Primary Schools” in Greece, that was introduced in 1997 as part of an educational reform aimed at the “opening of school to society” (Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων- Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο 2015). Following the guidelines of the Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework and an optional programme until 4:15 p.m. with subjects such as English, Information Technology, Physical Education, Drama, Art and Music, All-Day Schools provide space and time for experiential activities that are an essential prerequisite for the link between school and society. Taking advantage of experiential learning principles, the teaching of English in the afternoon programme can play a key role in the achievement of the social and pedagogical objectives of All-Day Schools.

Based on the principles of creativity, self-direction and cooperation, the teaching of English can serve both the social and the pedagogical objectives of All-Day Schools, thereby facilitating the “opening of school to society”. The social objectives deal with the creative use of students’ time whilst parents are working, as well as with the integration of migrant students in their school environment, and by extension, in the Greek society. As for the pedagogical objectives, they are connected with the development of life-long learning skills. All these objectives can be achieved by means of experiential activities (Χρυσοχόος, Ι. και Κοσοβίτσα, Κ. 2003).

Experiential activities can serve the social objectives of All-Day Schools by promoting creativity, self-direction and cooperation. Following the principles of creativity and self-direction, experiential activities in the afternoon programme provide opportunities, not only for consolidation of the material introduced in the morning programme, but also for production of new material by students through the use of resources such as the internet and the school library. Throughout the process of material production, students can use English as a helping tool for the management of information from various sources and subject areas. Experiential activities can also make an important contribution to the integration of migrant students in their school environment, by engaging learners in cooperative work.

Thus, along with the social purposes, English can also serve the pedagogical purposes of All-Day Schools, through experiential activities that are carefully designed to promote creativity, self-direction and cooperation. As mentioned above, the pedagogical purposes are connected with the development of life-long learning skills. This is according to Dewey’s principle of continuity that suggests that, “the future has to be taken into account at every stage of the educational process” (Dewey 1938:47). The engagement of learners with group activities in which they are asked to use their prior and current knowledge and experience
for common benefit, encourages inventive thinking, responsibility for learning as well as cooperation and solving of conflicts in constructive ways (Kohonen 1992:19-20). By fostering these skills and attitudes from an early age, All-Day Schools aim to prepare learners for the demands of the future, that is, for continuous adaptation to social and technological change. As it is revealed, the skills that All-Day Schools promote, namely creativity, self-direction and cooperation all coincide with the principles of experiential learning.

The teaching of English can also facilitate a real “opening of school to society” by means of project work, which may involve not only students and teachers but also the local society and parents in the educational process (Chryshochoos, 2002:38-39). Project work can also contribute to the integration of migrant students in their school environment by promoting cooperation, collaboration and themes of intercultural education. The success of project work depends on the extent to which members of different learning groups are able to depart from individualistic and competitive learning to more cooperative and collaborative learning. Specifically, successful project work requires a process of cooperation, which is characterized by division of the tasks to be completed, and a process of collaboration that implies shared creation of knowledge (Paulus 2005:103). The role of English in the success of project work in All-Day Schools is equally important to the role of cooperation and collaboration, since it can serve both as a tool for the management of information and as a means for the promotion of intercultural education (Χρυσοχόος & Κοσοβίτσα, 2003).

Clearly, experiential learning of English is vital for the achievement of the objectives of Greek Primary Schools, which bear the name “All-Day Schools” due to their extended programme. The aim of this study, therefore, is to investigate the implementation of Curriculum suggestions for experiential learning of English in the afternoon programme of All-Day Primary Schools.

1.2. Structure of the paper

The study was conducted in July 2013 and included 3 Research Questions (see Kidonia 2014). Along with exploring the extent to which experiential activities are implemented in All-Day Schools, the study also aimed to reveal any opportunities and challenges that the experiential learning of English may involve and to offer the participants’ suggestions for successful Curriculum implementation. Due to space limits, the current paper focuses only on the first Research Question. It explores the views of School Advisors and Teachers of English on the extent to which All-Day Schools implement the experiential curriculum suggestions.

Thus, after this introduction that outlines the broad aim of the study and explains how the teaching of English can contribute to the achievement of the social and pedagogical objectives of All-Day Schools, the article discusses what is meant by “experiential learning”. In this context, it clarifies the terms “ability to learn”, “plurilingualism” and “multilingualism” that are included in the Curriculum (section 2.1), and describes the cross-curricular approach with its benefits (section 2.2). This is followed by a presentation of the rationale behind the 2002 Curriculum for the teaching of English in All-Day Schools (section 2.3). The discussion on experiential learning ends with a set of criteria that Teachers need to bear in mind in designing experiential activities (section 2.4).

The article then presents the Research Question for the study (section 3.1). It also describes the design of the research instruments (section 3.2), explains how the research was conducted (section 3.3), and introduces the participants (section 3.4). In what comes next,
an overview of the coding and analysis undertaken is provided (section 4.1), which is followed by two sections discussing the Advisors’ and Teachers’ perspectives on curriculum implementation (sections 4.2.1 & 4.2.2). The article concludes with suggestions for Teachers’ continuing professional development and with ways of implementing projects successfully (sections 5.1 & 5.2).

2. Literature review

The introduction of All-Day Primary Schools in 1997 was followed by the development of the 2001 and 2002 Curricula. Both the 2001 Cross-Thematic Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages and the 2002 Curriculum for the teaching of English in the afternoon programme of All-Day Schools promote competences such as the ability to learn and plurilingualism. As will be discussed in the section to follow, in this way, the Curricula emphasise the role of personal experience not only for second language learning but also for life-long learning.

2.1. Role of experiential learning

All learning requires some sort of experience. According to Kolb (1984:38), “learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”. The experience may consist of prior events in the life of the learner, current life events, or those resulting from the learner’s participation in activities designed by teachers (Andersen et al. 1995:225). An essential feature of experiential learning is that learners analyse their experience, (individually, in pairs or groups) in order to draw meaning from it in the light of prior experience. The analysis involves a process of reflection, evaluation and reconstruction of the experience, which may lead to further action. During this process, learners develop their ability to learn, which is directly related to the idea of life-long learning. The ability to learn may also be conceived as discovering “otherness”. The “other” might be another language, another culture, other people or new areas of knowledge (Council of Europe-Common European Framework-CEF 2001:12).

Personal experience is also a prerequisite for the development of plurilingualism. Plurilingualism deals with the communicative competence that learners build up as their experience of language in its cultural context expands (CEF 2001:4). It is directly connected with intercultural awareness because it stresses the importance of the interaction between languages and cultures. Examples of plurilingual competence include calling upon the knowledge of a number of languages to make sense of a text in a previously “unknown” language, or mediating between individuals with no common language. On the other hand, multilingualism, which is also promoted by the 2001 and 2002 Curricula, refers to the knowledge of a number of languages, or to the co-existence of different languages in a particular educational institution or in a given society (CEF 2001:4).

2.2. The cross-thematic curriculum framework (2001)

The Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework, introduced in 2001, proposes the cross-curricular approach to the teaching of all school subjects including Modern Foreign Languages. As it mentions,

“Modern Foreign Languages contribute to the development of pupils’ ability to use language in real-life communication situations, (...) but also as a tool for acquiring and managing knowledge and information from different subject areas” (Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων- Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο. Διαθέματικο...
The emphasis of the cross-curricular approach is on active, experiential way to learning which involves the examination of thematic units from the perspective of different school subjects as part of student participation in projects. Project work begins with an interdisciplinary analysis of the thematic unit that the students have chosen to investigate in consultation with their teachers, and ends with a cross-curricular, holistic presentation in which two or more school subjects have been integrated. It is a task-centred mode of teaching and learning rooted in an educational philosophy, which aims to pave the way to a more democratic and participatory society. Therefore, project work realizes a dynamic balance between classroom managers who are also participants, in student discussions, role-plays, or in group decision-making activities, and participants who are also classroom managers, responsible for and leading their own learning. This balance results from a joint process of negotiation between all project participants, evident at all project stages, from opening, topic orientation and data collection to material organization, presentation and evaluation.

As opposed to the traditional classroom, in which, one teacher leads learning and individual learners are relatively passive recipients of information, in the project classroom teachers and learners become colleagues, who adopt the role of a researcher and cooperate in pairs or groups in order to make possible an open, process-oriented curriculum. Having a thematic unit usually related to a social or cultural issue as their starting point, teachers of two or more school subjects cooperate in lesson planning and investigate the learning process to see how learners respond to theme, task, teachers and group, and what contributions they can make to a collectively negotiated curriculum, which aims to meet social needs and individual interests. With the same thematic unit as a stimulus, learners discuss the content and scope of their project and work on tasks connected on a causal basis in order to realize certain macro- and micro- goals. For these goals to be achieved, learners need to cooperate in the organization of their work and constantly investigate their learning outcomes following a cyclical model of experiential learning. In other words, project themes and ideas alone do not account for the educational value of project tasks because

Only when learners become involved with these ideas through a process of discussion, experimentation, reflection, and application of insights to new cycles of experimentation, will learning take place which deserves to be called experiential (Legutke and Thomas 1991: 158).

Apart from promoting self-direction and independent decision-making, by inviting learners to determine and constantly evaluate the what, how and why of their learning, project tasks also contribute to the development of learners’ communicative competence. More specifically, in pursuit of the macro- and micro-goals they have set, learners move out of the classroom and use all four skills- reading, writing, speaking and listening- in a naturally integrated way. They may gather printed and visual material, conduct interviews, or make recordings of live talks and report their content, using both the mother tongue and the foreign language as tools for acquiring and managing knowledge and information in real-life communication situations.

Within this context, preoccupation among teachers is not principally with assessing the outcome of the project but with building a process orientation that will enable learners to learn experientially. The process entails opportunities for learners to expand their scope of
action in the foreign language and to combine relevant parts of different subjects into a composite, holistic product that they will recognise as an achievement of themselves, as individuals and members of a group. In this way, teaching does not only respond to the needs and learning styles of all students but it also contributes to the development of the multiple abilities or “intelligences” that they possess. These “intelligences” have been grouped by the psychologist Howard Gardner into the following eight comprehensive categories: a) linguistic, b) logical-mathematical, c) spatial, d) bodily-kinesthetic, e) musical, f) interpersonal, g) intrapersonal and h) naturalist (Armstrong 2009:6).

From all the above, it is revealed that the cross-curricular approach and project work are proposed by the Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework as vehicles for experiential learning due to their immense benefit both to students and to teachers.

The students’ motivation begins with their personal investment in the project. This motivation is sustained and increased as the work progresses. Firstly, because it affords them the opportunity to practise in the classroom the language for which they themselves have seen the need. Secondly, because the project enables them to use the target language in real situations. Thirdly, because in most cases it leads to tangible results- an end product which they themselves have created. And lastly, because it leads to a deepening of personal relationships- so difficult to achieve in day-to-day classroom work- between teacher and students and among the students themselves. (Fried-Booth, D.L. 1986:12).

To conclude, cross-curricular teaching makes demands upon language teachers in terms of their own professional development in at least two ways:

First, it brings them up against the limits of their knowledge and understanding of the world, as they move outward from their favoured subjects. Second, it challenges them to move forward in ways that will support their effective teaching of languages through other topics and subject areas. (Hayes 2010: 384).

2.3. English in All-Day Primary Schools

Introduced as an institution with the potential to shape social reality, All-Day Schools prepare students to become active participants in a multicultural society, which is asked to constantly adapt to technological change. To this end, they follow an extended, afternoon programme that allows for creativity and active participation of students in the learning process. With a combination of school subjects designed to develop all intelligences but without any assessment in the form of grades or exams, the afternoon classes complement the morning classes, they promote alternative evaluation such as self-assessment or group correction and encourage collaboration both among students and teachers. In this way, the afternoon programme aims to create a classroom environment more conducive to learning, where students will be not only revising and consolidating knowledge, but they will also be working collaboratively through cross-curricular activities in order to create knowledge.

The cross-curricular approach along with the guidelines on multilingualism and plurilingualism make the role of English in this programme vital. Based on the cross-curricular approach, English can become both the link between morning and afternoon school subjects and the means for the promotion of topics of intercultural education. Moreover, in conjunction with Information Technology, English can be used as a tool for the
performance of real-life, communicative tasks such as managing information from internet sources, interacting via web 2.0 tools or making presentations.

Meanwhile, the guidelines on multilingualism and plurilingualism encourage the use of English as a lingua franca, that is, as a contact language among students who do not share a first language (Jenkins 2007:1). Within this framework, the teaching of English in the afternoon programme can nurture a spirit of mutual respect among pupils, thus preparing them for “their encounters with cultural difference in their immediate context (i.e. in their homes, classrooms, schoolyard and neighbourhood)” (Fay et al. 2010:586).

The extracts from the 2002 Curriculum (Appendix 1/1.1) reflect the above rationale, by emphasising the importance of communicative and cross-curricular activities that aim both at knowledge consolidation and at the development of the competence of “learning how to learn”.

2.4. Criteria for experiential activities

In designing activities, Teachers need to bear in mind that experience alone is not necessarily educative. There are some criteria that need to be fulfilled if learning activities are to be called “experiential”. These criteria include:

- Learning goals that are meaningful to students and thus related to their lived experiences. In other words, activities should be “more than immediately enjoyable since they promote having desirable future experiences” (Dewey 1938:16).
- Continuity of experience (i.e. tasks connected on a causal basis/see section 2.2) according to Dewey’s principle that “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey 1938:27).
- Debriefing and reflection since “no experience having a meaning is possible without some element of thought” (Dewey 1916:145).
- Learning activities that involve the whole person (intellect, senses, feelings) and encourage contact and communication (e.g. role-plays, games).

Andersen et al. add two more criteria:

- “Recognition of what learners bring to the learning process” as well as
- “Concern for the well-being of the learner and both valuing and pursuing the self-directive potential of the learner” (Andersen et al. 1995: 225-239).

All the above criteria are necessary for learning activities to be labelled “experiential”.

3. Presentation of Research Methodology

3.1. The research question

While the Curriculum suggests experiential activities for the afternoon programme of All-Day Schools, anecdotal evidence suggests that experiential activities are not commonplace in the afternoon programme and, in many cases, English teachers simply help students do their homework. This results in students losing interest in the lesson, which either discourages attendance in the afternoon programme or causes behaviour issues. Thus, in this paper, I seek to answer the following research question:
According to School Advisors and Teachers, to what extent do All-Day Primary Schools implement the Curriculum suggestions for experiential learning of English in the afternoon programme?

3.2. The research instruments

I chose to address the above question both to School Advisors and to Teachers in order to gain multiple perspectives and thus draw safer conclusions about the functioning of All-Day Schools. As a survey researcher, I need to describe and to interpret naturally occurring phenomena that deal with “routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (Richards 2003:11), and to present these phenomena from the participants’ point of view. To this end, I designed two questionnaires, one for Advisors and one for Teachers, that were as non-intrusive and non-directive as possible (Nunan 1992:141), thereby enabling the elicitation of a picture of Experiential Learning of English in All-Day Primary Schools that is as valid as possible.

In order to make the two questionnaires look “easy, attractive and interesting” (Cohen et al. 2011:399), and in this way motivate respondents to cooperate, I included a limited number of items in Greek and I used a semi-structured format that allows respondents to choose between giving brief or more extensive answers (Cohen et al. 2011:382). For each questionnaire, I designed 7 items that were directly referenced against the research objectives (Oppenheim 1992:101). The focus of this paper is on items 1-5 that are referenced against the aforementioned Research Question (see section 3.1). Finally, I decided to add a section for comments, at the end of the questionnaires, so that participants can articulate any views for which the questionnaire items may not provide space (Gillham 2000:34).

Along with the questionnaire (Appendices 2 and 3), I also sent the Curriculum guidelines and principles to all participants and asked them to read some highlighted extracts (Appendix 1) before answering any questions.

3.3. Implementation

Once my study had been ethically approved, I sent an initial email to 4 Advisors and to 6 Teachers informing them about the topic of my study and asking them to participate in it. In case they were interested in participating, the 4 Advisors and the 6 Teachers were also invited to help me find more participants by giving me the email addresses of some of their colleagues. All 4 Advisors and 6 Teachers replied to my initial email and helped me find 5 more Advisors and 5 more Teachers. Therefore, the final number of participants in the study was 20: 9 Advisors and 11 Teachers. This sampling technique, which involves “a “chain reaction” whereby the researcher identifies a few people who meet the criteria of the particular study and then asks these participants to identify further members of the population” (Dörnyei 2003:72), is called “snowball sampling”.

Instead of asking the 4 Advisors and the 6 Teachers to forward my questionnaire to their colleagues, I chose to contact all potential participants myself following Dörnyei (2003:70) who suggests that, “questionnaire administration procedures play a significant role in affecting the quality of the elicited responses”. Thus, my decision to approach potential respondents myself and not simply send them my questionnaire through their colleagues intended to show my personal interest in their views and motivate them to take the necessary time to answer my questions.
3.4. Participants

3.4.1. The school advisors

The School Advisors of English are professionals in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) with higher education degrees and many years of teaching experience. They are responsible for the scientific and pedagogical guidance and support of both primary and secondary education teachers of English in the prefecture they supervise.

Aiming to gain an overview of Curriculum implementation from Primary Schools all over Greece, I decided to contact Advisors who supervise Primary Schools not only in cities but also in towns and villages. Therefore, I did not contact all Advisors whose email addresses I had available but I chose to contact a few Advisors who are responsible for prefectures of Athens, and a few more Advisors who supervise other prefectures of Greece. Specifically, 3 of the Advisors who participated in the survey supervise Primary Schools in prefectures of Athens, 2 Advisors supervise Primary Schools on islands and 4 Advisors are responsible for Primary Schools of other provincial areas.

While the School Advisors of English normally supervise the Schools of one prefecture, in some cases, it is possible that they supervise schools of two prefectures. In the present study, 3 of the Advisors are responsible for the schools of two prefectures. This can be the case in provincial areas with a limited number of schools.

3.4.2. The teachers

In Greek Primary Schools, there are Teachers of English with a different status, so not all of them have experience of teaching in the afternoon programme, which is the focus of the present study. In terms of status, English Teachers can be divided into 3 categories: 1) full-time teachers who teach only in the morning programme, 2) full-time teachers who teach both in the morning and afternoon programmes, and 3) part-time teachers who teach only in the afternoon programme. Thus, for my research purposes, I had to find participants from the last two categories. My participants would also need to have experience from the afternoon programme of different schools and, ideally, from schools of different areas of Greece, in order to help me gain an overview of Curriculum implementation.

While it is usually the part-time teachers who teach in different schools every year, there are also many full-time teachers without a permanent position in a specific school, who also teach in different schools and, in many cases, in different prefectures every year. The present study includes 1 part-time teacher and 2 full-time teachers who have been teaching in different prefectures almost every year. With the exception of 1 full-time teacher who has been teaching in the schools of the same area, all the other Teachers began as part-time teachers in one prefecture and gradually became full-time teachers in another prefecture. Hence, all these participants can offer interesting interpretations of experiential learning drawing on the insights they have gained from teaching not only in different schools but also in different areas of Greece.
4. Analysis and interpretation

4.1. Data preparation and content analysis

Having received the questionnaires from all School Advisors and Teachers, I had to identify and eliminate possible errors in them, such as missing answers, arithmetic errors in percentages or a cross in more than one boxes (see Appendices 2 and 3), which can reduce the validity of the data unless they are spotted at this stage of the research process (Cohen et al. 2011:407). After the “editing” of the questionnaire, as the above task is called, I proceeded to the “reduction” of the data, which consists of coding data in preparation for analysis (Cohen et al. 2011:407). This involves giving a name or label to a piece of text that contains an idea or a piece of information (Cohen et al. 2011:559). In this way, I obtained 20 pages of coded data that had to be represented in tables in order to be both comprehensible and comparable.

While I could easily transfer to tables the numerical data and the data from closed items, this was not the case with the data from sentence completion and open-ended items, which I decided to put into categories without distorting or misinterpreting their content. In other words, I chose to use content analysis as a way to “condense and quantify qualitative data” (Nunan 1992:147) without doing violence to it. Content analysis is a procedure in which themes are identified from the statements made by respondents, “with the researcher focusing on the way the theme is treated or presented and the frequency of its occurrence” (Spencer et al. 2003:200). The identified themes can then be numerically coded and entered into tables to be treated as quantitative data. In practice, however, there are almost always some responses that do not fit easily into categories and have to be reported as such (Gillham 2000:65).

4.2. Building up the picture of English in All-Day Schools

In the following two sections, I am exploring the views of Advisors and Teachers respectively on the extent to which All-Day Schools implement the Curriculum. This exploration reveals challenges that inhibit the experiential learning of English in All-Day Schools and have implications both for policy-makers and for Teachers.

4.2.1. The advisors’ challenge

From a first look at the Advisors’ answers, I realised that the numbers I was provided with do not allow for safe conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which All-Day Schools implement the Curriculum. While some Advisors answer the question about the number of schools they supervise in general terms (i.e. they mention they supervise all schools of their prefecture(s)), some other Advisors note that they are responsible for a big number of schools. However, all Advisors offer low percentages of schools that do not implement the Curriculum\(^1\). The lack of validity in the percentages that the Advisors provide is verified by the Advisors themselves. Advisor 7 comments on the percentages as follows:

> These percentages give an indication. They represent the Advisor’s overview of Curriculum implementation. For the percentages to be precise, the Advisor will have to attend the lessons of all Primary Schools of one prefecture and write down whether these schools implement experiential methods or not.
The issue of attending the lessons of All-Day Schools is also highlighted by Advisor 1, who provides the following explanation of the way she answered the questionnaire:

My personal experience of All-Day Schools is limited and the answers I have given are mainly based on the discussions I had with English teachers who work in these schools.

As the Advisors’ numerical data was invalid, in order to develop understanding of the extent to which the Curriculum is implemented, I had to look for comments that the Advisors had possibly made in the sentence completion and open-ended items. Skimming through their responses, I found that 6 Advisors had stated clearly that the Curriculum is not implemented in All-Day Schools, 1 Advisor had mentioned that the Curriculum is implemented and it is only a few teachers who prefer traditional methods, and 2 Advisors had remained neutral on the issue. The following extracts illustrate what the majority of the Advisors believe about the implementation of the Curriculum:

Ideally, the afternoon programme of All-Day Schools would be an excellent opportunity for the implementation of experiential activities. However, in practice, this happens to a small extent. (Advisor 4)

Since frontal teaching is very popular in the Greek education system, we need to work hard in order to introduce and implement experiential methods in the teaching of English both in the morning and in the afternoon programme of All-Day Schools. (Advisor 1)

Therefore, from all the above, I have concluded that, All-Day Schools cannot easily implement the experiential Curriculum suggestions because of the issues that the Advisors face with their supervision. As mentioned in section 3.4.1, the School Advisors of English are responsible for schools of both primary and secondary education, sometimes in more than one prefectures. The above data reveals that, this increased responsibility makes the Advisors’ task of attending the lessons of All-Day Schools and supporting the teachers in implementing the Curriculum extremely difficult.

4.2.2. Teachers showing promising work

In examining the Teachers’ perspectives on Curriculum implementation, I sought to identify not only which activities the Teachers have tried but whether these activities imply knowledge of the role of English in All-Day Schools, as described in the introduction and in section 2.3. Hence, in the following paragraphs, along with exploring successful and unsuccessful experiential activities, I am also seeking insights into the Teachers’ understanding of experiential learning principles and I am examining the extent to which the participants of this study have implemented project work successfully, thus following the Curriculum rationale.

The data shows that the majority of the Teachers who participated in the present study have tried some of the activities that are suggested in the Curriculum and, in most cases, these activities have been successful. Among the most successful experiential activities are the games, the songs and the story reading, usually followed by dramatization, whereas the dialogues appear to be the least successful experiential activity. The data also suggests that the majority of the Teachers are not familiar with experiential learning and project work. Specifically, only 4 out of the 11 Teachers who participated in the present study have
developed a good understanding of experiential learning and therefore have implemented project work successfully. The rest of the Teachers seem to have a poor understanding of experiential learning and project work. For example, Teacher 11 seems to ignore the fact that, in project work, it is the students who determine the what, how and why of their learning according to their interests (see section 2.2). As Teacher 11 says:

I have been able to implement the suggested activities to some extent because the children were usually tired so it was difficult for them to concentrate on activities such as projects.

On the other hand, the responses from Teachers 2, 6, 9 and 10 reveal a good understanding of experiential learning principles and justify the successful implementation of project work. Teachers 2 and 9 mention activities that involve the whole person (intellect, senses, feelings) and encourage contact and communication (see the criteria for experiential activities in section 2.4). This is how they describe the “British Customs” and the “fashion show”:

On every traditional British holiday we would learn about the relevant customs and we would perform them in class. (Teacher 2)

We organised a fashion show so that the children learn the different seasons and the different clothes, shoes and accessories that we wear in every season. (Teacher 9)

In addition, Teacher 6 shows recognition of what the learners bring to the learning process (see section 2.4), as she encourages her students to do “a group research” in order to create a poster. Finally, Teacher 10 organises dramatization around fairy tales that children find “most enjoyable”, as she says. The dramatization activities are therefore meaningful to students.

Even though these 4 Teachers have implemented projects successfully, their work does not clearly reflect the Curriculum rationale because their projects are not cross-curricular, that is, they do not examine thematic units from the perspective of different school subjects (see section 2.2). This weakness in Teachers’ work is possibly due to a weakness of the Curriculum, which may offer some general guidelines (see Appendix 1 and section 2.2) but does not describe the rationale for the teaching of English in All-Day Schools (see the introduction and section 2.3). Moreover, learning about the Curriculum rationale through training seems to rely totally on the Teachers’ motivation to develop professionally. This is due to the difficulty that the Advisors have in attending the lessons of All-Day Schools and supporting the teachers in implementing the Curriculum (see sections 3.4.1 and 4.2.1).

Given these challenges, the fact that most of the Teachers who participated in the present study have implemented some experiential activities successfully, while a few of them have also experimented with project work, shows the potential of these Teachers to engage with cross-curricular activities, if they get informed about the Curriculum rationale and about the role of English in All-Day Schools.
5. Suggestions for teachers

5.1. Continuing professional development

In experiential learning terms, Teachers are regarded as “self-motivated learners” (Grainger and Barnes 2006:213) who take responsibility for their continuing professional development. Through individual study or through participation in activities for professional growth, the aim for Teachers is to understand how theory and practice can inform one another and how this transformative process can inform their work (Johnson 2006:240). That is, in order to grow professionally, Teachers may not simply acquire theoretical knowledge, but they may link this theoretical knowledge to their own experiential knowledge and thus become “active users and producers of theory in their own right, for their own means, and as appropriate for their own instructional contexts” (Johnson 2006:240).

5.2. Implementing successful projects

To implement projects successfully, the English Teachers of All-Day Schools need to consider some suggestions from the literature. First of all, they need to bear in mind that heterogeneous groups deriving from careful analysis of the Teacher have been proven to be the most effective form of learning during project tasks (Legutke and Thomas 1991: 225). Therefore, throughout the projects, they need to organise students in cooperative teams that consist of “at least two friends and a balanced mixture of high, average and low achievers” (Legutke and Thomas 1991: 225). In addition, they should identify and focus on clear, appropriate, subject-based learning objectives and they should continually monitor the depth of students’ understanding by informal assessment during the activities (Barnes 2011:207). The English Teachers of All-Day Schools should also be prepared to drop the theme for a period in order to teach subject-specific skills and knowledge, and they should give students early opportunities to apply newly learned skills and knowledge when returning to the theme (Barnes 2011:207). Finally, in order to gain maximum benefit from the projects, both teachers and students can keep journals or diaries where they will be making notes and reflecting on their learning experiences and findings³ (Kohonen 2001:92, Catapano 2005:26).

6. Conclusions and implications

The current paper highlights the key role of experiential learning of English in the healthy functioning of All-Day Primary Schools. It explains how the teaching of English can develop the students’ life-long learning skills, and how it can contribute to the creative use of students’ time and to the integration of migrant students in their school environment, by means of experiential activities and cross-curricular project work.

The paper also reveals some of the challenges that inhibit experiential learning of English in All-Day Schools. The challenges deal with the Advisors’ difficulty in attending the lessons of All-Day Schools, which is an issue for policy-makers to consider, and with the fact that most Teachers are not familiar with the principles of experiential learning.

Despite these challenges, the Teacher participants of this study manage to show promising work. The majority of them have implemented successfully some of the activities that are suggested in the Curriculum, while a small minority has experimented with projects. This
implies their potential to also engage with cross-curricular activities if they get informed about the Curriculum rationale and about the role of English in All-Day Schools.

Therefore, the paper suggests that Teachers need to take responsibility for their continuing professional development and provides both methodological suggestions and examples of cross-curricular projects in order to encourage the successful implementation of the Curriculum.

Notes

1. To see the Advisors’ answers, please follow this link: http://attik.pde.sch.gr/sym06-gath/Drastringotitites/EnglishinAll-DaySchools-STUDY.ppt.
2. To see the Teachers’ answers, please follow this link: http://attik.pde.sch.gr/sym06-gath/Drastringotitites/EnglishinAll-DaySchools-STUDY.ppt.
3. To see examples of successful cross-curricular projects, please follow this link: http://attik.pde.sch.gr/sym06-gath/Drastringotitites/EnglishinAll-DaySchools-ACTIVITIES.ppt.

References


APPENDIX 1

CURRICULUM GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES
(Extracts given to participants to read)

1.1 The 2002 Curriculum guidelines

CHAPTER B- THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN ALL-DAY PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The teaching of English in the afternoon programme aims to contribute to the achievement of the objectives that the Curriculum of English for Primary School has set following the principles of literacy, multilingualism and multiculturalism.

The afternoon programme aims at knowledge consolidation through group, pair and individual learning. Its objective is to give students more opportunities to acquire language culture and to develop communicative competence by practising:

- Grammar, syntax and vocabulary
- Appropriate language use depending on the communicative context
- Receptive and productive skills
- Communication and learning strategies (especially for the development of the key competence of “learning how to learn”)

Moreover, both the morning and the additional afternoon school programmes give opportunities for cross-curricular activities in which the subject of English can be embedded. These activities offer students a holistic engagement with social issues and allow for combination of information from various cognitive fields.

Consolidation activities should vary. They should offer possibilities for both individual and group work and aim at the development of receptive and productive language skills. They should also involve students in speech acts of communicative value.

Consolidation activities can include:

1) Reading of texts (magazines, books etc)
2) Watching and commenting on educational films (e.g. documentaries)
3) Development of dialogue between students
4) Learning of songs
5) Project work or cross-curricular activities such as:
   - Writing of a newspaper in English
   - Role-play/dramatization in English

(Translated from the Government Gazette: ΕΦΗΜΕΡΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΚΥΒΕΡΝΗΣΕΩΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑΣ -FEK Β 1471:19572/22-11-2002)
1.2 The 2011 Curriculum principles

CHAPTER 2

THE FRAMEWORK AND THE PEDAGOGIC PRINCIPLES OF THE UNIFIED CURRICULUM

3. How our students learn

Knowledge is acquired, not offered. Through memorization we do not obtain true knowledge. Knowledge is not something “ready” to be offered to us. It is only information that can be offered to us (even though we can find information by ourselves if we want—especially now, in the era of multiple sources of information where we live). Depending on how we manage the offered information we may be led to knowledge. In fact, the way to knowledge (or to learning) involves a process of personal development that transforms us. During this process it is us who construct the knowledge. This is what we should bear in mind concerning the knowledge that our students acquire. It is them who construct the knowledge while investigating and trying to understand the world around them. The new knowledge or the new mental schemata are constructed and interpreted by our students depending on their perceptions or beliefs that each one of them has formulated on the basis of their prior knowledge and experience. While synthesizing new mental schemata, whoever accepts to enter the process of learning understands better what he/she already knows by combining new and old experiences. Our students accept to enter the process of learning when, the what and how we ask them to learn is meaningful to them. (..) For this reason, it is necessary that the materials and means we use are related with our students’ lives and with the context in which they live.

Experiential Learning is until today the most important way of education apart from the formal education system. The use of experiential learning methods and practices is of major importance in foreign language education because the language, either the native language or the foreign language cannot be memorized. Unless the language is used in real communication situations it cannot be learnt. Conditions for language use and communication are created in learning environments that promote collaboration.

(Translated from the Foreign Language Teacher’s Guide 2011:15-18/Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Θρησκευμάτων- Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο)
ΕΡΩΤΗΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟ ΣΧΟΛΙΚΩΝ ΣΥΜΒΟΥΛΩΝ

1) Σε πόσα Ολοήμερα Δημοτικά Σχολεία είστε υπεύθυνος/η;

Το Αναλυτικό Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών της Αγγλικής Γλώσσας για το Ολοήμερο Δημοτικό Σχολείο έχοντας ως στόχο « να δώσει στους μαθητές περισσότερες ευκαιρίες απόκτησης γλωσσικής παιδείας και ανάπτυξης της επικουρικοποιημένης τους ικανότητας» (ΦΕΚ 1471, 22 Νοεμβρίου 2002, σελ.19572) προτείνει μία σειρά δραστηριοτήτων εμπέδωσης της γνώσης του πρωινού προγράμματος με βιωματικό χαρακτήρα (παρακαλώ δείτε την αναλυτική περιγραφή των δραστηριοτήτων στο συνημμένο αρχείο «Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών Ολοήμερου» σελ. 19573). Επίσης, η βιωματική μάθηση αποτελεί παιδαγωγική αρχή του Ενιαίου Προγράμματος Σπουδών των Ξένων Γλωσσών που εγκρίθηκε από το Υπουργείο Παιδείας πριν από 2 χρόνια (ΦΕΚ 2320, 17 Οκτωβρίου 2011)-(παρακαλώ δείτε την ενότητα «Πώς μαθαίνουν οι μαθητές μας» στον Οδηγό του Εκπαιδευτικού των Ξένων Γλωσσών που σας επισυνάπτω, σελ. 15, 16, 17, 18).

Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τις οδηγίες των Προγραμμάτων Σπουδών του 2002 και 2011 παρακαλώ απαντήστε στις ερωτήσεις που ακολουθούν:

2) Σε ποιό βαθμό τα Ολοήμερα Δημοτικά Σχολεία στα οποία είστε υπεύθυνος εφαρμόζουν τις προτάσεις για βιωματική μάθηση στο απογευματινό τους πρόγραμμα;

☐ % των σχολείων εφαρμόζει τις προτάσεις σε μεγάλο βαθμό
☐ % των σχολείων εφαρμόζει τις προτάσεις σε μικρό βαθμό
☐ % των σχολείων δεν εφαρμόζει τις προτάσεις

Παρακαλώ αναφέρατε 3 λόγους για κάθε μία από τις παραπάνω απαντήσεις:

3) Τα σχολεία αυτά εφαρμόζουν τις προτάσεις των Προγραμμάτων Σπουδών για βιωματική μάθηση σε μεγάλο βαθμό επειδή:

1) 
2) 
3) 

4) Τα σχολεία αυτά εφαρμόζουν τις προτάσεις των Προγραμμάτων Σπουδών για βιωματική μάθηση σε μικρό βαθμό επειδή:

1) 
2)
3)

5) Τα σχολεία αυτά δεν εφαρμόζουν τις προτάσεις των Προγραμμάτων Σπουδών για βιωματική μάθηση επειδή:

1)

2)

3)

6) Με βάση τις απαντήσεις που δώσατε στις ερωτήσεις 3, 4 και 5 ποιές είναι οι ευκαιρίες και οι προκλήσεις που συνεπάγεται η βιωματική μάθηση της Αγγλικής στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των Ολοήμερων Δημοτικών; Παρακαλώ αναφέρατε ορισμένα γενικά συμπεράσματα.

7) Κατά τη γνώμη σας, τι θα πρέπει να γίνει ώστε οι βιωματικές δραστηριότητες που προτείνουν τα Προγράμματα Σπουδών να μπορούν να εφαρμοστούν επιτυχώς στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των Ολοήμερων Δημοτικών; (Παρακαλώ αναφέρατε 3 προτάσεις)

Παρακάτω μπορείτε να αναφέρετε σχόλια που θα θέλατε να κάνετε σχετικά με τα θέματα που διερευνούν οι παραπάνω ερωτήσεις.

Σας Ευχαριστώ πολύ για τη συμμετοχή και τον χρόνο σας!
APPENDIX 3

ΕΡΩΤΗΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΟ ΚΑΘΗΓΗΤΩΝ

1) Ποιός είναι ο αριθμός των Ολοήμερων Δημοτικών Σχολείων στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των οποίων έχετε δουλέψει;

Το Αναλυτικό Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών της Αγγλικής Γλώσσας για το Ολοήμερο Δημοτικό Σχολείο έχοντας ως στόχο να δώσει στους μαθητές περισσότερες ευκαιρίες απόκτησης γλωσσικής παιδείας και ανάπτυξης της επικοινωνιακής τους ικανότητας (ΦΕΚ 1471, 22 Νοεμβρίου 2002, σελ.19572) προτείνει μία σειρά δραστηριοτήτων εμπέδωσης της γνώσης του πρωινού προγράμματος με βιωματικό χαρακτήρα (παρακαλώ δείτε την αναλυτική περιγραφή των δραστηριοτήτων στο συνημμένο αρχείο «Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών Ολοήμερου» σελ. 19573). Επίσης, η βιωματική μάθηση αποτελεί παιδαγωγική αρχή του Ενιαίου Προγράμματος Σπουδών των Ξένων Γλωσσών που εγκρίθηκε από το Υπουργείο Παιδείας πριν από 2 χρόνια (ΦΕΚ 2320, 17 Οκτωβρίου 2011)-παρακαλώ δείτε την ενότητα «Πώς μαθαίνουν οι μαθητές μας» στον Οδηγό του Εκπαιδευτικού των Ξένων Γλωσσών που σας επισυνάπτω, σελ. 15, 16, 17, 18).

Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τις οδηγίες των Προγραμμάτων Σπουδών του 2002 και 2011 παρακαλώ απαντήστε στις ερωτήσεις που ακολουθούν:

2) Έχετε δοκιμάσει κάποιες από τις βιωματικές δραστηριότητες που προτείνονται στο Πρόγραμμα Σπουδών του 2002; (Παρακαλώ συμπληρώστε με «Χ»)

☐ Έχω δοκιμάσει όλες τις προτεινόμενες δραστηριότητες

☐ Έχω δοκιμάσει μερικές από τις προτεινόμενες δραστηριότητες

☐ Δεν έχω δοκιμάσει καμία από τις προτεινόμενες δραστηριότητες

3) Μπορείτε να δώσετε 3 παραδείγματα επιτυχών βιωματικών δραστηριοτήτων που έχετε δοκιμάσει στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα; (Εναλλακτικά συμπληρώστε με «Χ» το σχετικό κουτάκι)

1) Δεν έχω δοκιμάσει καμία βιωματική δραστηριότητα στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα

☐ Οι βιωματικές δραστηριότητες που έχω δοκιμάσει στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα δεν ήταν επιτυχείς

4) Μπορείτε να δώσετε 3 παραδείγματα μη επιτυχών βιωματικών δραστηριοτήτων που έχετε δοκιμάσει στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα; (Εναλλακτικά συμπληρώστε με «Χ» το σχετικό κουτάκι)

1) Δεν έχω δοκιμάσει καμία βιωματική δραστηριότητα στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα

☐ Οι βιωματικές δραστηριότητες που έχω δοκιμάσει στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα δεν ήταν επιτυχείς

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Δεν έχω δοκιμάσει καμία βιωματική δραστηριότητα στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα

Οι βιωματικές δραστηριότητες που έχω δοκιμάσει στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα ήταν επιτυχείς

5) Παρακαλώ συμπληρώστε τις παρακάτω προτάσεις:

α) Μπόρεσα να εφαρμόσω βιωματικές δραστηριότητες στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των σχολείων που έχω δουλέψει επειδή

β) Μπόρεσα να εφαρμόσω βιωματικές δραστηριότητες σε μικρό βαθμό στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των σχολείων που έχω δουλέψει επειδή

γ) Δε μπόρεσα να εφαρμόσω βιωματικές δραστηριότητες στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των σχολείων που έχω δουλέψει επειδή

6) Με βάση τις απαντήσεις που δώσατε στην ερώτηση 5, ποιές είναι οι ευκαιρίες και οι προκλήσεις που συνεπάγεται η βιωματική μάθηση της Αγγλικής στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των Ολοήμερων Δημοτικών; (Παρακαλώ αναφέρατε ορισμένα γενικά συμπεράσματα)

7) Κατά τη γνώμη σας, τι θα πρέπει να γίνει ώστε οι βιωματικές δραστηριότητες που προτείνουν τα Προγράμματα Σπουδών να μπορούν να εφαρμοστούν επιτυχώς στο απογευματινό πρόγραμμα των Ολοήμερων Δημοτικών; (Παρακαλώ αναφέρατε 3 προτάσεις)

Παρακάτω μπορείτε να αναφέρετε σχόλια που θα θέλατε να κάνετε σχετικά με τα θέματα που διερευνούν οι παραπάνω ερωτήσεις.

Σας Ευχαριστώ πολύ για τη συμμετοχή και τον χρόνο σας!
Zaharenia-Irini Kidonia (reniakid@yahoo.gr) holds a B.A in English Language and Literature from the University of Athens and an M.Ed. in TESOL from the University of Manchester (UK). She has been teaching English for over 10 years in a variety of contexts in Greece, both in the state and private sector. Her main research interests are teaching languages to young learners and classroom interaction.
Investigating the efficacy of a balanced model of phonics and whole language approach for the development of young learners’ early reading skills in English

Διερευνώντας την αποτελεσματικότητα ενός ισορροπημένου μοντέλου φωνημικής και ολικής προσέγγισης με στόχο την ανάπτυξη της ικανότητας της αρχικής ανάγνωσης των μικρών μαθητών στα Αγγλικά

Katerina DAMIANOU

The present study is concerned with the skill of reading and young learners. It aims at exploring the ways in which beginner readers of English in the Greek primary school context access the print. In order to gain insight into this issue, the study proposes a balanced early reading model that encompasses elements from the two most influential approaches to teaching reading, namely Phonics and Whole language. Then, the impact of the model on the young learners’ progress in early reading is studied in an action research that includes teacher’s journals, class recordings, a battery of reading tests and a learners’ questionnaire. The information deriving from these sources reveals original and interesting findings on learner-print interaction as well as learner preferences and strategies. The study aims at pinpointing evidence that can inform and contribute to the amelioration of the teaching practices employed in the Greek primary schools regarding the teaching of early reading in English.

Η παρούσα μελέτη ασχολείται με την αναγνωστική ικανότητα των μικρών μαθητών. Στοχεύει στο να εξερευνήσει τους τρόπους με τους οποίους οι αρχάριοι μαθητές Αγγλικών στο δημοτικό σχολείο αποκτούν πρόσθετη στην ανάγνωση της συγκεκριμένης ξένης γλώσσας. Προκειμένου να επιτευχθεί ο στόχος, η έρευνα προτείνει ένα ενοπλακτομένο μοντέλο αρχικής ανάγνωσης για το οποίο χρησιμοποιήθηκαν στοιχεία από τις δύο προσέγγισεις στη διδασκαλία της ανάγνωσης με τη μεγαλύτερη επιρροή της Φωνημικής προσέγγιση υπό την Ολική προσέγγιση της Γλώσσας. Έπειτα, μελετήθηκε ο αντίκτυπος του μοντέλου στην πρόοδο της αρχικής αναγνωστικής ικανότητας των μικρών μαθητών μέσα στα πλαίσια μιας έρευνας δράσης η οποία περιλαμβάνει ημερολόγια της διδασκαλίας-ερευνήτριας, ηχογραφήσεις της τάξης, μια σειρά από τεστ και ένα ερωτηματολόγιο. Οι
1. Introduction

Teaching reading is central to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, as critical the initial steps to literacy may be, they are not always clear. Important questions regarding early literacy are difficult to be addressed: How do young learners actually learn to decode the print and extract meaning from it? What processes and strategies lead to the successful unlocking of the marks on the page? When are learners actually reading and not just ‘barking at print’, i.e. producing the right phonemes in the right order but without understanding what is read (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill and Pincas, 1980, p. 91)? Which theoretical approaches to teaching reading seem to be more effective at beginners’ level? In order to obtain answers to such questions, the actual circumstances in which learners are taught early reading skills need to be examined along with the impact of the implemented methodologies.

The present study is therefore concerned with the young learners’ first encounter with L2 reading. More specifically, it intends to identify the currently employed methodologies for the teaching of early reading to young learners in Greek primary schools. Then, the implementation of a balanced early reading model which combines two prominent approaches to teaching reading, namely phonics and whole language is explored. Finally, the impact of the implemented materials on the development of the young learners’ early reading skills is revealed with the help of a variety of data gathering tools.

2. Exploring the nature of reading

Reading can be defined as the process of getting meaning from print. However, the complexity and the multidimensionality of this fundamental skill are not captured by a simple definition. In 1980 Gough and Hillinger proposed the Simple view of reading with the intention of providing a framework which could explain reading. According to this view, reading (R) equals the product of decoding (D) and comprehension (C) (R=D×C). Its proponents maintain that the Simple view provides ‘an accurate description of reading ability’ (Gough, 1996, p. 4) since ‘a child who cannot decode cannot read; a child who cannot comprehend cannot read either’ (Gough, Hoover and Peterson, 1996, p. 3). Many studies (Kirby and Savage, 2008) have pinpointed that this view allows for valid predictions regarding learner progress in L1 reading up to the fourth grade. This model has been very influential; in fact it has been recommended by the Independent Review of the Teaching of Reading in the UK (DFES, 2006) as the framework that adequately explains the skill of reading and should inform early reading teaching practices. Whether the Simple View can accurately account for the relationship between decoding and comprehension is debated...
among scholars; however, there is consensus regarding the fact that both are fundamental for successful reading (Dombey, 2009). Therefore, these two components need to be addressed in order to gain a comprehensive insight into the nature of reading.

2.1. Decoding

Decoding refers to the process of using letter-to-sound correspondences in order to recognise words. Learners need to be able to understand that cat is different from car or hat because in each case different phonemes -and their corresponding letters- are involved. Therefore decoding is related to the immediate recognition of the letters and the phonemes they represent in a specific combination for a given word. In cat, it is essential to understand that the phonemes involved are /k/, /æ/ and /t/ and they are read as /kæt/. The goal of this process is to be able to break the code, i.e. to automatically apply the knowledge of the code in order to recognise new words. Decoding equips learners with the ability to access an infinite number of phoneme combinations, i.e. to virtually read anything.

Decoding is related to the notions of phonological awareness and phonemic awareness. Phonological awareness refers to the ability to understand that language is made up of phonemes, syllables and distinct words, i.e. that it is comprised of these separate elements and it is not a unified and indivisible string of sounds. Furthermore, phonemic awareness means that learners have the ability to detect, segment, add, delete, substitute and blend phonemes to create new words. Learner ease at manipulating phonemes leads to smooth grasping of the alphabetic principle i.e. that letters stand for phonemes. In reviewing the relevant literature, Adams (1990, p. 44) asserts that ‘knowledge of letters and phonemic awareness have been found to bear a strong and direct relationship to success and ease of reading acquisition’. This means that the role of decoding in learning to read is of paramount importance, as learners who achieve phoneme and word recognition early become successful readers and progress in reading comprehension (Demont and Gombert, 1996).

2.2. Comprehension

Word recognition is not enough for reading to occur; learners must simultaneously access the meaning of words in order to fully understand what they read (Hoover and Gough, 1990). Comprehension is therefore the counterpart of decoding. Comprehension in a language is achieved through speaking and listening; native speakers master their mother tongue before entering school settings by interacting with adults. When learners begin to learn to read it is important that the materials they encounter are linguistically and mentally appropriate, so that their background knowledge can be activated (Hoover and Gough, 1990; McNamara, Ozuru and Floyd, 2011). Familiarity of content is important in order for internal knowledge about language to be activated and valid meaning to be constructed (Stuart, Stainthorp and Snowling, 2008).

Furthermore, the National Reading Panel Report (Shanahan, 2005) underpins that ‘comprehension strategies are intentional actions that a reader can undertake to increase the chances of understanding or remembering the information in a text’. Comprehension includes thinking processes and problem solving techniques along with the activation of the learner’s inner lexicon. It is a complex process which cannot be taught directly as in the case of decoding. To this end, the gradual initiation and practice of multiple strategies related to successful comprehension is advisable (Shanahan, 2005).
2.3. Approaches to teaching reading

Before embarking on the quest for the most appropriate teaching methodology, it is necessary to present the most prominent characteristics of the different approaches to early reading as they have emerged through their implementation in various teaching contexts.

**The whole word approach**

The whole word approach is based on training the learners to recognise word cards. The words employed are of high frequency and this approach is an efficient way of building a good sight vocabulary rather quickly. Learners are therefore motivated as they are able to read many words at an early stage and their confidence is enhanced. However, lack of context is a serious limitation to this approach, as learner memory is soon saturated with plain words and learners may become disinterested (Cameron, 2001, p.148).

**The phonics approach**

The main idea around which the phonics approach evolves is the alphabetic principle: since letters represent sounds (phonemes) and their combination creates words, then focused and systematic instruction of sound-letter relationships leads to successful reading. Phonics instruction includes in depth elaboration of phonemes; segmenting, blending and phoneme isolation tasks are used to reinforce phonemic awareness. However, several issues related to decoding arise due to the opacity of the English language and the irregularities it presents regarding sound-letter patterns, with the striking example of function words (words such as *I, where, the, my*) are important to meaning and learners need to be able to read them. Also, context and meaning are not considered important in the early stages of teaching reading by this approach, a practice which may deprive learners of enhanced access to comprehension. Still, phonics instruction is considered an effective way of teaching reading as it provides learners with the most straightforward way of accessing the print during their first encounters with it (Cameron, 2001, p. 149; Beck and Juel, 1995, p.5)

**The whole language approach**

The whole language approach is focused on meaning and therefore it is considered a top down approach, a holistic way of involving learners with the print (Daniels, Zemelman and Bizar, 1999, p. 33) The linguistic context is of high importance and words are not presented in isolation; they are always integrated in context which is familiar and interesting for the learners, while lexical chunks are often employed as they carry more complex meaning than words and they are more useful for communication purposes. Distinct instruction on isolated phonemes is not supported by this approach which however may pose difficulties to some learners who are struggling to access both meaning and new, unknown letters and phonemes.

**The balanced approach**

In order to compromise the two approaches that have dominated the teaching of reading in what has been called ‘the language wars’, the balanced approach has been proposed. This approach embraces the most effective features of both the phonics and the whole language approach and combines the building of decoding skills and phonemic awareness with a focus on context and meaning (Donat, 2003 and 2006; Thogmartin, 1997). As pointed out earlier, the apparent disadvantage of phonics is that it focuses on decontextualised sounds, letters
and words while it does not cater for letter-phoneme irregularities. On the other hand, whole language does not promote direct decoding techniques, overlooking the alphabetic principle and the enhancement of phonemic awareness. This may cause problems to learners who fail to mentally establish letter sound relationships that are fundamental for smooth progress in reading. Therefore a reading method that encompasses elements from both approaches is considered more beneficial for young learners. The teaching of phonics is preferable within context, as familiar and enjoyable texts are an effective means of introducing and practicing phonemic features. On the other hand, whole language lessons must entail focused teaching of phonemic awareness which is a prerequisite for the development of the reading skill (Weaver, 2002, p.344).

3. The research questions and the research context

After pointing out the main approaches to teaching early reading, the study evolves in two levels. First, it aims at identifying the currently employed approach for the teaching of early L2 reading. Then, an early reading model based on the balanced approach is applied to a class of third graders and its effects on their progress are studied. The study’s actual content derives from the following questions.

1. Which approaches to early reading can be identified in the course book for Grade 3 (Magic Book, 2011)? What evidence is there of phonics and/or whole language approach in the ready-made materials?
2. How can the balanced approach be implemented in Grade 3 along with Magic Book?
3. What are the effects of the balanced phonics and whole language approach on the progress of the young learners’ reading skill?
4. What are the young learners’ attitudes towards the reading skill and the teaching methodology proposed?

The research was conducted with the 19 students of Grade 3 in a primary school near Korinthos.

3.1. Data collection tools

Battery of tests

The learners’ progress in reading was tested through 3 teacher-generated tests (an example in Appendix I) which include words and chunks the learners were exposed to during the implementation of the early reading model (Gove and Cvelich, 2010). The tests consist of 5 tasks:

- a known-word without context decoding task (Wren, 2002)
- a phonological awareness task (Murray, Smith and Murray, 2000)
- a non-word decoding task (Sprenger-Charolles and Messaoud-Galusi, 2009)
- a read-and-match the word to the picture task
- a lexical chunk task.

The learners took the test by reading the words and chunks aloud to the teacher for tasks 1, 3, 4 and 5 and by recognising a specific phoneme in various words the teacher read, for task 2.
The learners’ questionnaire

A questionnaire with 10 closed type questions with a three-choice scale (a lot, so and so, not really) was completed by the learners. The questions investigate the learners’ attitude, affective stance, reading strategies and reading preferences regarding the methodologies employed in class.

Teacher’s journals during classroom observation

The teacher noted down reading-related behaviour such as reading attempts and self correction, learners’ questions and observations, but also indications of classroom atmosphere and motivation levels (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

Recordings

The teacher’s journals were supplemented and cross checked with classroom recordings as they provide authentic reading instances and real time, permanent data that can be re-examined.

4. Findings

4.1. Research question 1: Existing materials

Magic Book

The pilot edition of Magic Book was used in the 3rd grade for the teaching of early reading. The book exhibits features from all the aforementioned approaches. More specifically, in the pre unit basic principles of phonics approach are apparent, such as the non alphabetic order and the consistency of letter-phoneme relationship as criteria for the presentation of letters. Also, word cards are widely used; a loan from the whole word approach in order for learners to build an initial sight vocabulary. In the rest of the units however, the whole language approach is dominant. Children’s literature and popular fairytales are used as reading texts. Familiarity of content is important in order for the learners’ background knowledge to be activated. Moreover, on linguistic level, lexical chunks are presented within context in order to facilitate learners to remember and use them.

4.2. Research question 2: The implemented methodology

A balanced early reading model

The model which was implemented for the purposes of this study is based on both phonics and whole language; therefore it follows the balanced approach. Schematically, the components of the model that guided the practices employed in class are presented in Figure 1. Context is considered focal in the model and it is placed in the centre exactly because it is central to the actual teaching that the model intends to inform. Thus, phonemes and chunks are intended to be practiced within context, while at the same time the context, i.e. a particular story or communicative situation, guides the decisions regarding which phonemes and chunks to present to the learners. Therefore, the relationship between phonemes and context on the one hand and lexical chunks and context on the other is reciprocal. The goal of the model is to integrate the decoding of the printed text with the
actual understanding of its meaning, i.e. to achieve both the right spelling out of the script and comprehension of its content.

![Diagram of phonics approach and whole language approach](image)

**Figure 1. Realisation of the balanced early reading model**

The model guides the teaching practices that were employed for the purposes of the specific study. Magic book was followed but at certain points, teacher-generated materials and techniques were also implemented.

**Observation routine**

During the observation routine the teacher presented pictures of objects and the corresponding word cards and then encouraged the learners to observe the letters in these words. Then, the learners were invited to listen carefully to the corresponding sounds, repeat them and try to discover similarities and differences among words and also between different readings of the same letter, depending on its position in the word. They became familiar with sound-letter correspondences and they practised recognising and combining phonemes. They experimented with deleting or adding phonemes and letters to existing words in order to create new ones. They also practiced detecting rhymes and applying them to the reading of new words. This oral work was implicit phonics teaching and learners were very positive towards it.

**Posters**

Two posters (Appendix IV) were used in order to provide context for the practicing of new words: a ‘body parts’ poster and a ‘places’ poster. Learners read cards with words and pinned them on the right place, showing they were able to both decode and understand the meaning of the words and the context in which they could be encountered. The posters help with revision and memory enhancement and are also consistent to the whole word approach.

**Big books and Mini books**

Using Big books and Mini books (Appendices II and III) in class provided the learners with a reading experience that derives from both phonics and whole language tradition and rendered the learning experience interesting and motivating.
Big books are considered important in the whole language approach. They presuppose shared reading, which is a scaffolding practice: the learners are encouraged and guided on the way to independent reading by the teacher and their classmates. Shared reading enhances comprehension as it gives the participants the chance to predict content, relate it to their background knowledge and check understanding (Kraayenoord and Paris, 1996).

For the purposes of this study, the teacher created her own Big books because familiarity of content is of paramount importance if reading in a foreign language is to be promoted. No commercially available Big book can include the language the specific learners are exposed to. In this light, the two Big books include words and chunks familiar to the learners, stories and heroes taken from Magic book and pictures and flip-flaps that arouse learner interest and motivation. Big books provide the visual aids to teach new phonemes, letters, words, sentences and chunks; in this way, a framework for revision and further practice is also created.

Mini books on the other hand are more personalised. Their main purpose is to provide material that matches the learners’ early reading level for reading practice at home. It is important to be able to read and understand something outside the school setting, without the teacher’s help; the learners’ confidence and sense of success is reinforced and they acquire a positive stance towards the language. Mini books promote silent reading that enhances comprehension and recycling of vocabulary. They were created in class by the learners who wrote and read their own pages based on known vocabulary.

4.3. Research question 3: The effects of the balanced approach on learner progress

Test results

The learners reacted to the reading test positively. They were very interested in all the tasks and expressed willingness to participate in the tests. The results are summarised by task as follows.

In the first task, the learners were asked to decode a known word that was presented out-of-context. Since nothing was included that could trigger their memory but the phonemes themselves, they needed to rely on their decoding skills alone to complete the task. As the results show, they were able to decode most of the words correctly. Moreover, their results improved in the two following tests, pointing to the direction of a positive course of development for the decoding of decontextualised words (Figure 2).

![Figure 2. Comparative representation of the results of the decoding task (task 1) across the 3 tests. Number of words (in a total of 5) decoded by the students](image-url)
The second task was a phonological awareness task, aiming to check the learners’ ability to recognise some unusual phonemes for speakers with Greek as L1 (such as [/ʃ/, /ʌ/ or /ə/]). The results pinpoint that the learners’ phonemic awareness is at a good level. They were able to recognise most of the phonemes in all the tests with the exception of test 3, where they didn’t succeed in distinguishing /ɑː/ from /æ/, the most difficult distinction they were asked to make in all 3 tests (Figure 3).

![Figure 3. Comparative representation of the results of the phonological awareness task (task 2) across the 3 tests. Number of phonemes (in a total of 9) recognised by the students](image)

The third task was a non-word decoding task. It was the most demanding, as learners needed more time to tackle with the pseudo-words. They struggled in the first two tests, misreading mose as /maʊs/ or /mæze/ and not as /maʊs/ (rhyming with nose) and kine as /ˈkɪn/ and not /ˈkain/ or at least /kin/. But by the time of the third test the learners’ skills had improved significantly and they succeeded in decoding rupper as /ˈrʌpə(r)/ and flide as /ˈflaid/ putting the silent e rule into practice (Figure 4).

![Figure 4. Comparative representation of the results of the non-word task (task 3) across the 3 tests. Number of words (in a total of 5) decoded by the students](image)

For the next task the learners had to read a word and match it to the right picture. In almost all cases they were able to both read the known words and match them to pictures accordingly. This underpins the interrelationship between the graphic representation of words and images, as indicated by the whole word approach. Furthermore, the learners were more eager to complete this task as they clearly found a purpose in matching the words to the pictures; they also described it as easier and more pleasant (Figure 5).
Task 5 was a chunk reading task and the learners were successful in reading most of the chunks even from the first test. The use of pictures along with the lexical chunks increased the learners’ willingness and readiness to read. It also became obvious that they felt more comfortable when reading a word within a sentence. Even if they managed to partially read the chunk or sentence, still they experienced a feeling of success. Reading within context supports the whole language approach since learners were better in recognising and reading chunks within context than in isolation (Figure 6).

![Figure 5](image1.png)

*Figure 5. Comparative representation of the results of the decoding with context task (task 4) across the 3 tests. Number of words (in a total of 5) decoded by the students.*

![Figure 6](image2.png)

*Figure 6. Comparative representation of the results of the chunks reading task (task 5) across the 3 tests. Number of chunks (in a total of 5) read by the students.*

On the whole, the learners performed best in tasks 4 and 5; thus the necessity for the use of pictures and context in early reading in order to facilitate young learners to both decode and understand is underpinned. The results pinpoint learner progress on both the phonemic and the lexical level while they stress the role of context in word and chunk reading (Gibbons, 1991; Nation and Snowling, 2004).

**Classroom observation and recordings**

The most prevailing data deriving from the classroom observation and the recordings are grouped into broad conclusions with examples from classroom evidence that support them.
Learners with previous tutoring in letter naming found it more difficult to decode new words while students without prior exposure to letters in alphabetic order were better at decoding phonemes and words.

Some researchers claim that letter naming can cause confusion to beginner learners (Donat, 2003; Sprenger-Charolles and Messaoud-Galusi, 2009). During this study the students weren’t exposed to letter naming; however some of them attend afternoon language schools where letter naming is considered important. It is possible to trace such influence in students who tended to call out the name of a letter instead of the phoneme it represents when attempting to decode a new word. For example:

Transcript 1:
Word: skirt
T: how can we read the first letter?
Gregory: /es/
T: the next one?
Gregory: /kei/
T: how do we read them together?
Gregory:….. (blank)

Transcript 2:
Word: notebook
T: What’s the first letter?
Gregory: /en/
T: not /n/?
Gregory: yes, /n/

On the other hand, students were quicker and more effective in decoding letters with the right phoneme when letter naming was not involved.

Students were able to make their own phonemic rules, apply them to different words and add exceptions. For example, the students stated that letter w is read /w/ at the beginning of words, but /s/ at the end of them like in watermelon, yellow, window. They also decided that double o is read /u:/ in school, zoo, foot, book, classroom but not in door. The same happens with cluster ch which is /tʃ/ in teacher and chair but not in school (their examples). They also concluded that letter e at the end of words is not read and mentioned the words apple, juice, kite, ice, shoe as examples. They also created more complex rules as in this case:

Transcript 3
Word: pencil
Panos: c is /s/ and not /k/ like in ‘car’.
John: because in front of /c/ there is /n/

Transcript 4
Word: (pencil) case
Students: a is read /ei/ and not /æ/ because it’s in the middle of words

The generation of rules is a language related behaviour that can contribute to the linguistic development of young learners (Thogmartin, 1997).
Students were concerned with the schematic representation of phonemes. During the learners’ experimentation with phonemes they showed interest in the way the sounds are represented in their written form. Dessara wrote x on the board to explain to her classmates that it is read /ks/ like in Alex and fox while Marinos produced his own written representation of his perceived pronunciation of the body parts (Figure 7).

![Figure 7](image)

Associations between sounds, letters and actual shapes are useful tools that enhance memory and facilitate the reading process (Thogmartin, 1997).

Students may need focused help with their decoding skills (Donat, 2003).

One particular student provided insight into the way reading can be dealt with by some learners. The student found it difficult to recognise and distinguish between most phonemes, for example /d/ and /b/, /p/ and the Greek /r/ (/p/) or /i/ and /l/. The teacher implemented a short intervention of explicit and focused phonics instruction with the student, as recommended by Weaver (2002) and after just a few extra lessons she was more confident and willing to participate in reading. Her reading skills improved and she was soon able to independently read for longer.

The data that derive from classroom observation reveal that young learners employed a wide repertoire of practices which includes sound associations, visual cues or their own reading rules, as part of their efforts to learn to read (Weaver, 2002).

4.6. Research question 4: Learners’ attitude towards the balanced approach and the reading skill

The questionnaire results

The students reacted enthusiastically to the questionnaire (Appendix V), showed interest in it and completed it carefully. The answers reveal that the whole class is positive towards the language and reading, as 19/19 students answered they like reading in English a lot and 17/19 that they find it very easy (questions 1 and 2). In question 3, regarding Magic Book, 15 students responded that they like reading from it a lot and the remaining 4 are neither positive nor negative towards it. Big books and word cards, which are also part of the
implemented reading methodology, received positive responses as 17/19 and 16/19 students respectively answered they like them a lot (questions 4 and 5). Question 6 revealed that 11 students do not feel anxious when encountering new words to read, but 4 are reluctant in deciding how they feel, while the remaining 4 are really anxious about it and find it difficult. On the whole, most students do not feel threatened when they need to decode unknown words and they also approve the reading materials and techniques which derive from the balanced model rationale.

Questions 7 and 8 are concerned with the strategies students employ when attempting to read new words. Half the students prefer decoding new words letter by letter while the other half of the class does not use this route to approach them. On the other hand, the strategy of whole word reading is employed by 14 students with only 2 rejecting it completely. These results reveal the complexity and the variety of approaches learners employ when reading and point to the direction of the implementation of techniques that cater for all of these ways, for example phonemic instruction for the letter to letter decoding and sight words within context for whole word reading. The implementation of the balanced early reading model points to this direction.

The answers to questions 9 and 10 reveal that 12 students read a lot and 5 sometimes read their Mini books at home, while 11 read a lot and 4 sometimes read Magic book alone. Two students do not read their Mini Books and 4 do not read Magic book at all at home. Mini books are therefore useful complementary material providing students with appropriate and appealing reading texts and reinforcing their reading experience along with Magic Book.

5. Conclusion and implications

The picture that emerges from this research regarding the relationship of young learners and early reading in English is extremely interesting and brings to the foreground several issues. Regarding the approaches to teaching reading, both phonics and the whole language approach seem to contribute to the enhancement of young learners’ early reading skills. The balanced early reading model combines elements from both these approaches leading to positive indications regarding learner progress in reading, as pointed out by the test results. But apart from decoding and comprehension skills, young learners also need to enjoy learning in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere with appropriate reading materials that allow them to experiment and at the same time boost their confidence. By carefully observing the way the specific learners interacted with the materials and by using a questionnaire to ask for their opinion, it became obvious that these goals were achieved and that learners not only improved in reading, but also felt very positive towards it.

However, more research could be conducted in the future, on a larger scale and with a bigger sample of learners in order to pinpoint more clearly the strategies they employ in their first efforts to decode. The present study has shown that almost all learners attempted to read words as a whole, while half of the class also employed letter-by-letter decoding. It would be extremely useful for coursebook designers as well as teachers, to understand the extent to which learners make use of these strategies and thus gain some insight into the way their mind works regarding reading. This should lead to appropriate decisions concerning approaches to reading and reading materials to be implemented in order to facilitate young learners master this skill and upgrade the actual teaching and learning that takes place in our classrooms.
References

Kirby, J.R. and Savage, R.S. (2008). ‘Can the simple view deal with the complexities of reading?’ *Literacy, 42/2*: 75–82.


Appendix I

Test 1

Test 1
1) hat lion juice bell car
2) a) 1. 2. 3. 
b) 1. 2. 3. 
c) 1. 2. 3. 
3) dat jat zin wil pim
4) watermelon monkey jumper tall small
5) What’s this?
It’s a fat dog.
It’s a purple egg.
It’s an orange skirt.
It’s a short dress.

Research Papers in Language Teaching and Learning
Appendix II: Sample pages from Big books
Appendix III: Sample pages from Mini books

I'm Kari and your name?  
What's Hello! Let's go to school. 
Hello Lena!  
this is my friend Tammy.

We do jigsaw togethe.

I can swing in the park.

I play hopscotch with my friend.

I can run in the sports centre.

Hi! I'm Pinocchio!
Appendix IV: Posters
### Appendix V: The learners’ questionnaire

Βάζω X στη σωστή φατσούλα για μένα!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Όνομα:</th>
<th>Πολύ</th>
<th>Έτσι κι έτσι</th>
<th>Σχεδόν καθόλου</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Μου αρέσει να διαβάζω στα Αγγλικά.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Μου φαίνεται εύκολο να διαβάζω στα Αγγλικά.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Έχω άγχος όταν διαβάζουμε καινούριες λέξεις γιατί είναι δύσκολες.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Μου αρέσει να διαβάζω το Magic Book.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Μου αρέσει να διαβάζω το μεγάλο βιβλίο (Big Book).</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Μου αρέσει να διαβάζω τις κάρτες με τις καινούριες λέξεις.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Όταν διαβάζω καινούριες λέξεις προσπαθώ να διαβάσω κάθε γράμμα χωριστά.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Όταν διαβάζω μια καινούρια λέξη προσπαθώ να τη διαβάσω ολόκληρη.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Διαβάζω μόνος μου/μόνη μου το βιβλιαράκι μου (Mini book) στο σπίτι.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Διαβάζω μόνος μου/μόνη μου το Magic Book στο σπίτι.</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
<td>Ακριβώς και άλλο</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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E-books in early literacy: The effects of a balanced Phonics and Whole Language approach on the development of young learners’ reading skills

Elli KONSTANTOPOULOU

The present study explores the ways beginner readers of the English language develop their reading skill. The main purpose of this research is to present and investigate the effectiveness of a story-based syllabus in a class of third grade young learners who are learning English as a foreign language within the context of a Greek public primary school. For the achievement of the aforementioned purpose, the study proposed a balanced approach that encompassed elements from the two most influential approaches to teaching reading, namely Phonics and Whole language approach. A brief reference will be made to the research design (method, context, participants) as well as to the results of the study and the pedagogical implications arising from them.

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξερευνά τους τρόπους τους οι οποίους οι αρχάριοι μαθητές αναπτύσσουν την αναγνωστική τους ικανότητα. Ο κύριος σκοπός της έρευνας είναι να παρουσιάσει και να ερευνήσει την αποτελεσματικότητα του προγράμματος διδασκαλίας μέσω ιστοριών σε μια τάξη νεαρών μαθητών τρίτης δημοτικού που μαθαίνουν Αγγλικά ως ξένη γλώσσα στα πλαίσια του Ελληνικού Δημοσίου δημοτικού σχολείου. Για την επίτευξη του στόχου που προαναφέρθηκε, η έρευνα προτείνει μια εξισορροπημένη προσέγγιση που περιέχει στοιχεία από τις δύο προσεγγίσεις στη διδασκαλία της ανάγνωσης με τη μεγαλύτερη επιρροή, δηλαδή τη Φωνημική και την Ολιστική προσέγγιση της γλώσσας. Θα γίνει μια σύντομη αναφορά στο σχεδιασμό της έρευνας (μεθοδολογία, περιεχόμενο, συμμετέχοντες) καθώς επίσης και στα αποτελέσματα της μελέτης και στα παιδαγωγικά ευρήματα που προκύπτουν από αυτά.
Key words: E-books, phonics, whole language, early literacy, stories, story-based syllabus, third grade learners

1. Introduction

Reading is considered to be a crucial life skill that equips people with the ability to come into contact with the print and construct meaning from written texts. Much as with any language skill the teaching of reading is a complex matter. With reference to EFL learning in particular, second language literacy is a complicated area and as far as young learners are concerned, there is much that remains unknown. In the past decade, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to studying how English learners develop language and literacy skills, with a special focus on reading development (Gersten & Geva, 2003:44). As Anderson, Heibert, Scott and Wilkinson (1985) state, reading is a cornerstone for a child’s success in schools, and indeed, throughout life. Learners develop their language skills in their early primary years since they must acquire the knowledge, skills and strategies that will allow them to read and think critically. There is a wide range of teaching methodologies and theoretical approaches to teaching reading to young learners, but what the most appropriate and effective one is, it is still under consideration.

Taking the above-mentioned issues into account, the particular study explores young learners’ first encounter with reading in English within the context of a Greek public primary school. A story based syllabus that adopts a combined Phonics and Whole language approach to teaching reading is designed and implemented in order to investigate to which extent it is effective in developing young learners’ reading skills. Combining primarily qualitative as well as quantitative methodology, data will be gained from the analysis of the reading tests, the students’ questionnaire, the teacher journal and the classroom recordings as well.

2. The nature of reading: the significance or early decoding skill and comprehension

Reading has been defined by many as “the process of constructing meaning from written texts” (Anderson et al., 1985; Calfoglou, 2004). Recent reading theories have attempted to shed light on this complicated as well as demanding skill by supporting that reading involves a blend of lower and higher level processes (Calfoglou, 2004 : 85). Certain abilities must be developed that work together to create strong reading skills that include phonemic awareness, decoding ability and comprehension skills.

To begin with, decoding simply refers to the process of using letter-to-sound correspondences in order to recognize words. It equips learners with the ability to translate the printed letters into sounds and perceive the difference that lies between two words as well. For instance, the words cat and fat differ in the onset /k/ and /f/ (the initial consonants) while the rime /at/ (the remaining vowel and consonants) remains the same in both words (Beck & Juel, 1995: 4).

Acknowledging the value of decoding skills, another issue closely related to decoding is that of phonological awareness which can take the form of awareness of rhyme, syllables and onsets of words. More specifically, phonological awareness often refers to the ability to deal
explicitly and segmentally with sound units smaller than the syllable or better manipulate units of sounds in speech (Calfoglou, 2004: 96; Stanovich, 2000: 396). On the other hand, within the notion of phonological awareness, phonemic awareness plays its own role in reading. Phonemic awareness involves hearing language at the phoneme level and can be defined as the ability to hear and manipulate the sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken words are made up of sequences of speech sounds (Yopp, 1992: 696). The ability to hear and manipulate phonemes plays a causal role in the acquisition of beginning reading skills (Smith, Simmons & Shakweiler, 1985).

Even though decoding is a significant skill that readers should possess in order to recognize the printed words and their sounds, it is not adequate for understanding a written text. As a matter of fact, decoding along with linguistic comprehension are held to be interdependent and neither one is more or less necessary than the other. By and large, comprehension is considered to be a “creative multifaceted process” and can be defined as the ability to understand and gain meaning from what is read. Proficient readers use a variety of comprehension strategies simultaneously such as activating background knowledge and drawing valid inferences about what they have read. Since constructing meaning from text is not a separate literacy skill, students should not only be provided with explicit instruction in comprehension strategies but they must be also able to decode or recognize words easily in order to be successful at reading. To this end, decoding and comprehension are two areas of immediate interest regarding early reading teaching techniques and should be learned together.

2.1. Teaching reading in English to Greek young learners

Having examined the nature of reading, the issue of how young learners learn to read in the English language needs to be addressed in detail. Since reading is considered to be a basic life skill, learners commence their reading quest in the Greek language at a very young age, approximately at the age of 6-7 years old through instruction in their primary schools.

Greek learners benefit greatly from basic instruction in letter-to-sound- correspondences and are able to recognize words quickly and easily which leads to a major developmental path to L1 word recognition and early L1 reading (Goswami, 2006; Grabe, 2009:117; Porpodas, 2006). It is also worth mentioning that English has the most opaque alphabetic orthography, thus learning to read in English is very different from reading in Greek. Without a doubt, this opacity in English can create some problems to the Greek learners who need to switch from a more to a less transparent orthography (Calfoglou, 2004: 89).

In the light of the above, the differences that share the two languages may pose some barriers on the route to independent reading, indicating the significance of L1 literacy though, which should be definitely taken into serious account in the L2 reading class.

2.3. Phonics and Whole language learning: A balanced approach to beginning reading

Learning to read and write can begin from text level, sentence or word. Each starting point has produced approaches to teaching reading beginning in first language. Approaches such as the Language Experience approach, the Whole Word/Look and Say approach, the Phonics approach and the Whole Language approach/ Real Books have both influenced the way L1 and L2 are taught and learnt, distinguishing two of the most influential though, namely the Phonics and Whole language approach for the purpose of this study.
The Phonics approach to teaching reading instruction has been treated as particularly beneficial in the first language context (Calfoglou, 2004:92). It focuses on letter-sound relations and involves learning the letters of a language as well as sounding out letters in a word as in cat, /k/ /a/ /t/ for instance, thus building literacy skills from the bottom up (Calfoglou, 2004: 92 ; Cameron, 2000: 149; Zouganeli, 2004: 20). Phonics advocates argue that if a person is able to decode the text correctly, meaning and understanding will follow. Hence, through the act of decoding the text, the reader discovers what the message is (Wren, 2003:1). Phonics teaching directs children’s attention to letter-sound level features of the language since it emphasizes the alphabetic principle according to which letters represent the sound of speech. Children have the opportunity to learn letter sounds (b= the first sound in bat and ball) and then blend them to form words (bl=the first two sounds in blue). What is more, children continue their progress in reading by learning how to segment and chunk letter sounds in order to blend them to form words (trap= /t/ /r/ /a/ /p/ or /tr/ /ap/). In this way, children familiarize themselves with the sound-symbol relationship and become able to transfer this knowledge to new unknown words (Zouganeli, 2004: 20).

Contrasted often with known phonics-based methods of reading, the Whole language approach was introduced by Smith and Goodman (1971). It is also called the “Real Books” approach since real books, i.e. books written to read for pleasure are used in the language classroom (Zouganeli, 2004: 18). Within a whole language perspective the meaning of texts is emphasized over the sounds of letters and phonics instruction becomes just one component of the whole language classroom. It is regarded as a top down approach since during a whole language reading session emphasis is not placed on reading precision and accuracy but on comprehension and appreciation (Wren, 2003: 1). More specifically, readers construct a personal meaning for a text based on using prior knowledge to interpret the meaning of what they are reading. In the simplest terms, the whole language is a method of teaching children to read by recognizing words or phrases as whole pieces of language. Thus, lexical chunks or prefabricated phrases are preferred, which are pair or group of words, commonly found together and they are typically related to functional use of language. (Schmitt, 2000: 400). As already mentioned, some important aspects of the whole language philosophy include an emphasis on literature. Therefore, stories are of paramount importance in a whole language classroom since they are primarily used by teachers to teach and foster literacy. Cameron (2001:139) views stories as holistic approaches to language teaching and learning which focus on children’s involvement with rich, authentic uses of the foreign language.

They are placed in contrast and many educators have indeed debated for many years about which is the best approach to teach children to read. On one side of the spectrum stands the Phonics approach, a bottom-up approach that focuses on spelling-sound relationships, while on the other side is the Whole language approach, characterized as a top-down one, according to which meaning and context are of paramount importance. It seems that the differences between these methods are largely related to what is emphasized and the sequence of skill instruction. However, both instructional methods use elements that are emphasized in the other.

Therefore, a balanced approach that encompasses elements from both approaches is more beneficial for young learners. The combination of Phonics with some elements of Whole language, particularly those that emphasize reading comprehension, seems to be an appropriate method to teaching reading in English. This way, children are able to develop functional phonics knowledge in the context of authentic reading (Weaver, 1994: 1).
On the whole, a literacy-rich classroom environment accompanied with explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, word recognition and comprehension strategies will help develop children’s literacy acquisition.

3. The implemented approach to teaching reading: the parallel story-based syllabus

The parallel story-based framework developed for the purposes of this study, encompasses elements from the two most influential approaches, namely the Phonics and Whole language approach, therefore it follows the balanced approach as described previously. This is clearly reflected in the activities designed throughout the eight teaching sessions that aim to engage students in practising phonemes and chunks within context. Apparently, the main aim of the parallel syllabus is to create the optimal conditions under which learners will develop their reading skill through the use of authentic stories accompanied with meaningful and purposeful activities. An attempt was made to design a parallel story framework that adopts some useful elements from the technology-based approach since the authentic stories used are in the form of electronic story books (e-Books).

3.1. The significant contribution of stories in children’s foreign language development

Stories are placed at the centre of the current parallel syllabus design as they can lay the foundations for more positive attitudes towards the English language, since children are acquainted with this genre from an early age. Bearing in mind that reading is the key that unlocks these stories, it becomes obvious that children’s story books can turn into useful tools for the foreign language learning.

Acknowledging the true value of stories in the language classroom, four stories were selected for the purposes of this study; two well-known classic fairy tales for children, namely ‘Goldilocks’ and ‘Pinocchio’, along with two of the most popular fables of Aesop ‘Country mouse, city mouse’ and ‘The ant and the grasshopper’ (Appendix I). The four stories seem to be familiar to the young learners from their everyday life; Pinocchio and Goldilocks have been read as bedtime stories countless times while the two Aesop fables are extremely popular with the Greek students thanks to the renowned Greek story-teller Aesop.

3.2. The educational technology: the preference for e-Books over traditional storybooks

A reference should be made to the significance of educational technology since it is evident throughout the story sessions. Educational technology refers to any kind of technology that can be used in the language classroom (Slaouti & Kanellopoulou, 2005:17). The increasing number of electronic storybooks verifies to a certain degree the significance of the educational technology.

It is broadly known that media and technology provide increasingly more chances for children to contact the language and that is the reason why they are finding more and more their way into the foreign language classroom. Given that ‘young learners are digital natives and they should be more familiar with the technology’ (Fatimah, 2012:141), the incorporation of interactive e-Books in the story-based framework is critical for developing both learners’ decoding skills, comprehension skills and multiple literacies.
Electronic storybooks can be considered as one of those means of technology that can be used successfully in teaching English as a foreign language and can indeed be ‘a powerful tool and an asset to reading’ (Davis & Pearman, 2005:453). Moody (2010:27) defines the electronic story books or simply e-Books as: ‘an electronic form of a book with features similar to those of a traditional print book including pages that ‘turn’, and digital features that can assist the reader such as word pronunciations, text highlighting, and text-to-speech options and hypermedia (e.g. video, animations and sound).’ Without a doubt, the four e-Books used throughout the syllabus seem to be extremely appealing to learners and especially to young learners since they provide ‘animation, sound effects and game-like formats’ to support comprehension as McKenna et al. (1996:3) correctly report.

Another feature of the e-Books that helps children increase their reading ability is the ‘reading aloud’ element that these books provide. Thanks to the ‘read aloud’ option, children cannot only learn new words, but also hear how they are properly pronounced. In this way, story-telling can be facilitated in a foreign language classroom by using this useful option, thereby making the young readers become more confident in their own reading ability by paying attention to the pronunciation of the words and the flow of reading. What is more, learners’ decoding skills can be surely enhanced thanks to another feature that eBooks contain; that of highlighting or enlarging words. According to a research conducted by Wandy Hoh and her team cited in Bacon (2013:1), highlighting and narration draws children’s eyes to words. Hence, it can be beneficial for young learners to employ the automatic features in such enhanced picture books since they combine recorded human voices with highlighted words that can help children associate words with sounds. Moving to the development of the comprehension skills, the particular e-Books manage to support learners’ understanding of the stories thanks to the animated illustrations and sounds of the movements of the characters that contain. These two elements effectively contribute to the reading comprehension that, according to Ertem (2010:140), is ‘crucial to the development of children’s reading skill’.

3.3. Analysis of the activities within the eight teaching sessions

The exploitation of the electronic books and the corresponding activities tend to engage learners in the learning process right from the beginning. Williams (1998) rightfully claims in her article that the activities in which the learners will get involved should be meaningful, interesting and purposeful within a clear, familiar context. With Williams’ suggestion in mind, an array of tasks for the syllabus relevant to the students’ interests, cognitive as well as linguistic level is proposed for the needs of this study.

Through the four stories, knowledge and skills at letter-sound level are practised by choosing from each story repeated patterns to focus on. To this end, activities that develop learners’ phonological and phonemic awareness are evident throughout the lessons. Blending activities, segmentation tasks and rhyming chants are designed with a view to drawing the learners’ attention to the sound-letter relationships (Appendix II). All the above activities seem to lead learners to work more on phonemes and enable them to put conscious effort in decoding correctly or deciphering the printed text that is the ultimate goal.

Following carefully the early reading model adopted for this study that contains not only phonics based activities but also whole language activities (Appendix III), it becomes clear that the syllabus contains also tasks that provide holistic learning experiences. Casting an eye over the various activities of the eight teaching sessions it becomes obvious that
learners are introduced to some story sequencing tasks. The contribution of games, songs and drama to children’s language development is also highlighted throughout this framework. These features could neither be ignored nor neglected from this syllabus since they motivate students and can create a pleasant unwinding classroom atmosphere which is conducive both to the learning process and the affective development of students. It is equally important that learners have the opportunity to become familiar with grammatical and syntactic clues that appear in the stories in a playful way, thereby building a bank of chunks that facilitate automaticity.

Additionally, puppets and drama have their own role in the syllabus. Drama is seen as a part of everyday reality for children and a rather novel and fulfilling schooling experience, which, according to Zouganeli (2004:144-145), can add variety and action to the foreign language classroom. Except for songs and puppets, games play their own role in the syllabus. Halliwell (1994:20) mentions that ‘games help change the atmosphere in the classroom and stir the class’.

On the whole, the book’s migration to the digital realm seems to have changed the way today’s children read. Stories in the form of e-Books along with suitable activities provide extra context for effective whole class reading and language practice while learners are experimenting with phonemes and improving their decoding and comprehension skills in an attractive, enjoyable learning environment.

4. Methodology of the research

4.1. The current teaching situation and learners’ profile

This experimental research was conducted in the third grade of a Greek public primary school in Agrinio. The class consists of 19 students; 10 boys and 9 girls. They are all Greek monolingual learners who have been together since the first grade and have been learning English as a foreign language for about one to two years. Additionally, they are at the breakthrough stage of the basic level (A1) according to the “Common Reference levels” of the Common European Framework. The school participates in «Ε.Α.Ε.Π» (Ενιαίο Αναμορφωμένο Εκπαιδευτικό Πρόγραμμα), thus English is included in the first and second grade’s curriculum.

Concerning their reading level, the majority of students managed to read satisfyingly at the beginning of the study while two of them faced great difficulties, since they could not even decode a known word let alone read a whole sentence. Nonetheless, these students did show great progress in reading after the intervention, which will become evident in the presentation of the results.

4.2. Conducting action research for data collection

The method selected for the specific study has been the action research method, aiming at systematic reflection over teaching practice and further action. Action research is widely used in education as a useful tool in testing hypotheses and research questions built within the educational context. Of equal or perhaps even greater importance is that it can be used as a means of critical reflection on aspects of reading instruction and students’ learning with a view to providing insight into the teaching and learning that takes place in a classroom. Hence, the reading teacher can be seen as an action researcher who looks critically at her
classroom, reflects and enhances the quality of learning that takes place through the systematic analysis and collection of data.

Research questions usually and naturally lead to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The action research method conducted in the particular way, constitutes both a quantitative and qualitative approach, since more that one method of data collecting is used. This multi-method approach is known as triangulation and its key is ‘to see the same thing from different perspectives and confirm or challenge the findings of one method with those of another’ (Laws, 2003 cited in Bell, 2010:118; Richards, 2001:59). To this end, a series of reading tests and a learners’ questionnaire offer numerical data while the teacher’s journal, the class observations and recordings of the lessons provide a rich amount of information on qualitative basis.

4.3. The description of the data collection tools

4.3.1. A series of reading tests

A series of five reading tests tailored to the content and teaching methods that the students were exposed to were used throughout the eight teaching sessions; a pre-test that aimed to measure learners’ reading performance before the intervention while the other four tests were administrated after every story reading session with a view to measuring their progress when a two-hour story-based lesson was completed. The tests consist of 5 tasks; the majority of them are reading aloud tasks on one-to-one basis between the teacher and each student. As for the order of the tasks, the tests begin with the decontextualized tasks and proceed to more contextualized ones.

4.3.2. The learners’ questionnaire

A questionnaire was employed for the purposes of this study in order to elicit learner’s views on the reading skill and the teaching practices the educator adopted throughout the eight story-based sessions. Meticulous attention was paid to ensure that individual questions are clear, relevant and appropriate for students’ age with a view to obtaining as much as possible valid responses to the questions. More specifically, the particular questionnaire consists of ten (10) items that are actually short, simple statements written in the mother tongue of the learners (Greek) since learners’ young age was a factor to take into account in order to avoid making them feel confused and frustrated.

4.3.3. Recordings of the eight teaching sessions and tests

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data contributes to the enhancement of the validity of the research and as a consequence more reliable findings are provided. Acknowledging the value of information on a qualitative basis, keeping records of the teaching sessions and tests was one of the most appropriate sources of data collection selected for the specific study among others.

Students were engaged several times in reading aloud tasks and participated in the reading tests, thus their performance, behaviour and reactions were audio recorded by using the appropriate recording device. Additionally, they offered the opportunity to cross check what the educator had actually written down while observing in class.
4.3.4. Teacher’s journal and classroom observation

Classroom observations and teacher’s journals can provide invaluable information to the researcher that would have been impossible to discover by other means. In this study, the researcher takes the place of the observer and gathers data concerning learners’ behaviour, their reading performance as well as the classroom atmosphere. Since students are involved in read-aloud tasks, notes are taken throughout the teaching sessions that include how the students progress in reading, their attempt to decode correctly and their participation in the various reading tasks. Journals help to that direction as well since the educator can keep a written record of what actually happens in the classroom (Grabe & Stoller, 2011:175; Richards & Lockhart, 1996:7).

On the whole, the specific data-collection techniques cannot be tabulated or translated to numbers since they provide qualitative data. However, they can be easily reviewed and give a rich amount of information, thus leading the researcher to both some interesting interpretations and conclusions.

5. Presentation and analysis of research findings

4.1. The results of the tests

A pre-test (Appendix IV) was administrated to students and aimed to measure learners’ reading performance before the intervention while the other four tests were administrated after every story reading session with a view to measuring their progress when a two-hour story-based lesson was completed. The particular reading tests reveal interesting information concerning learners’ reading performance and provide us with some intriguing results that are summarized below.

The aim of task 1 was to test students’ decoding ability without the help of context. The overall results of this task show that the young learners did not face any particular difficulties in this task since they decoded correctly the words; they performed successfully with phonemes presented out of context and made gradual progress throughout the four tests (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Comparative representation of the results of the decoding task (task 1) across the five tests](image-url)
The second task aimed at testing whether reading is result of conscious decoding or confirming that students manage to decode consciously and not recognize words as a whole. The results of the pseudo-word task point to the direction that the young learners managed to apply their phonemic knowledge, improve their decoding skills to a great extent and made progress in deciphering non words, considering the demanding nature of the task as well as students’ first encounter with pseudo words (Figure 2).

![Figure 2: Comparative representation of the results of the pseudo word task across the five tests (task 2)]

Task 3 was intended to test if students can combine successfully decoding and meaning. The pictures strongly supported their comprehension and decoding skills as well. Consequently, students were helped by the context that enhanced their decoding ability and led them to carry out the task successfully (Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Comparative representation of the results of the matching a picture with the correct word task (task 3) across the five tests]
In task 4 students’ ability was tested to apply their phonemic knowledge to decode both familiar and unfamiliar words using the realistic context to check their comprehension by reading short texts accompanied with pictures that are related to the stories. Casting an eye over the results of the fourth task it can be concluded that the reading performance of the learners was noticeably improved while the context played a significant role in the decoding ability of the students. Apart from this, the learners were willing enough to participate in this task, felt comfortable while reading and their fluency was enhanced.

Last but not least, the aim of task 5 (the chunk reading task) was to explore the relationship of context, language chunks and reading performance. The students’ progress in this task showed again the significance of the relationship of context, language chunks and reading performance, thereby highlighting the significance of the whole language approach in this study (Figure 4).

4.2. The results of the questionnaire

The questionnaire designed by the teacher aimed to collect quantitative data regarding learner’s views on the reading skill through the use of electronic books (eBooks), learners’ preferred reading strategies as well as their stance towards the teaching practices the educator adopted and implemented throughout the eight story-based sessions.

Throughout the one and a half month intervention study, the third graders were highly motivated and more than eager to participate in every activity proposed by the teacher. They showed their interest and willingness to experiment with a variety of alternative tasks that aimed at developing their reading skill. In addition, the students were particularly enthusiastic about the stories in the form of e-Books and found the role-plays, the games and the puppet show quite intriguing and amusing, and for that reason they were engaged actively and energetically. There was a lively atmosphere in the class, where students helped each other and the teacher acted as their supporter and facilitator during their attempt to enhance their performance in reading.

Students reacted positively towards the reading methodology implemented by the teacher. The majority of students are helped when reading a new story when they are familiar with some language chunks. They employed the various strategies of the balanced reading
approach. The strategy of learning or identifying new words by stretching out a word into its component sounds assists to a great degree many students. They also embraced the innovative way of teaching reading in English through the use of stories in the form of eBooks, which were part of the implemented teaching practices in the study, received positive responses as 14 (of 19) students answered that they liked them a lot.

4.3. Classroom observation and recordings

Some broad conclusions drawn while observing young learners’ reading performance throughout the teaching sessions are discussed analytically below and supported by a variety of striking examples from classroom practices while the class recordings and teacher’s journal enhance the validity of data by revealing how the students progress in reading, their attempt to decode correctly and their participation in the various reading tasks, with a view to composing a fuller picture of the effectiveness of the story-based framework in developing young learners’ reading skills.

The most prevailing data are summarized as follows.

The phonemic instruction contributed to the development of students’ decoding skills

Young learners had the opportunity to practise knowledge and skills at letter-sound level through phonics-based activities. In particular, blending activities gave the learners the opportunity to learn how to combine individual sounds smoothly together as it can be demonstrated in the transcript below from the Goldilocks story session:

S3: This porridge is too /s/ /o/ /l/ /d/
T: Για διάβασε όλη τη λέξη μαζί...
S3 cold (decodes it correctly)
T: Άρα οι ήχοι από τα γραμματάκια είναι...
S3: /c/ /o/ /l/ /d/
T: Πές μας πάλι τη λέξη ολόκληρη...
S3: cold

This is a substitution task in the Pinocchio story session that posed no great difficulty to students.

T: Γιάννη σου δίνω τη λέξη boy και θέλω αντί για /b/ να μου πεις /t/.
John: toy
John: toyshop, το μαγαζί με παιχνίδια! (refers to another word that is familiar to him that contains the word toy)

A variety of whole based activities such as role plays, songs, games and the puppet show kept the learners motivated and created a stress-free learning environment and facilitated acquisition of language chunks.

Students were engaged in an array of tasks that aroused their interest but also assisted them in enhancing their comprehension strategies. Right from the beginning, the young learners expressed their willingness to participate in acting out designated roles in each story and they did their best to be as realistic as possible. Apart from the role plays, the puppet show in the Pinocchio story-session was a real success. In a similar vein, the games and songs added action and changed the atmosphere in the foreign language classroom. It can be
assumed with a degree of certainty that these activities created an unwinding classroom atmosphere which was definitely conducive to the learning process since the learners practised continuously chunks of language selected from the stories in a playful and entertaining way, thereby building a bank of chunks without noticing.

The balanced approach assisted the young learners in improving their reading skills to a great extent (examples of Paraskevi and Mary).

Two particular students are worth mentioning because of managing to improve their reading skills to a great degree. Maria and Paraskevi faced great difficulties with reading in the English language. Both of them were shy and reluctant to participate during class while Paraskevi could not even decode a word; she was merely repeating what the teacher said. The researcher took some notes throughout the teaching sessions and tests and kept a journal with actual instances of learners’ interaction with the reading materials and with their level of motivation towards the teaching methods that the teacher implements.

Their progress is summarized in the box below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Before the intervention</th>
<th>After the intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neither decode nor recognize the sounds of the letters</td>
<td>Managed to read correctly some pseudo words (short or CVC words like ruv, foop, yam)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merely repeating what the teacher said</td>
<td>In the last test began for the first time to recognize and combine sounds of the letters like /a/ /e/ /e/ /l/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to read in English</td>
<td>Decoded correctly the words fox, leg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraskevi’s case</td>
<td>Recognized the syllable /tai/ in the non word tairy and /la/ in the non word carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before the intervention</td>
<td>After the intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not read words</td>
<td>Attempted to read simple words or CVC words like bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not read long sentences</td>
<td>Decoded correctly some pseudo words like gotato and carpenter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary’s case</td>
<td>Recognized the sounds of the letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More confident and willing to participate in class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up, the progress of the two girls in reading manifests how the phonics instruction in conjunction with whole based activities can lead to the development of word-recognition skills and phonemic awareness and above all, sustain an interest in reading.

5. Educational Implications

Through the research conducted, it is hoped that the use of stories in the form of eBooks will gain more ground in the foreign language classroom. These new devices will play a crucial role in the literacy acquisition of the children and occupy a more central role in education. It is essential that the teachers incorporate these powerful resources into their instruction and use them effectively and properly in order to affect positively their students’ literacy development.
What is more, adopting a balanced approach for early readers brought out the benefits of a combined Phonics and Whole language approach concerning significant aspects of young learners’ reading development. It is advisable to expose learners to meaningful activities in order to pay attention to letter sound relationships since phonemic and phonological awareness is strongly related to success in reading acquisition. In a similar vein, motivational tasks such as practising chunks of language through role plays, songs and puppet show will not only make the learning process a pleasant experience but also they will give the learners the opportunity to enhance their comprehension strategies since comprehension is an integral part of reading. Thus, the implementation of such a framework constitutes an essential teaching practice in the class of young learners whose reading development in English is of outmost importance.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of the particular study was to present the effectiveness of a parallel story-based framework in relation to the development of the reading skill in a class of third grade young learners who are learning English as a foreign language within the context of a Greek public primary school.

According to the findings of the study, the third graders benefited from the Phonics and Whole language based tasks proposed by the teacher. What is more, they experimented with phonemes and employed a variety of strategies in order to improve their reading performance. Of equal or perhaps even greater importance is the use of eBooks in the foreign classroom, which managed to transform the learning procedure into a pleasant experience and determined learners’ progress in the English language to a certain degree. As a result, eBooks created the optimal conditions under which the learners managed to read in L2 timely and effectively while the combination of the Phonics and Whole language approach contributed to the learners’ successful route to reading.

Notes

1. According to Cameron (2001:167), real books were those written by ‘real’ authors for parents to buy for children and there was a so-called ‘golden age’ of young children’s literature in English in the 1970s and 1980s.
2. Parallel versions of ‘Pinocchio’ and ‘The ant and the grasshopper’ stories are found in ‘Magic Book 1’ and ‘Magic Book 2’ accordingly.

References


Appendix I

Goldilocks story

Pinocchio story

Country mouse- city mouse story

Ant & Grasshopper story
Appendix II

Rhyming chants

Task 1
Τι λέει η Goldilocks? Διάβασε το ποιημάτικι για να το βρεις!

3 brown bears!
3 brown bears!
See all their beds!
See all their chairs!

Blending activities
Ο Pinocchio είναι κλειδωμένος στην αποθήκη. Βοήθησέ τον να βρει μια έξοδο! Βαλε στη σωστή σειρά τα κουτιά και σχημάτισε μια λέξη!

_____

_____
**Segmentation activities**

**Task 2**

To country mouse παίζει ένα παιχνίδι λέξεων με το city mouse! Ακολούθησε τις οδηγίες και βοήθησε το city mouse να βρει τις μυστικές λέξεις!

Say mouse!

Now say the word without /m/

What is the secret word?

_________________

Say city!

Now say the word without /s/.

What is the secret word?

_________________
Appendix III

Story sequencing tasks

Task 1

Τώρα σειρά σου να πεις την ιστορία της Goldilocks! Βάλε στη σωστή σειρά τις εικόνες και έπειτα χρωμάτισέ τες!

Role play

Task 2

a. Ποιός λέει τι; Διάβασε για να το βρεις! Ένωσε τη σωστή πρόταση με τη σωστή εικόνα.

A. They are eating all my food! Meow!

Run away!

B. Help! Help!

Meow! Stop right there!

This way! Hurry, quick!

b. Τώρα βάλτε τις μάσκες σας και μιμηθείτε τα ποντίκια και τη γάτα!
Puppet show

a. Diáβασε τους διάλογους μεταξύ του Ρινοκχίο και του παππού του από την ιστορία. Ένωσε τον σωστό διάλογο με τη σωστή εικόνα.

C. “Grandpa, read me a book, please!”

“Sure, my good child Pinocchio.”

b. Ώρα για κουκλοθέατρο! Πάρτε τις κούκλες και μιμηθείτε τον Ρινοκχίο και τον παππού του!
Appendix IV (Pre-Test)

Task 1
Διάβασε τις παρακάτω λέξεις
friend  zebra  key  magic  ant

Task 2
Διάβασε τις παρακάτω λέξεις
Zog  bof  mite  lizarm  barden

Task 3
Διάβασε τις παρακάτω λέξεις και γράψε τη σωστή λέξη κάτω από την εικόνα.
map  flower  rabbit  monkey

Task 4
Διάβασε τις φράσεις
Hello!  I’m the ant!
Come and play!
What’s this?  It’s a magic book!

Task 5
Διάβασε το κειμένο
Fiona and Kelly play all day long.
Who’s this? This is a pirate. His name is Cook.
This is Smarty, the parrot.
Elli Konstantopoulou (konstelli@ yahoo.gr) holds a B.A. in English Language and Literature from Aristotle University, Thessaloniki (2006) and a Master’s degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (M.ed) from the Hellenic Open University, Patras (2014). She has been an EFL teacher in both the public and the private sector since 2007. She works now as a permanent teacher in primary education in the Greek public sector. Her research interests include educational technology and teaching English as a foreign language to young learners.
The aim of this study was to investigate the spelling strategies used by EFL students in Oman. Although the amount of research on spelling is increasing in Oman, the area of spelling learning strategies still needs further investigation. There is insufficient information in understanding the kind of spelling strategies that are being used in Omani classrooms, therefore, to adopt and use at any time. However, the current study focuses on finding out the frequency of the use of the strategies by grades four and ten, and the differences between both grades in the use of these strategies. The study sample consisted of 757 students from grades four and ten as they represent the exit level of school cycles in Oman. This survey study design is comprised of a questionnaire that was divided into different categories representing different spelling strategies. Results revealed statistically significant differences in the use of the strategies with respect to grades. Based on the findings, practical implications and recommendations are provided.

Key words: overlapping waves theory, spelling strategies, EFL students, Oman

1. Introduction

1.1. The Overlapping Waves Theory

The overlapping waves theory is operationally defined as a concept that refers to the use of different types of strategies for a particular time and gradually the use of one particular strategy is reduced or increased as decided by a user, (also called repertoire theory) was developed by Robert Siegler in 1996 (See also Rittle-Johnson & Siegler, 1999; Grabner-Hagen, 2004; Baleghizadeh & Dargahi, 2011). Primarily, Robert Siegler investigated the strategies used by children in the non-algorithmic domain; that is spelling. As Siegler pointed out, his investigation was particularly based on investigating algorithmic domains such as subtraction, multiplication, time telling and physics (Rittle Johnson & Siegler, 1999). Shrager and Siegler (1998) state that the overlapping waves model explains the characterization of development. The model was represented by a diagram that consisted of two axes (Y and X).
The axes sketched consisted of many wavy lines that represented the strategies. For more explanation, the overlapping waves refer to strategies in timeline waves in which each strategy represents a wavy line and there are also crossed lines. The overlapped or crossed lines show that students use several strategies at the same time while spelling a word. However, this theory is more reliable and describes the development more accurately than the traditional stage models such as the connectionist. Traditionally, the connectionist theory emphasizes the use of a combination of cognitive processes such as: semantic, orthographic and phonological processors simultaneously. The connectionist theory holds that there should be an interaction between lexical and phonological systems. However, any limitations linked to the phonological system will affect the other system (Sawyer & Joyce, 2005). This theory depends upon an individual’s amount of word use and exposure at different ages (Grabner- Hagen, 2004). Compared to the stage theories, the overlapping waves theory postulates that children use different strategies to learn spelling at any given time (Cuidon, 2009). As noted by Grabner-Hagen (2004), in relation to the overlapping waves theory, initially, the strategy is invented, then applied to problems and accordingly used once accurate responses reveal. In other words when one strategy is more reliable than another, the child will use it alongside other strategies.

1.2. Three basic assumptions of the overlapping waves theory

Rittle-Johnson & Siegler (1999) presented the three basic assumptions of the overlapping waves model. The first is variability of strategy use. The perspective of variability represents the use of a range of strategies at a particular stage. For instance, children might use more than one type of strategy. They may use rule use and visual checking strategies in combination to spell a word. The second assumption is adaptive choice, which indicates that children use strategies from their own strategy repertoire depending on the level of word difficulty to spell words correctly. After becoming more competent, children may use the most effective strategies and become less dependent on certain strategies. Basically, children may use sounding out to spell a word and if the word is difficult to remember another strategy could be used to remember the difficult parts. Consequently, the child uses syllabification strategies to learn that particular word instead of merely using sounding out. To this end, the strategies children use in classrooms may differ and therefore investigating how do young learners use several strategies concurrently helps reduce teachers’ effort to enhance students’ abilities to learn spelling.

Even though learners try out different strategies to indicate which one works better for them, spellers examine which strategy to adapt while spelling. In their research report, Shrager & Siegler (1998) indicated that the discovery of new strategies and adaptive choices are linked processes, and that choices are attained when prior strategy discovery is present. The third assumption in the overlapping waves theory is the gradual change. According to Rittle-Johnson & Siegler (1999) the changes can be produced in four ways. Changes occur when a new strategy and a more advanced strategy are introduced. They also occur when the use of more advanced strategies is increased, or when effective implementation of strategies and more adaptive choices are available. This can be illustrated by indicating how a child uses syllabification, meanwhile a teacher introduces a new strategy in the classroom, for instance, visual checking. The student utilizes syllabification and visual checking when learning to spell a word. Consequently, the most effective strategy will replace the ineffective one, therefore, change occurs.

Although children use several strategies to spell a word, select the most effective one and change a strategy used, similarly, adults use various strategies and pursue the same process
of change as young learners. Kwong & Varnhagen (2005) investigated the generalizability of the overlapping waves in spelling from children to adults. They investigated the children’s progression from early attempts to spell new words to the point at which they could retrieve the spelling from memory. This was a short-term longitudinal study, which aimed at frequently observing the participants over a short period. The researchers used this study to gain further understanding of the strategies used by learners. The results of the study revealed that both children and adults showed variability, adaptive choice and gradual change in the use of strategies. This study provides support for the generalizability of the overlapping waves theory.

There are various strategies that learners use to spell words. One of the strategies is retrieval. It is the automatic recall of answer and it is considered as one of the most successful and useful approaches to spelling. Beginning spellers use different strategies and start replacing older ones with the more efficient strategies such as retrieval (Steffler, Varnhagen, Friesen & Treiman, 1998). Other strategies excluding retrieval are called backup strategies.

According to Rittle-Johnson & Siegler (1999), the most common backup strategies are:

- Sounding out
- Analogy
- Rule use
- Syllabification

The least common used strategies are:

- Visual memory
- Visual checking
- Writing synonyms

1.3. Related studies

1.3.1. Spelling Learning Strategies in the Overlapping Waves Theory

Different studies investigated various methods in learning strategies such as using e-games (Al Farsi, 2009), the effectiveness of syllable training (Bhattacharya & Ehri, 2004), the effectiveness of a kinesthetic approach (Grant, 1985), the use of dictionaries (Huang, 2003), and the use of mobile phones (Bushnell, Kemp & Martin, 2011). There are some studies (Baleghizadeh and Dargahi, 2011; Rittle-Johnson and Siegler, 1999) which have investigated spelling learning strategies, particularly in the overlapping waves zone which will be focused on in this section.

In the EFL context, Baleghizadeh and Dargahi (2011) investigated the spelling learning strategies used by 32 EFL Iranian learners. However, frequencies and differences in the use of spelling strategies among good, average and poor spellers were found. The students were given a dictation on spelling. The students had to spell 20 words selected from course books which were read out loud by the researchers. Then, students explained how they spelled the words. They had to indicate whether they recalled the words (retrieval), used sounds to spell the words (sounding out), referred to a rule (rule use) and used a visual strategy to check the spelling (visual checking). However, they were asked to determine what strategies they used to spell words correctly. The researchers used a spelling development model. This means that children developmentally progress and use spelling strategies as they move to upper levels. In addition, researchers indicated that children used six different strategies to spell:
retrieval, sounding out, analogies, rules, visual memory, checking and syllabification. The results revealed that the most frequently used strategy was retrieval (46.7%) and the second used strategy was sounding out (34%). In reference to students’ levels, good spellers used analogy and syllabification more often than poor spellers did. Other strategies such as sounding out and visual strategies were used most frequently by poor spellers. The results revealed that 78% of good spellers used the most common strategies such as sounding out, rule use, syllabification and analogy. Only 26% of the poor spellers used the most common strategies. However, different students use altered amount of several strategies and differences can occur within one particular grade level.

A study by Rittle-Johnson and Siegler (1999), the advocates of the overlapping waves theory, investigated spelling learning strategies used by children through observations of ongoing behavior while spelling words and verbal reports. In this longitudinal study, the researchers examined the number of strategies that children used in their first grade level and then followed up the students to examine the strategies they used in the next grade level. They explored how effectively the strategies were used and which strategies were more effective with which words. They examined three basic phenomena: variability, adaptive choice and gradual change in spelling learning strategies. 30 students participated in the study for two years, but 7 children did not participate in the next year for specific reasons. For instance, some parents refused that their children continue in the study and others moved to other schools. The students worked under two different conditions, either allowed or prohibited. In other words, allowed condition refers to the condition in which students are given time to use backup strategies to remember the spelling of words, whereas, the prohibited condition represents the situation in which no explicit or direct use of a backup strategy is allowed. Three components of the overlapping waves theory (variability, adaptive choice and gradual change) as investigated in this study will be explained.

In terms of variability, results revealed that children used six strategies, which were retrieval, sounding out, analogy, rule use, visual checking and a combination of two strategies. The researchers discovered that rule use and visual checking were always used in combination with other strategies. Even in the next grade level, grade two students used the same strategies but not to the same degree (Rittle-Johnson and Siegler, 1999).

The next phenomenon, adaptive choice, was also tested in this study. The results revealed that incorrect answers were highly correlated with backup strategy use. This means that children used backup strategies more on the words that they misspelled during spelling more often. For more explanation, children tend to refer to backup strategies when they find it difficult to spell a word. However, the researchers indicated that the use of backup strategies is slower and that children may or may not choose to use them. It can be concluded that the use of backup strategies is more often associated with spelling difficult words.

The last element was the gradual change in strategy use. It was found that good spellers who made fewer mistakes used fewer backup strategies. The results indicated that speed and accuracy of strategy use increased because of the use of the fastest and most accurate strategy that yielded to the correct answer. Other reasons for the increased use of accurate strategies included the quick and accurate use of the best strategy at the right time.

Using different strategies at the same time was also tackled by Siegler (1996). He investigated the use of several strategies in spelling through direct spelling tasks. He asked 28 second graders to spell a set of words. Children used their own dictionary to look up
words. The findings of the study revealed that children used at least four spelling strategies: retrieval, sounding out, writing alternative spellings and looking up words in the dictionary. In addition, the findings revealed that students used sounding out because it took them less time than the others but it was, unfortunately, less accurate. Another interesting finding showed that looking up words in the dictionary did not produce perfect spelling. Miscopying and inability of identifying the target word were the most obvious problems for students in using dictionaries for looking up words for the spelling. Hence, the use of several strategies is part of students’ abilities in order to learn particular words and produce correct spelling.

Literature on spelling brought up theories (e.g. overlapping waves and connectionist) that indeed represent two different facets of one idea that refers to the development of spelling. Spelling theories took different directions to explain the stages of spelling development, some of which explained learning spelling through stages (Cramer, 1998; Frith, 1985; Gentry, 1982) or interconnected waves that cross each other, particularly, the overlapping waves theory (Grabner-Hagen, 2004; Rittle-Johnson & Siegler, 1999; Kwong & Varnhagen, 2005). Moreover, researchers provided the answers to spelling learning through their observations and analysis. They investigated the ways students spell correct words by the use of different spelling strategies to a certain degree or the use of several strategies at the same time. In general, according to the overlapping waves theory, as children move to an upper grade level, the degree of strategy use changes and learners tend to use different strategies from the ones used previously.

Most research indicates that the spelling learning strategies are new to the context, since they were presented to overcome the problems related to stage model theories. Much more research is still needed in this area. This section provided an overview of the context in which spelling learning strategies exist. The present study attempts to be innovative in combining the elements, which other studies lacked. It combines more strategies to be involved in spelling learning in the light of the overlapping waves theory such as using different types of dictionaries, creating word lists and implementing kinesthetic strategies. Furthermore, the study has the advantage of involving a large number of subjects compared to previous studies, for instance, that were conducted by Rittle-Johnson & Siegler (1999) which was carried out engaging 23 participants and another study by Baleghizadeh and Dargahi (2011) in which the number of participants was 32. Hence, involving a larger number of participants might make the results more generalizable.

2. Purpose of the study

The main aim of this study was to identify the common spelling learning strategies that grade four and grade ten learners use to learn English spelling. The research study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What spelling learning strategies are most frequently used by grade four Omani students?
2. What spelling learning strategies are most frequently used by grade ten Omani students?
3. Is there a statistically significant difference between grade four and grade ten in their use of spelling learning strategies?
3. Research method

3.1. Subjects

The population of this study consisted of grade four and grade ten students from the Muscat Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman in the academic year 2013/2014. The two grades, grade four and grade ten, were selected because in the Omani educational system grade four represents the exit level from cycle one and grade ten represents the exit level from cycle two, therefore, the researcher selected the two grades so as to indicate the different strategies that both young and older students use in the two different cycles. The total number of the population was 14,921 students. Five percent of this number should represent the sample of the study, but for the reasons of having intact classes and the inability of separating students from their classes to administer the questionnaire to the exact number (i.e. 746), a number of 757 students responded to a spelling strategies questionnaire where they had to indicate whether they use the strategies mentioned or not.

3.2. Spelling Strategies Questionnaire

The researcher developed a spelling strategies questionnaire of a three-point scale and of the closed type requiring one response for each item, called spelling learning strategies questionnaire. The participants had to select one of the following to indicate the extent to which they use a particular strategy for spelling (Always=1, sometimes=2 and never=3). It was based on coded observations from Rittle-Johnson and Seigler’s spelling strategies model (1999). In addition, it consisted of (25) items that involved different strategies. A number of (14) jury members from Sultan Qaboos University and the Ministry of Education validated the questionnaire and its appropriateness concerning statements clarity and translation.

The reliability of the questionnaire was established by using a statistical procedure that is the test-retest method. It was administered on (50) students randomly selected and was not part of the sample of the study. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient which is the measure of reliability between total scores in the two administrations was found to be 0.71 which is considered an adequate level of reliability. Item 2 was found not to be adequately understood by students (I write words quickly). Item 2 needed a different rating scale, so the researcher decided to drop item 2 from the final questionnaire. The number of items was 26 and it became 25 after dropping item number 2 from the list. However, the researcher administered the questionnaire in the classrooms to ensure that students understand the items and eliminate any ambiguity regarding the questionnaire items.

4. Data analysis and discussion

Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions by identifying the most and least frequently used strategies by both grades four and ten. Regarding the results of questionnaire, low-use strategies are represented by the means between (1-1.4), medium-use strategies were represented by the means (1.5-2.4), and high-use means fall within (2.5-3).

Regarding research question one, the most frequently used strategy by grade four students are shown in Table 1.
Table (1) shows the means of spelling strategies arranged from the most frequently to least frequently used strategy by grade four students. It is evident that the mean values of all nine strategies fall within medium-use (1.5-2.4). As shown in Table 5, rule use is the most frequently used strategy by grade four learners (1.59). The second one is retrieval with a mean value of 1.72, followed by visual checking (1.74) and sounding out (1.77). The least frequently used strategy is the kinesthetic strategy with a mean value of 2.37.

The findings of this study are similar to the findings of the researchers Rittle-Johnson & Siegler (1999), and Grabner-Hagen (2004). According to the overlapping waves theory, they found that young children indicated the use of several strategies. The results of the present study show that the young children in grade four reported the use of several strategies in learning spelling but only to a certain degree. They tend to use some strategies more often than others which might be due to the introduction of certain strategies in the classroom. Rule-use as the most frequently used strategy is implicitly introduced at the second semester in the curriculum. In other words, children start deducing rules for spelling from the rule patterns they see in the textbook. For example, recognizing the regular past tense of -ed pattern at the end of the verbs makes students recognize this pattern for spelling. This result is supported by O’Sullivan & Thomas (2007) who found that the children involved in their study made explicit generalizations and deduced rules as their spelling knowledge grew.

To answer research question two, the most frequently used strategies by grade ten students are clearly shown in Table 2. Table 2 depicts results similar to those found for grade four. The grand mean values for the strategies used by grade ten students indicate a medium-use of strategies except for the kinesthetic, which represents a very low-use strategy. The table shows that the most frequently used strategy is the visual checking strategy with the mean score of 1.57, followed by retrieval (1.88). The least frequently used strategy is the kinesthetic strategy with a mean score of 2.51. The finding regarding the kinesthetic strategy, the least frequently used strategy in grade four, is a surprising result. Since young learners have the power to play and use their physical strength in activities, they could produce better results if bodily activities were used in spelling. The reason for not using kinesthetic activities might be attributed to the role of teachers because no bodily activities are introduced to teach spelling in the classrooms. This could also be attributed to teachers’ lack of knowledge to introduce the activities as strategies using the appropriate methods in order to learn the spellings of words. However, visual checking, the most frequently used
strategy is the preferred strategy that teachers ask the learners to use to learn spelling. This might be because it is the only one spelling strategy introduced explicitly by the curriculum in the teachers’ guide from grade five upwards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual checking</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding out</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule use</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabification</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing synonyms</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual memory</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Means represent the frequency of strategy use (a lower mean indicates higher usage)

**Table. 2 Means and Standard Deviations of the Strategies Used by Grade Ten Students**

### 4.1. Ranking of Strategies

In the table below, the strategies are ranked according to their frequency of use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Rank in grade four</th>
<th>Rank in grade ten</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding out</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabification</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual checking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual memory</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing synonyms</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesthetic</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note*strategies ordered from most to least frequently used

**Table 3 Strategies Ranked according to Frequency of Use in Grades Four and Ten**

As is evident in Table 3, grades four and ten students differ in the type of spelling strategies they use the most. It shows that grade four students reported the use of rule-use strategies more frequently. Grade ten students use visual checking more frequently. However, both grades share a similar degree of usage of certain strategies such as retrieval and kinesthetic. The findings are in line with the results of the study by Kwong & Varnhagen (2005), which investigated the shifts in strategy use between young students and older ones. Their findings showed that older students used different strategies than those used by younger ones. Similarly, grade ten students used different strategies compared to grade four. Grade ten students reported the use of visual checking strategies more often than other types of strategies, while grade four reported the use of rule-use strategies more often. One possible
explanation is that rule-use is introduced to grade four students for the first time and students may tend to adhere to rule use strategy more in their learning.

As for the significance level between the differences of strategy usage with respect to the grade level (Research question three states “Is there a statistically significant difference between grades four and ten in their use of spelling learning strategies?”), a t-test was used and the following results were revealed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retrieval</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding out</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>.212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule use</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>9.17</td>
<td>755</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syllabification</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>755</td>
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<td>Ten</td>
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<td>2.08</td>
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<td>Four</td>
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<td>.44</td>
<td>6.01</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ten</td>
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<tr>
<td>Visual checking</td>
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<td>4.75</td>
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<td>2.51</td>
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Note. Std = Standard Deviation, t = t value and df = degrees of freedom

Table 4. Means, Standard Deviations and the t-values of Strategies Used by Grades Four and Ten

As shown in Table 4, the two grades were significantly different at the 0.05 level in their use of all of the strategies except for three strategies; analogy, syllabification and writing synonyms. Commonly, students used analogy syllabification and synonyms less given that they are not introduced in the classrooms. The statistically significant differences were in favor of grade four. Visual checking, with a t-value of 4.70 and a p-value less than 0.001, was the only strategy, which was in favor of grade ten students who indicated the use of this strategy more often than did grade four students. The reason behind this result is probably related to the Omani curriculum since it introduces visual checking strategy from grade five upwards and students continue using this particular strategy for the next grade levels without being introduced to other strategies.

One of the functions of strategy use in learning to spell is to help to hold the spelling of words in the memory of the young students. It seems that since young learners are still trying to move the word into their long-term memory, they experiment with different strategies more than older students do. The results of the overall means of the strategies in Table 4 show that grade four students use more strategies than grade ten do. This finding is also supported by Grabner-Hagen’s (2004) study, which showed that children in early stages
used up to six different types of strategies and as they moved to the next grade levels, the number of strategies used became less than the previous grade level, once they had acquired the spelling of words.

5. Summary and conclusion

This study revealed noteworthy conclusions under the context of spelling strategies that should be mentioned, for instance, spelling instruction should not only be centered on one type of strategy ignoring the others. Additionally, systematic and effective teaching methods should be adopted in order to improve the use of different spelling strategies in classrooms. Results are clear that students use more than one type of strategies to learn spelling, not only one single strategy. Moreover, the results support the underlying basic foundation regarding the overlapping waves theory in which students use multiple strategies at the same time when learning to spell. In general, students reported a moderate-use of spelling learning strategies by both grades four and ten. Both grades reported the use of all spelling learning strategies to a certain degree. There was a shift in the use of multiple strategies by students. According to the overlapping waves theory, children shift the use of a strategy to another strategy from time to time. In the current study, grade four students reported the use of the same strategies as grade ten but there was a difference in the degree of the usage from most frequently used to less frequently used ones.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study a number of recommendations are made regarding the spelling learning strategies. These are targeted towards the Ministry of Education, EFL teachers and supervisors but there are also some recommendations for further research studies. Regarding recommendations related to the Ministry of Education, the ministry should conduct in-service training workshops for teachers and provide them with the skills for introducing new and more advanced spelling learning strategies to students that may help them retrieve spelling of words quickly and correctly. Furthermore, it could involve students in identifying their preferred ways to learn spelling and to contribute to establish focused spelling sessions.

The recommendations that are related to EFL teachers and supervisors involve several practical considerations, for instance, Omani teachers should create opportunities for students to practice and investigate the best way to learn spelling through the introduction of various and suitable strategies. In addition, teachers should raise students’ consciousness by designing classroom instructions involving various spelling learning strategies. Supervisors should give the senior teachers and teachers time to plan spelling sessions in which they can introduce more advanced spelling strategies and train students to use them in and outside classes to become more self-directed students and independent learners. In the last part, recommendations related to further research suggest that more studies are required to actually measure and observe the most effective spelling strategies that help students learn the spelling of words and retrieve the words’ spellings. Further studies could implement the questionnaire to other regions in the Sultanate of Oman and it is of great importance to see the reported strategies used to learn spelling among students from different places in Oman.
References


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Enhancing Fourth Graders’ Writing Skills Through Collaborative Writing Tasks: An Experimental Study

Konstantina STRATIGOU

The present article aims to investigate how the writing skill of fourth graders can be enhanced through an extended engagement in collaborative writing activities, involving process writing. It is argued that writing, particularly as a collaborative activity within a process writing context, can improve learners’ language knowledge and, therefore, have a positive effect on the quality of writing in a foreign language context. The pooling of ideas and linguistic resources, after systematic engagement, leading to the production of a joint product, we hypothesize, can have positive outcomes and yield better written outputs than outputs produced individually. To test our hypothesis, we conducted a comparative study of the written outputs of two classes of fourth graders in a primary school in the Prefecture of Piraeus. In the control group, process writing tasks were carried out by students on an individual basis whereas in the experimental group the same tasks were carried out in pairs. The writing quality of students’ texts in the two groups was evaluated in terms of accuracy, fluency, complexity, content, structure and task – fulfillment and students’ attitudes and perceptions with regard to their writing experience were gauged immediately after the final writing session through the administration of a questionnaire.
μια συγκριτική μελέτη των γραπτών εργασιών δύο τάξεων της Δ΄ Δημοτικού σε ένα Δημοτικό Σχολείο στη Νομαρχία Πειραιά. Οι δραστηριότητες της διαδικασίας παραγωγής γραπτού κειμένου στην ομάδα ελέγχου, διεξήχθησαν σε ατομική βάση, ενώ στην πειραματική ομάδα, οι ίδιες δραστηριότητες διεξήχθησαν σε ζευγάρια. Η ποιότητα των γραπτών κειμένων των μαθητών συγκρίθηκε ως προς την ακρίβεια, το νόημα, την πολυπλοκότητα, το περιεχόμενο, τη δομή και, γενικότερα, την πραγμάτωση δραστηριοτήτων ευής αξιολογήθηκαν επίσης οι συμπεριφορές και οι αντιλήψεις των μαθητών ως προς την εμπειρία της παραγωγής γραπτού λόγου μετά την τελευταία συνεδρία μέσω της συμπλήρωσης ερωτηματολογίου.

**Key words:** collaborative writing, individual writing, joint scaffolding, collaborative process writing tasks, comparative study, written outputs, post-writing questionnaire

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1. **Introduction**

Writing is generally considered an activity that is carried out by learners individually, either in class or as homework, followed by feedback provided by the teacher. Writing activities usually focus on the end-product, to be evaluated by the teacher, and on linguistic accuracy rather than content. Little or no attention is generally paid to the processes learners go through while composing or to how they can be benefited by having a range of planning, writing and revising strategies to draw on (Hedge, 2000; Hyland, 1996). What is more, little attention is paid to the social context of language learning, in which co-construction of knowledge can provide learners with language learning opportunities that can potentially facilitate their language development, according to the social constructivist view of learning (Bruner, 1985; Donato, 1994; Swain, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978, among others). Within such a constructivist framework, learners can draw and build on each other’s knowledge, which allows them to interact at higher levels of activity than if they had worked individually. As suggested in the literature (Donato, 1994; Storch, 2002; Swain and Lapkin, 1998), this kind of social interaction can contribute to language learning.

Drawing on this, in the present study we argue that writing need not be a solitary activity in which the individual discovers language on his/her own. Instead, it can be carried out through peer exchange and collaborative work. The pooling of knowledge and collaboration during the writing process towards a common goal may lead to the production of stronger end-products, as relevant research has shown (Dobao, 2012; Ens et al, 2011; Shehadeh, 2011). It will thus be argued that negotiating in collaborative writing tasks, providing on-going feedback and sharing responsibility for written products can help students to develop a better understanding of writing and accomplish tasks that they might not have accomplished alone, at least not so successfully. Coursebook activities for fourth graders, as regards writing, incorporate mainly individual work, with the exception of a cross-curricular project at the end of each unit. This is usually done in groups and occasionally in pairs, but students are expected to produce a one-off piece of writing. Within the framework for collaboration briefly outlined above, students should be given more opportunities for collaborative work and collaborative writing in particular within a process writing context.

To this end, this study highlights two important features of writing, that of process and collaboration, which are hugely overlooked not only in coursebook materials but also in current writing instruction practices in foreign language classrooms. Collaborative writing in primary classes, if dealt with in a more systematic way, can “push” learners to a higher level
of achievement, help them to gain new insights, learn to cooperate with other students and, last but definitely not least, improve the quality of their writing.

2. Literature review

Writing is generally thought of as an individual activity but in real life contexts, such as in higher education or in the workplace, collaborative writing is not that unusual. Learners develop knowledge through ‘scaffolding’, that is through social interaction with other able members of a society. Such scaffolding can also occur in a foreign language context, in which learners work either in pairs or in groups. Joint scaffolding, a term used by Donato (1994), is seen as taking place among peers when they are performing group-pair work during the various stages of process writing.

One way to promote social interaction among peers in a writing class is to engage them in collaborative writing or in pair/group writing activities. Collaborative writing “entails the production of a shared document where group members engage in substantive interaction, shared decision – making and responsibility for the document” (Allen et al., 1978 in Fung, 2010, p. 18). It can be ‘dialogic’ and ‘hierarchic’ collaborative writing, according to Ede and Lunsford (1990). The former refers to writing in which members work together on all aspects of a project while the latter refers to writing in which members assign each other or themselves different parts of the project (Ede and Lunsford, 1990, in Ens et al., 2011, p. 66).

Another distinction, as defined by Ritchie and Rigano (2007), is between that of ‘cooperative’ and ‘lead’ writing. In ‘cooperative’ writing, contributors take turns at negotiating different sections to write whereas in ‘lead’ writing one person is in charge of writing the first draft and the lead is rotated for the other drafts (p. 66). Both components of each of the above distinctions could be included in a collaborative venture.

Collaborative writing affords learners the opportunity to co-construct knowledge by getting involved in a process of joint negotiation of meaning. It requires the integration of specific features, that is, those of “defining” and “facilitating” ones (Fung, 2010, p.18). The “defining” features involve the element of ‘mutual interaction’, during which students initiate and contribute ideas as well as help students to foster generative and reflective thinking (p. 9). During ‘negotiation’, students engage in ‘interaction’ when they encounter problems with the comprehension of messages (p. 21). The feature of ‘cognitive conflict’ is also present in a collaborative writing scheme before decisions are reached. On the other hand, “facilitating” features are related to ‘backtracking’, that is moving back and forth between the different process writing stages so that learners can enhance task familiarity (p. 26).

Within a process writing framework, writing is viewed as a “non-linear, exploratory and generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning” (Zamel, 1983: 165). In other words, writing is seen as a form of ‘problem –solving’ which allows for an interplay of different processes, such as “generating ideas, discovering a ‘voice’ with which to write, planning, goal – setting, monitoring and evaluating what is going to be written, and searching for language with which to express exact meanings” (p. 3). With regard to collaborative writing, students are encouraged to contribute to the decision – making on all aspects of writing and during all the writing stages, regarding content, structure and language. Thus, the joint responsibility over the production of the text promotes a sense of “co-ownership” (Storch, 2005: 154).

During collaborative planning the planners not only have to generate and then elaborate their plans for their partners, but also evaluate what they have generated, select ideas and make
decisions in order to reach a consensus about topic, details and organization (Flower, 1994; Saunders, 1989). Next, in collaborative composing, which is a less ‘open’ task than planning, co – composers undertake the task of actually producing a piece of writing. It starts with a conversation on how to go about writing, or else, with the process of oral composing, as co – writers have to explore options by listening to each other’s ideas and to decide among words, phrases and sentences for the joint text (Saunders, 1989, p.106). Co – writers’ roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined at every stage of the writing process and in every task they engage in. This may entail either individual or collective efforts to maintain equal status by sharing the work load and by making decisions together (p. 107). For example, one might take on the role of the text generator while the other might make decisions and undertake the role of the ‘scribe’, or they could share responsibilities simultaneously and then transcribe.

It should be noted here that the stages are not necessarily strictly sequential but might also be done simultaneously. To be more specific, during collaborative reviewing, according to Saunders (1989), writers take turns in reviewing their texts throughout the process of composing and focus on evaluating the decisions they have made. Writers share their drafts with peers, who become readers and respond to their texts either by commenting, criticizing each other’s work, providing suggestions, sharing ideas and knowledge and generally contributing their strengths to the pair or group (Fung, 2010: 23). Co – writers may also share the responsibility of producing part or parts of their final product individually. This is a more ‘closed’ task than planning and composing, which entails learners taking turns as writers and readers in assessing their text or texts together. Collaborators discuss the decisions they have made and work towards reaching an agreement on the parts of the text that work successfully as well as on the parts that need to be improved and try to reach a consensus about new options for a second draft. Thus, co-writers share responsibility for revisions from draft to draft.

At the co-publishing stage, on the other hand, students may not complete all tasks collaboratively. They may work together “to develop a collective document that is comprised of their individual texts” (Saunders, 1989, p. 103). Co-publishers, as suggested in Saunders, “share ownership over their collective document but maintain primary authority over the drafts they have planned together but composed separately”, as writers in this research will be responsible not only for producing parts of the drafts separately but will be responsible for the collective document as well (p. 107).

The evaluation that takes place here is considered to be a collective task aiming at improving the parts as well as the overall document. Finally, during co-editing, writers interact with one another, debating the correction of surface level features of each other’s texts or of the final written product. The element of ‘intervention’¹ that involves fellow students’ feedback and peer review can prove to be particularly useful during the writing process (Susser, 1994; White and Arndt, 1991; Wigglesworth and Storch, 2012).

The research reported upon collaborative writing has generally pointed to beneficial effects. Collaborative writing and learning, in general, can result in positive student outcomes in the domain of student learning and achievement as well as in that of social skills. Students learn to work towards the achievement of a common goal and are responsible for their teammates’ learning as well as their own (Dotson, 2001). Each person in the group or pair is held accountable for doing their share of the work and for the mastery of the material to be learned, therefore ensuring ‘individual accountability’ (Johnson and Johnson, 2002). Research has shown that the social interaction that takes place can affect an individual’s quality of
learning; learners encourage and support each other, share knowledge, make decisions collectively, learn how to write from peers, deal with disagreements, make use of different strategies, negotiating roles and meaning (Ens et al., 2011; Fung, 2010).

A number of studies have investigated the benefits of collaborative writing by comparing group, pair and individual work. In 1999, Storch investigated the impact of collaboration on grammatical accuracy through the use of three different tasks, that is, of a cloze exercise, a composition task and a text reconstruction task. The findings showed that students who worked in pairs produced more accurate but shorter and less syntactically complex written texts than students working alone. In subsequent studies, Storch (2005) and Storch & Wigglesworth (2007) investigated the benefits of collaborative work further in order to analyse not only the written texts produced but also the nature of the writing process and to determine the effects of collaboration (Dobao, 2012, p.42). These studies involved intermediate to advanced learners of English as a second language. Storch (2005) compared dyadic and individual performance on a short text based on a graphic prompt. The participants were adult students completing degree courses. The study found that pairs produced shorter but better texts in terms of grammatical accuracy, complexity and task fulfillment than those writing individually. The analysis of the oral interactions in the pairs confirmed that collaboration afforded learners the opportunity to pool their ideas and provide each other with immediate feedback. However, the differences observed were not statistically significant because only five individual learners and seven pairs participated in the study. Interviews with the students who participated in this study yielded positive reactions to collaborative writing and interesting insights. Similarly, in 2007, Storch and Wigglesworth compared the performance of 24 pairs and 24 individual learners on an argumentative essay and on a report whereas in 2009 they compared 24 pairs and 48 individual learners on an argumentative essay. The findings from both studies were similar. The texts written in pairs were significantly more accurate, linguistically, than those written individually, although there were no differences in terms of fluency and complexity.

In 2011, Shehadeh’s study involved two classes of first year university students in the United Arab Emirates. One class, which was considered the experimental group, consisted of 18 students whereas the other one, which was considered the control group, consisted of 20 students. In the control group, writing tasks were carried out by students individually whereas in the experimental group the same tasks were carried out in pairs. The quality of the writing texts was determined by a holistic rating procedure that included content, organization, grammar, vocabulary and mechanics (p.286). Results of the study showed that the effect of collaborative writing was significant for content, organization, and vocabulary, but not for grammar or mechanics. Student responses, after a survey regarding the collaborative writing experience, were positive and felt it contributed to their second language learning.

In a similar study, Dobao (2012) compared the performance of the same writing task by groups of four learners, pairs and individual learners. It also examined the effect of the number of participants on the fluency, accuracy and complexity of the written outputs (p. 40). The findings showed that the texts written by the groups were more accurate than those written in pairs and individually. Wigglesworth and Storch (in press) accordingly, examined the effect of learners working in pairs or small groups on writing tasks and their responses to feedback and the extent to which this can enhance language learning. The study yielded results in favour of the learners working in pairs because they could receive immediate feedback on their deliberations and could scaffold each other’s performance.
Most of these studies, however, involve participants who are mainly university students studying English or other foreign languages and adult ESL students completing their degree courses (Dobao, 2012; Shehadeh, 2011; Storch 2005; Wigglesworth and Storch, in press). Finally, studies that have taken place in order to investigate collaborative writing and its effects on students’ writings do not involve systematic engagement of young learners in collaborative process writing activities, which will be the aim of this study.

To test for the advantages of collaborative writing over individual writing in a Greek primary school context, we designed the experiment described in the next section.

3. Methodology

3.1. The hypothesis and research questions

Drawing on the research presented above, the hypothesis underlying the present study is that systematic collaborative writing within process writing could enhance primary school fourth grade students’ writing skills.

More specifically, the questions posed are as follows:

1. Is collaborative process writing more effective than individual process writing? More specifically, can collaborative process writing affect students’ task performance by enhancing their achievement?
2. How do fourth grade students perceive collaborative writing after systematic engagement with process writing tasks and how do their perceptions compare with those of their peers, engaged in individual writing?

3.2. Participants, teaching context and procedure

The participants in the present research were fourth grade students in two classes of a primary school in the Prefecture of Piraeus. There were 22 10–11 year old students in each class, of mixed gender, nationality and learning abilities. Their level of proficiency was that of A1 (“Breakthrough”). Most learners had been studying English as a foreign language for an average of 3 years, including instruction at private institutes.

Both classes were taught by the same teacher, so the instructional curriculum was the same before the research. The main collaborative unit in the experimental group was the pair but there was some group work included in this group, as well. Students in both groups (the control and the experimental one) were assigned the production of four written outputs in two different genres, descriptive and emails. The format of the writing activities was the same in both conditions, as both groups were involved in the same process writing activities. However, the students in the experimental condition were given more activity time. Each session or writing cycle consisted of 4–5 one-hour lessons and all writing tasks, drafting, revising and editing were completed during classroom time.

In the experimental group, 7 pairs were formed by self–selection whereas the other 4, being indecisive about who to collaborate with, were appointed by the teacher on the basis of having more able students to scaffold others, who were less able. The change of partners in 8 out of the 11 pairs is indicative of collaboration conflict². Throughout the sessions, the teacher held individual conferences with students to help them resolve problems and tension and to ensure the fair division of work to the greatest possible extent.
3.3. The method

In order to explore the above questions, we arranged for two groups of students to engage in process writing activities over a period of five weeks. Further research was done with the same group of students again for a period of about five weeks the following year to see if the initial results persisted. In order to determine the relative advantages of students’ achievement and task performance in the collaborative mode, we compared one group’s written outputs after the implementation of collaborative process writing tasks with a second group’s individually written outputs. Individually and jointly produced texts were compared both quantitatively and qualitatively with a view to gaining further insight into the quality of students’ writing and investigating the progress made by each group. The mean scores were considered and compared regarding quantitative measures, that is fluency, complexity and accuracy as well as qualitative measures regarding content, structure and organization of the texts. Students’ attitudes and reflections on collaborative writing and its usefulness were also gauged immediately after the final collaborative and individual writing session through the administration of a post-writing questionnaire. The two groups’ answers were analysed and discussed.

3.4. Instruments and measures for data collection

The students’ written outputs were analyzed with the use of both quantitative and qualitative measures. This combination of methods targeted some kind of holistic assessment (Bacha, 2001, p. 374). Quantitative measures included measures of fluency, complexity, and accuracy. Fluency was measured in terms of the total number of words (Dobao, 2012), whereas complexity in terms of the total number of clauses produced and the number of simple and compound sentences present in the students’ texts. Accuracy, on the other hand, was measured by the proportion of clauses free of grammar, syntax, lexis or spelling errors as against the total number of clauses. Punctuation and capitalization errors were not considered. Errors were defined as syntactic, that is, having to do with order or missing elements or as morphological. On the other hand, the qualitative evaluation of students’ written outputs considered the content, structure and organization of the texts with some little reference to mechanics. To this end, a 5-scale global evaluation scheme was adopted that was made up of a commentary type of text (see Appendix). Students’ writings were quantitatively assessed on a score out of 5 and half scores were also awarded.

To measure the mean, which is the average of the scores obtained, we computed students’ progress in all variables of the four written outputs (i.e. total number of words, total number of sentences, number of error free clauses, number of simple sentences, number of compound sentences, number of grammar, lexical and spelling errors). The ‘mean’ of the overall scores was also used to describe the general tendencies in the data obtained and the overall spread of the scores (Dörnyei, 2007, p.213) of the students’ texts. The median was used to indicate the number which is ‘the fiftieth percentile’ that separates the best fifty percent of the scores, from the worst fifty percent of the scores of the written outputs. Variance and its square root, the standard deviation, indicators of the average distance of the scores from the mean (Bachman, 1990, p. 73) were also computed. These statistics were used to measure students’ progress in both groups related to the overall grade assigned to their outputs.

Lastly, the two distinct questionnaires used to explore students’ perceptions of the process, were administered in Greek. The ‘Likert scale’ was used to express either a relatively positive/favorable or negative/unfavorable attitude towards the writing experience and
open-ended questions were used to obtain ‘rich data’ about the participants’ experience and to widen the scope of the researcher’s understanding (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 40). Response options, however, were reduced to three since the researcher had to deal with young children (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 38). Questionnaires were designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data; the former resulting in numerical data, which could be replicable and generalizable, to a certain extent, to other contexts, and the latter resulting in open-ended, non-numerical data that was exploratory in nature (Dörnyei, 2003, 2007).

4. Results and Discussion

The results tend to reveal that extended collaboration can generally have a positive effect on students’ written output in terms of fluency, complexity, accuracy, content and organization.

Comparative analysis of students’ individually and jointly written texts showed that, first, with regard to fluency, pairs tended to compose longer texts than students who composed individually, contrary to past research, which has shown that learners writing alone produce longer texts than learners writing either in groups or in pairs (cf. Dobao, 2012; Storch, 2005). Still, it is worth noting that, after prolonged engagement, both groups tended to increase the length of the texts they produced, evidently due to the effects of process writing, as we can see in Chart 1. As regards complexity, that is, the total number of clauses and the number of simple and compound sentences present in the students’ texts, students in the collaborative group again produced more clauses than the individual group. So, we have an advantage for the collaborative group here, too. The collaborative group produced more simple sentences than the individual group as well (Chart 2). In this case, too, the collaborative group performed better than the individual one. The collaborative group also tended to produce slightly more compound sentences than the individual group, though with a certain amount of fluctuation, as we can see in Chart 3.
The third feature examined was accuracy, that is, the number of error-free clauses as against the total number of clauses produced as well as the number of grammar, lexical and spelling errors. Overall, the texts produced by the collaborative group appeared to contain more error-free clauses than their individual group counterparts, as we can see in Chart 4. Moreover, texts produced in the collaborative condition appeared to be more accurate in relation to grammar errors and, particularly in session 3, the difference between the two groups seemed to increase substantially (Chart 5). The collaborative group seemed to outperform the individual one, here as well. As for lexical errors, it can be said that the collaborative group yielded texts that were more accurate in word choice (Chart 6).

Finally, in the case of spelling errors, the means revealed that the individual group produced fewer errors in session 1 than the collaborative group. Yet, the individual group demonstrated a gradual decrease in the number of spelling errors they made in the subsequent sessions 2 and 3, as shown in Chart 7. Overall, then, that is in terms of fluency, complexity and accuracy, we can see that the collaborative group obtained better scores in all sessions compared to the individual group.
On the other hand, it is interesting to note that there was a tendency for both groups to yield progressively better scores in terms of overall mark mean (Chart 8). And, as for the overall mark median, it can be said that for every written text the median for the collaborative group was better than the median for the individual group, which means that the middle point (when arranged in rank order) of the scores achieved in pairs was better compared to the middle point of the scores in the individual group. In other words, the upper ‘fiftieth percentile’ of the pairs was better than that of the individuals, as we can see in Chart 9 below:

Finally, as regards the overall mark variance, it should be noted that the lowest values of variance in the collaborative group in comparison to those in the individual group indicate that the former was more homogeneous than the latter. Thus, the results for overall mark variance and standard deviation are positive for the collaborative group, too (Charts 10 and 11).
All things considered, the collaborative group seemed to outperform the individual group in all the above-mentioned measures. Though the statistical significance of the differences was not computed, due to the relatively small learner sample employed, considerable differences were noted between the two groups with regard to fluency and in terms of the means of text length and the means of the number of clauses. Also, substantial differences were observed between the collaborative and individual group concerning complexity and as to the mean number of simple sentences. The differences between the two groups with reference to the mean number of compound sentences were clear, too. Substantial differences, were also to be noted between the texts written by pairs and those written by individual learners with regard to accuracy and in terms of the mean number of error-free clauses and the mean number of grammar errors. The variations between the two groups concerning the mean number of lexical errors were clear, as were the ones in the mean number of spelling errors. Finally, the results regarding the overall mark mean, the variance and standard deviation were also in favor of the collaborative group. It is worth commenting here that the individual group’s results revealed a general tendency for improvement throughout the sessions, with some fluctuations, as well. This might be attributed to the fact that their performance might have been positively affected by process writing activities. Still, the collaborative group’s performance, in relation to all variables, also tended to improve gradually and retained its lead throughout.

Interestingly, in the collaborative condition pairs produced longer texts, as we can see in Chart 1 above, but it took them longer to complete the writing tasks than the students in the control condition. These findings are in line with previous research, in which pairs spend more time deliberating over language use and the content of their outputs (Storch, 2005; Storch and Wigglesworth 2007). When it comes to accuracy, the findings of this research are also in line with those which have found that learners writing in pairs produce linguistically more accurate texts than students writing alone (Shehadeh, 2011; Storch, 2005; Storch and Wigglesworth 2007). The present research actually supports the social constructivist view of learning that students, at least low – proficiency ones, can benefit from scaffolding each other. Furthermore, the repeated collaborative writing activities seemed to have provided learners with repeated practice in generating ideas, giving and receiving feedback, rewriting, and all this can be said to lead to learning (Wigglesworth and Storch, in press).

The additional samples that were collected the following year, after engaging the same group of students in individual and pair work, reinforced the hypothesis of this study regarding the results of collaborative writing. In the additional samples, students working in pairs produced shorter texts than those working individually, in line with research conducted the previous year regarding the same measures. In terms of complexity, pairs tended to write less complex sentences, although the mean values seemed to increase progressively in favour of the...
collaborative group. Similarly, in terms of accuracy, texts produced by pairs were grammatically and linguistically more accurate than those produced individually. The differences regarding grammar, spelling and errors between the two groups were clear and generally persisted but there were some fluctuations concerning the mean values. The advantage for the collaborative group persisted in the case of error free clauses, as well.

The results from the additional samples regarding the overall mark mean (Chart 12), median, variance and standard deviation (Chart 13) were clearly positive for the collaborative group. The above results provide further evidence for the effects of the extended use of collaborative writing tasks in the second language classroom. Generally, the rate of improvement was higher in the collaborative group than in the individual group, which means that students became familiar with collaborative writing tasks, so their performance improved gradually.

The data collected by administering the post–writing questionnaires to the two student groups revealed a generally highly positive attitude towards the specific learning experience as a whole. More specifically, as regards the collaborative group, the data revealed that, despite the clashes/conflict observed, a great percentage of respondents enjoyed the extended pair work and felt their writing improved because of the collaboration and made them work harder, as shown in Graph 1 below (items 2 and 4). Respondents also highly favored the idea of producing a joint piece of writing (item 3) and found it easy to collaborate throughout the stages of process writing (item 5a, 5b and 5c) with the editing stage being the highest on their preference list (item 5d). Students also felt that collaboration helped them a great deal to make changes in their work (item 6), that collaboration gave them the opportunity to contribute to the production of the common document by providing suggestions (item 7) and the majority quite enjoyed the idea of being assessed together with a partner (item 8). Despite their positive attitudes towards the collaborative working mode, however, more than half (item 9) of the respondents felt they worked more on the writing tasks than their partners and half of the students claimed that there were points of disagreement (item 10). Still, the majority highly favored the idea of engaging in collaborative writing activities in the future (item 13).
Moreover, respondents expressed positive feelings towards peer feedback and found it useful in improving their work (items 14 – 15), as we can see in Graph 2 below:

Similarly, as we can see in Graph 3 below, a great percentage of the students (item 16) claimed that they learnt more and improved their knowledge of English by collaborating. Respondents, however, were less positive about the reduction of the bulk of the work by collaborating with others (item 17). A high percentage (item 18) believed that they learnt to cooperate with others and also more than half of them (item 19) claimed that they got mutual support and that they built their friendship (item 20). More than half claimed that collaboration helped them to share ideas and get a better understanding of the work (item 21).
Finally, with respect to the open-ended questions referring to feelings and attitudes towards the collaborative experience as a whole and to the benefits of doing pair work, students’ responses yielded some very interesting insights. Most students expressed very positive feelings towards collaboration, joint writing, interacting, providing mutual support, getting to know each other better, building their friendship, and all this seemed to have filled them with joy. One student actually said that it was the best thing that he had ever done. Few of them, however, commented that they could not cooperate well with their partners. Concerning the benefits of pair work, on the other hand, students commented again on building their friendship, helping each other and having fun, teaching one another new things and getting the same grade. Last but not least, a great percentage of respondents expressed their strong agreement with the perceived benefits of extended pair – work and collaborative writing in particular.

All things considered, it can be said that students’ responses to the questionnaires provided further evidence about the usefulness of collaborative writing activities in the second language classroom. The findings clearly showed that collaborative writing created an overall positive atmosphere in the classroom and encouraged student collaboration as well as promoted good interpersonal relations.

5. Conclusions and implications for teaching

This study is not without its limitations. To start with, it was carried out within one particular primary school and with two specific groups of students and, therefore, results may not be generalizable within other contexts (Dörnyei, 2003, 2007). It would be nice to see what happens when the research encompasses secondary students. Second, we were not able to compare the pair-work learning arrangement with a similar one, “where students were assigned to work in pairs but not assessed together”, as suggested in Roskams (1999, p. 103). Allotting group grades is something that needs to be considered further, especially after the questionnaire results, which revealed students’ frustration over doing most of the work. Moreover, we do not know if results could have been affected if students had been provided with explicit training in collaborative skills and strategies and if more time had been spent on structured classroom activities prior to collaborative writing. It might also have been useful to engage in a discussion of the learning values of collaboration and, generally, in careful class preparation either through individual and pair conferencing prior to any engagement in such activities (Howard, 2000). For this reason, it is suggested that it would be to the benefit of...
students if there was some mechanism that would ensure the fair division of work, as suggested in Roskams (1999, p. 10). Further research could also investigate the effects of peer feedback and the concept of “collaborative autonomy” in students’ pair or even small group work as well as how ‘weaning’ students away from teacher dependence can affect their writing performance. For this purpose, it would be interesting to see what happens if students are told to decide how to share the work themselves from the very beginning so as not to complain about the sharing being unfair.

The present study provided evidence that systematic engagement in collaborative writing activities can be a challenging experience for the students. Young learners of English were faced with tasks they had never engaged in before. Generally, the findings of the present study, in line with findings from other research (see, e.g., Shehadeh, 2011, p. 296) showed that collaborative writing can be an “important pedagogical tool in the learning and teaching of writing in foreign language contexts” by encouraging student collaboration and a positive social classroom atmosphere, which enable students to produce better scripts than when they work individually. Further experimental work could investigate the questions posed in this study with larger samples so that results can be more generalizable. In addition, further research could examine the extent to which the number of participants in collaborative writing activities can influence “the opportunities that peer interaction offers for collaboration and collaborative dialogue” (Dobao, 2012: 56). More specifically, it would be quite interesting to see if students while working in small groups, in order to produce a joint text, can interact with task features in the same way pairs do and how learner-related factors can influence their collaboration.

Finally, future research could focus on insights from incorporating collaborative writing activities and creating conditions for more collaborative arrangements in the classroom throughout the school year so as to prepare students for a future which may require them to write collaboratively (Ede and Lunsford, 1990; Murray, 1992 in Storch 2005). As Vygotsky (1978) has rightly pointed out, human development is inherently a socially situated activity in which cognitive and linguistic development arises in social interaction with more able members of society and stretches beyond their current level towards their potential level of development.

Notes

1. “Intervention” and “awareness” are the two essential elements of process writing pedagogy, according to Susser (1994).
2. Opposition and dysfunction were part of this unproductive behavior and that is why the change of partners was deemed necessary. The main goal was to make the students willing to contribute to the tasks actively. Generally, students seemed to become more familiar with the whole procedure after the second session.
3. In analyzing students’ texts it was felt important to consider not only grammatical and lexical accuracy but also complexity, because it reflects, as pointed out by Storch, “the writer’s willingness to engage and experiment with a range of syntactic structures” (2005, p. 158).
4. A simple sentence “consists of one independent clause” while “a compound sentence contains two or more independent clauses”, as suggested in Clampitt, Page-Jacobs and Skinner (2007, p. 66). An independent clause, on the other hand, is a grammatical structure which contains a subject and a verb and which can be used on its own (Richards, Platt and Platt, 1992 in Storch, 2005, p. 157).
5. Like, for example, inappropriate tense, plural forms, subject-verb agreement, incorrect use of prepositions, articles and errors in word formation and wrong word choice (Storch, 2005, p. 158).
6. This was done due to the students’ young age.
7. The vertical axis in Charts 1-7 refers to the mean values of the scores in each session.

References


### Appendix

#### Overall evaluation scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.= Excellent</td>
<td>This is a very well written text. It is well structured. Ideas are clearly organized and well linked together. The specific task is fully addressed and the response is very good. Very good control of simple grammatical structures. Very effective choice of words with only minor spelling and punctuation errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.= Good</td>
<td>This is a good text. It has a clear overall structure. Ideas are fairly well organized; they are generally linked appropriately and easy to follow. Most of the specific task is addressed and the response is good. Good control of simple grammatical structures with occasional errors. Effective choice of words with few spelling and punctuation errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.= Average</td>
<td>This is a satisfactory text. It has an overall structure. Main ideas are somewhat clear; they are loosely organized, loosely linked and incomplete. The specific task is partially addressed but the response is satisfactory. Fair control of simple grammatical structures with some impeding errors. Adequate choice of words with a fair number of spelling and punctuation errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.= Poor</td>
<td>This is an adequate text. The text is difficult to follow because the main ideas are not clear or well organized. Minor attempt to address the specific task. The response is weak. Limited control of simple grammatical structures with many errors. Limited choice of words with frequent errors in spelling and punctuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.= Very Poor</td>
<td>This is a poorly written text. It is poorly organized and difficult to follow. Main ideas are unclear. Weak attempt to address the specific task. The response is very unclear. Very poor control of simple grammatical structures. Ineffective choice of words with almost no control over spelling and punctuation.</td>
</tr>
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Developing a strategic reading approach in Greek primary EFL classes: An exploratory study

Anάπτυξη στρατηγικών κατανόησης γραπτού λόγου σε Έλληνες μαθητές Δημοτικού σχολείου που μαθαίνουν την αγγλική ως ξένη γλώσσα: Μια διερευνητική μελέτη

Polyxeni MANOLI

The present study probed into the immediate and delayed effects of a multiple-strategy instruction on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners’ reading performance. The sample of the study consisted of 20, 11 to 12 year-old, Greek-speaking EFL learners, who received a three-month multiple-reading strategy instruction set within the Direct Explanation framework and participated in pretest, immediate and delayed posttest measurements. The data came from two reading comprehension measures, one standardized EFL reading ability test and one researcher-designed reading test. The results of the study indicated that the EFL students improved their reading performance both in the immediate and delayed posttest measurements when compared to their pretest measurement. Empirical evidence for not only the immediate but also the delayed effects of strategy training in young EFL contexts is provided. Pedagogical implications and recommendations for further research are also discussed.
1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is viewed as the result of complex interactions between the text, the setting, the reader, and the reading strategies -both in a first (L1) and second language (L2)\(^1\) (Erler & Finkbeiner, 2007). Reading strategies, which are regarded as “ways of getting round difficulties encountered while reading” (Urqhart & Weir, 1998, p. 95), “are of interest not only for what they reveal about the way readers manage their interactions with written text, but also for how the use of strategies is related to effective reading comprehension” (Carrell, 1998, p. 1). Macaro (2006) highlighted that strategies attempt to turn a L2 text from a state in which it is not understood into different states or levels of understanding and integration into existing knowledge or experience.

A considerable amount of L2 reading research shed light on the use of reading strategies and strategy instruction in order to enhance learners’ reading achievement. More recent trends in L2 reading research emphasized multiple-strategy instruction rather than individual strategy instruction highlighting the fact that strategic readers draw on a repertoire of strategies, perceive the nature of the problem, choose the appropriate strategies and coordinate their use with other strategies according to the purpose of reading (Anderson, 1991; Grabe, 2009).

Although there is some empirical evidence for the effects of multiple-strategy instruction on EFL reading performance or strategy use (see section 2.2), there is a lack of studies investigating the maintenance of comprehension gains after intervention withdrawal; examining the delayed effects of strategy instruction should constitute one of the main aims of the different intervention programmes, as the value of strategy training draws on whether its impact lasts over time when the strategy sessions have ceased (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2011; Plonsky, 2011). Concurrently, research evidence points to a dearth of focus on the reading comprehension skill in classrooms highlighting that it is often limited to a short text comprehension and simply regarded as a tool for exposing learners to vocabulary (Grenfell, 1992; Janzen, 2007; Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2013).
2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategy instruction

The line of reading research that examined the strategies that skilled and less-skilled readers deploy (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Block, 1986; Geladari, Griva, & Mastrothanasis, 2010; Malcolm, 2009; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Zhang & Wu, 2009) in an attempt to construct meaning from written texts was conducive to strategy instruction in order to help less proficient readers develop strategic reading and improve comprehension (Koda, 2005). It is assumed that the cognitive enterprise of effective reading comprehension requires readers’ use and control of a variety of strategies when faced with comprehension difficulties (Cohen, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005; Oxford, 2011). However, efficient strategy use cannot be attained merely as a result of reading but should be integrated in the reading instruction process through explicit teaching the reasoning associated with strategy development (Dewitz, Jones, & Leahy, 2009; Duffy, Roehler, Meloth, & Vavrus, 1986). Explicit strategy instruction includes a cycle of direct explanation of strategies, modelling, guided and independent practice of strategies to familiarize students with strategy use, raise students’ metacognitive awareness of the reading process, and enhance comprehension (Duffy, 2002; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Oxford, 2011; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Metacognitive awareness during the reading process refers to readers’ metacognitive knowledge of the nature and purpose of reading and the self-control mechanisms they can use to monitor and control comprehension (Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001).

In this way, reading instruction should involve direct verbal explanation on behalf of the teachers in order to communicate information about what the strategies are (declarative knowledge), when and why to use them (conditional knowledge), and how to use them (procedural knowledge) (Duffy et al., 1986; Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983). There is consensus among researchers that children’s declarative knowledge of strategies is not sufficient for high performance without both procedural and conditional knowledge about the strategies (Sperling, Howard, Staley, & Dubois, 2004; Weinstein, Husman, & Dierking, 2000).

2.2. Research on multiple-strategy instruction

Based on L1 reading research (e.g., Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, & Schuder, 1996; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Spörer, Brunstein, & Kieschke, 2009), a number of EFL studies dealing with adults or university students in a range of cultural and learning settings have probed into the immediate effects of multiple-strategy training that develops within students’ metacognitive awareness. The findings of these studies, which mostly implemented multiple-strategy training consisting of teacher strategy modelling followed by student practice with a focus on comprehension monitoring, showed that strategy training could enhance strategy use and improve EFL reading achievement.

To be more precise, Cotterall (1990) and Song (1998), drawing on Palincsar and Brown’s (1984) study, conducted metacognitive strategy instruction via the Reciprocal Teaching approach in pre-university EFL classes and lent support for the effectiveness of the training on learners’ reading achievement. Salataci and Akyel (2002) explored the effects of applying a four-week metacognitive multiple-strategy instruction through the Reciprocal Teaching approach indicating that the Turkish-speaking university EFL students increased strategy use in both languages and enhanced EFL reading performance. Dreyer and Nel (2003) conducted a 13-week multiple-strategy training within a technology-enhanced learning environment in
South African college students learning EFL for professional purposes indicating that students in the experimental group received significantly higher marks on three comprehension measures as compared to the students in the control group. Zhang (2008), when applying a two-month multiple-strategy instruction within a constructivist framework to Chinese university EFL students, revealed positive effects of the training on learners’ reading achievement. In another study, Aghaie and Zhang (2012) demonstrated the positive impact of a four-month multiple-strategy instruction on Iranian high school EFL students’ reading performance and strategy transfer. Akkakoson (2013) also indicated positive effects of implementing strategy training on Thai university EFL students’ reading achievement and strategy use. More recently, Dabarera, Renandya, and Zhang (2014), who investigated the impact of applying strategy training via the Reciprocal Teaching approach to EFL secondary school students in Singapore, found that the training improved students’ reading achievement and boosted their metacognitive awareness.

Regarding the Greek socio-educational context, no study has so far focused on multiple-reading strategy instruction, while few studies have examined the impact of individual reading strategy instruction providing positive results (Hatzitheodorou, 2005; Pappa, Zafiropoulou, & Metallidou, 2003; Rizouli, 2013).

Relying on EFL reading research, there is a dearth of empirical studies exploring the maintenance of comprehension gains after intervention withdrawal, though it is assumed that the value of strategy training draws on whether its impact lasts over time (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2011; Plonsky, 2011). Allowing for the gap identified in the literature review, the purpose of this study was to investigate the immediate and delayed effects of implementing multiple-strategy instruction on primary students’ reading performance who were attending EFL classes in Greece.

3. Method

3.1. Research questions and hypotheses

Allowing for the theoretical underpinnings discussed above and the purpose of the study, the following research questions were addressed:

- Can a multiple-strategy training set within the Direct Explanation approach enhance primary EFL students’ reading achievement?
- Can the comprehension gains from strategy training be maintained in a subsequent non-treatment measurement?

Concurrently, the following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

- It was assumed that the EFL students would significantly improve their reading performance after the strategy training.
- It was expected that the EFL students would maintain comprehension gains in a subsequent non-treatment measurement.

3.2. Participants

The sample of the study consisted of 20 Greek-speaking EFL learners registered in the sixth grade -the last grade- of a primary state school in a provincial city of central Greece, Trikala. The participants were approximately 11-12 years old and of A2 level according to the levels
of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, 2001). This particular age was chosen, as it was expected that students at the age of approximately 12 would have been more receptive to the acquisition of strategies when compared to younger or older students, as strategies develop between the age of 7 and 13, though their spontaneous use materializes around the age of 10 or above (Garner, 1990; Kolić-Vehovec, Bajšanski, & Rončević Zubković, 2010; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). Simultaneously, it was assumed that Greek students would already have had a cumulative EFL learning experience of at least four years at the time when the data were collected, since EFL is taught as a compulsory subject from the third to the sixth grade of state elementary schools -Greek primary education consists of six grades- three hours per week -each teaching hour lasts for approximately 40 minutes.

3.3. Procedure

One week before and after the teaching intervention a standardized EFL reading ability test and a researcher-designed reading test were administered to investigate the immediate effects of the strategy instruction on students’ reading performance. In addition, three months after the intervention withdrawal the same researcher-designed test as the one used as a pretest and posttest measure was administered to explore the delayed effects of the strategy training on students’ reading achievement. All the research instruments were administered to the students by the researcher in order to be in control of the testing procedure, that is, the provision of the appropriate guidelines and the avoidance of possible interference on behalf of their EFL teachers.

3.4. Research instruments

Two research instruments were used to collect data in this study: one standardized EFL reading ability test and one researcher-designed reading test. All reading tests were scored by two judges, the researcher and another colleague, independently; the inter-rater agreement was quite satisfactory (92%). Acceptable responses were determined at the outset of the scoring procedure. Possible differences were resolved through regular meetings between the two scorers. Simultaneously, most items were multiple-choice and short answer questions, which demand no judgment on behalf of the scorer and render the whole scoring process more objective and reliable (Hughes, 2003).

The standardized reading ability test. The reading section of a national, standardized foreign language exam system was used to assess sixth graders’ reading performance before and after the teaching intervention. It included cloze texts and short texts that were accompanied by 40 multiple-choice and 10 fill-in-the-gap questions. It was completed within a teaching hour, that is, within 40 minutes, to avoid disruptions in the normal flow of classes. According to the instructions provided by the examination board, the scoring procedure of this section relies on a 50-point scale, 1 point per correct item. At the same time, the standardized reading ability measure was used to check the validity of the researcher-designed measure; significant Pearson correlations were found between the results of the reading section of the standardized test and the researcher-designed measure ($r = .54, p < .01$).

The researcher-designed reading test. It comprised three texts consisting of multiple-choice and short answer questions, which were specifically designed to examine the reading strategies the teaching intervention emphasized. The constructed test was also designed to be completed within a teaching hour. Moreover, the time limit of the tasks designed to
measure the use of skimming and scanning was particularly tight, as both skimming and scanning are selective types of reading requiring a high speed (Carver, 1992; Grabe, 2009). The constructed test was also scored on a 50-point scale in agreement with the scale used in the reading section of the standardized test. Regarding internal consistency, Cronbach’s alphas was satisfactory for the constructed test -above the .7 acceptance level (α=.86).

3.5. The teaching intervention

The strategy instruction, which was conducted by the researcher, lasted for approximately three months and included 12 instructional sessions, one per week, to avoid disruption of the normal flow of class. Allowing for the English Curriculum (2003) that is intended for the level at which this study was conducted and the framework set by the CEFR (2001), the reading strategies taught in the present study were: predicting text content and using semantic mapping prior to text reading, getting the gist (skimming), identifying specific information (scanning), and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. The instructional approach adopted in the study was based on Direct Explanation, which followed a cycle of strategy explanation, modelling and extensive practice consisting of gradual removal of scaffolding in order to familiarize students with the strategy use and raise their metacognitive awareness of the reading process (Duffy et al., 1986; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

To be more precise, the first two instructional sessions were devoted to direct strategy explanation and modelling where the researcher’s main aim was to communicate particular pieces of information about what each strategy was (declarative knowledge), how it could be applied (procedural knowledge), when and why it could be used (conditional knowledge) (Duffy et al., 1986; Paris et al., 1983). The researcher’s strategy modelling relied on concrete examples from a text by thinking aloud the cognitive processes taking place during each strategy application to turn the covert comprehension processes into overt (Dewitz et al., 2009; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). On subsequent days, the students were given chances to put the new strategies into guided practice, where the researcher and students worked together. In this context, the students were asked to work on a variety of reading materials and activities that were chosen and designed to facilitate the use of the specific strategies applying a combination of strategies to each text. The researcher’s assistance was gradually removed leading to more independent practice (Pearson & Dole, 1987; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) to help students “find their own pathways to success” (Cohen, 1998, p. 67). The participants were constantly encouraged to reflect upon their own strategy use in each activity aiming to help them enhance their ability to monitor the reading comprehension process. Answers were checked in class and corrective feedback was provided, where necessary. In the last instructional session, the researcher provided students with the chance to co-ordinate all the strategies they had been taught in a new reading material without interfering in the whole learning process to help them transfer the taught strategies to new but similar reading situations (Cohen, 1998; Duffy et al., 1986; Pearson & Dole, 1987).

Reading materials. The reading materials were chosen to promote the use of the specific reading strategies. Concurrently, the researcher attempted to expose students to a range of texts, such as narrative, expository, argumentative, and descriptive (see De Beaugrande, 1981; Koda, 2005). Most of them were mainly drawn from educational internet sites, as the researcher’s aim was to use authentic texts that would attract students’ attention and activate their background knowledge. These texts covered a variety of topics ranging from pen pals, museum maps, mobile phones to Disneyland Park and horror stories allowing for
students’ interests and preferences, which, according to Nuttall (1996), is the most important selection criterion. Furthermore, though students’ reading proficiency was taken into consideration, most of the texts used in the training were of a higher reading ability level than students’ actual level, because strategy development is required when students face comprehension difficulties (Dole, Duffy, Roehler, & Pearson, 1991; Urquhart & Weir, 1998). Regarding the activities accompanying the texts, they were designed to practise the use of the reading strategies emphasized in the instructional sessions. Activities, such as multiple choice, matching, true/false/not given, and short-answer questions were mainly designed, which limit students’ choice and allow objectivity in the scoring procedures.

3.6. Data analysis

The present study included three sets of data: a) the pre-intervention data (pretest), b) the post-intervention data (posttest) and c) the follow-up data. For the statistical analyses of the data, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 was used. In accordance with the aims of the study, the statistical analyses of Repeated Measures of ANOVA and Paired T-Test were computed. The level of significance was set at .05.

4. Results

To investigate the immediate and delayed effects of the strategy training on EFL students’ reading performance, a Repeated Measures ANOVA design was conducted with the scores of the standardized test in the two measurement times (before and after the intervention) as within subject variable. The results showed that the main effect of time was statistically significant, $F(1, 19) = 19.32, p < .001, \eta^2 = .504$. Additionally, the application of Paired T-Test demonstrated that the difference in comprehension scores was statistically significant between the pretest and posttest measurement, $t(19) = -4.395, p < .001$. The mean scores of the standardized reading measure before and after the intervention are depicted in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SRAT1</td>
<td>RT1</td>
<td>SRAT2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>31.60</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>39.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>9.52</td>
<td>9.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SRAT1= the score in the Standardized Reading Ability Test in the pretest measurement, SRAT2= the score in the Standardized Reading Ability Test in the posttest measurement, while RT1= the score in the Researcher-designed Reading Test in the pretest measurement, RT2= the score in the Researcher-designed Reading Text in the posttest measurement, RT3= the score in the Researcher-designed Reading Text in the follow-up measurement.

Table 1. Means and SD of the students’ reading performance in the three different measurements.

Moreover, a Repeated Measures ANOVA design was performed using the time of measurement (pretest, posttest, and follow-up) as a within subjects variable and the scores of the researcher-designed reading comprehension test in the three different measurements as the dependent variables. The results indicated that the main effect of time factor was statistically significant, $F(2, 38) = 61.76, p < .001, \eta^2 = .765$. Concurrently, the application of Paired T-Test showed that the difference in comprehension scores was statistically significant between the pretest and the posttest measurement, $t(19) = -10.208, p < .001$, between the pretest and the follow-up measurement, $t(19) = -4.730, p < .001$, and between
the posttest and the follow-up measurement, \( t(19) = 6.668, p < .001 \). Even though there was a loss from the posttest to the follow-up measurement, the difference in performance between the pretest and the follow-up measurement was still statistically significant in favor of the follow-up measurement (see Table 1).

The above results confirmed not only the immediate but also the delayed effects of the strategy instruction on students’ reading performance after the intervention (posttest measurement) as well as in a subsequent non-treatment measurement (follow-up measurement).

5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the immediate and delayed effects of implementing explicit multiple-strategy instruction on EFL primary students’ reading performance. Initially, it was assumed that students would improve reading performance in an immediate and delayed posttest measurement as compared to their pretest measurement. Indeed, the analyses of the research data confirmed the above hypotheses.

To be more precise, a comparison of the data collected before and after strategy instruction revealed that the EFL students significantly improved their performance on both comprehension measures. This finding is in accordance with previous studies that have also examined the immediate effects of multiple-strategy instruction on EFL students’ reading performance and yielded positive results (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Akkakoson, 2013; Cotterall, 1990; Dabarera et al., 2014; Dreyer & Nel, 2003; Salataci & Akyel, 2002; Song, 1998; Zhang, 2008). However, no direct comparisons can be made with the above studies, as there are major differences in the characteristics of the sample, the duration of the teaching interventions, the strategies used or the instructional approach adopted in each study.

In addition, the results of the study provided strong support for the maintenance of comprehension gains after treatment withdrawal. Namely, it was shown that the Greek-speaking EFL students who received metacognitive multiple-reading strategy instruction maintained comprehension gains in a subsequent measurement, which did not disappear after treatment withdrawal. Indeed, the results indicated that the means of the researcher-designed comprehension measure differentiated significantly not only between the pretest and the posttest measurement but also between the pretest and the follow-up measurement, confirming the immediate and delayed effects of the strategy training on students’ reading performance both after the intervention (immediate posttest measurement) and some months after the intervention withdrawal (delayed posttest measurement). Although a loss from the posttest to the follow-up measurement can be observed, which is quite normal due to the passage of time, the difference in performance between the pretest and the follow-up measurement was still statistically significant in favor of the follow-up measurement. Given that the delayed effects of strategy training have not been examined thoroughly in the EFL reading research, the comprehension gains found in a subsequent non-treatment measurement of the study contribute to this line of research and strengthen the theoretical belief that explicit multiple-strategy instruction involving metacognitive awareness raising could be a valuable instructional tool for EFL reading comprehension (Duffy et al., 1986). After all, the value of strategy instruction is critical when its impact lasts over time when the instructional sessions have ceased (Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2011; Plonsky, 2011).
Concomitantly, the data of the study supported the effectiveness of the instructional approach adopted, which seemed to be conducive to students’ significant comprehension gains. In other words, the Direct Explanation approach, which followed a cycle of direct strategy explanation, modelling, and extensive practice emphasizing the three types of metacognitive knowledge (declarative, procedural, and conditional) proved to be really efficient in helping students internalize strategy instruction (Duffy et al., 1986; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Paris et al., 1983; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Paris et al. (1983) alleged that these three types of knowledge constitute necessary components of strategic behavior, as they assist learners in selecting the appropriate strategies to facilitate reading comprehension. Moreover, it is highly possible that the duration of the training, which lasted for three months including 12 instructional sessions, have contributed to the positive results yielded, as developing students’ strategic reading behaviour is a long-term educational process requiring teachers’ perpetual support, explanations, modelling, and feedback throughout strategy training (Carrell, 1998; Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005).

In fact, the teaching intervention diverged from the rather traditional and teacher-centered way of approaching EFL reading comprehension in the Greek primary classes, which consisted of oral text reading through mainly the Round Robin Reading (RRR) technique, text translation, vocabulary instruction, oral comprehension questions and written task completion following text reading (Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2013). The former approach emphasizes a strategic, active and selective type of reading according to the goals of reading; on the contrary, the latter approach can be regarded as rather traditional and teacher-centered focusing on readers’ passive text interaction and word mastering, as the extensive use of RRR technique is seen as an instance of ineffective and pedagogically obsolete oral reading practice (Kelly, 1995; Opitz & Rasinski, 2008). In this way, it would have been very difficult for these EFL learners that used to stick to word-for-word text translation to adopt a strategic and selective type of reading if they had not been taught during the training strategies, such as guessing unknown words from context and searching for the gist or specific pieces of information by reading quickly and omitting large parts of the text.

Overall, the results suggest that a similar instructional design should be implemented in EFL classes, including the Greek socio-educational context, in which the present study was conducted, in order to help learners approach reading materials strategically, construct text meaning and derive the pleasure of achievement notwithstanding the difficulties they may come across while interacting with reading materials. In fact, a large number of students, particularly less skilled ones, are not able to deploy reading strategies effectively lagging behind in their academic tasks (e.g., Anderson, 1991; Block, 1986; Geladari et al., 2010; Malcolm, 2009; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Zhang & Wu, 2009). Therefore, teaching students how to approach EFL texts by developing a repertoire of strategies should constitute the main focus in the various instructional sessions; explicit multiple-strategy training involving strategy explanation, modelling, and practice seems to be a promising instructional approach and could be paving the way to the future (Duffy, 2002; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Grabe, 2009; Oxford, 2011; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

Nonetheless, the findings and the pedagogical implications of the present study should be viewed with some skepticism allowing for its limitations, such as the rather small number of participants and the lack of an experimental group, which render the results less reliable. In this way, the findings of this study should be replicated and similar instructional design should be implemented in various L2 learning contexts in order to get more tangible research evidence.
6. Conclusion

The results of the study indicated that the Greek-speaking primary EFL students enhanced their reading performance in an immediate and delayed posttest measurement. Therefore, it was shown that the strategy training was effective in helping EFL students not only improve reading achievement after the teaching intervention but maintain comprehension gains in a subsequent non-treatment measurement. The findings of the study provided empirical evidence for the maintenance of comprehension gains after treatment withdrawal, which is the main contribution of the study to the relevant L2 reading research, as, to the best of the researcher’s knowledge, most studies have investigated only immediate intervention effects. However, allowing for the limitations mentioned above, future research is needed to extend and validate the findings of the present study.

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Note

1. Though the researchers are aware of the difference between the terms foreign language (FL) and L2 (Oxford, 2003), they adopt the terms L2 and EFL, as they are widely used in literature.

References


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The blog as an innovative tool for the development of the writing skill in the Greek EFL class

The present paper seeks to explore the extent to which the use of the weblog in the Greek EFL classroom can serve as a means of helping learners improve their writing and research skills. The possibility of creating ‘nodes’ of learning through blog posts that can enhance foreign language learning in real life communication instances with other members of online communities occupies central position in this research. The development of new literacies as well as the increase of intercultural awareness through the blog in a constantly changing global environment are also issues that the present research focuses on.

The blog as an innovative tool for the development of the writing skill in the Greek EFL class

Το ιστολόγιο ως καινοτόμο εργαλείο για την καλλιέργεια της δεξιότητας του γραπτού λόγου στην Ελληνική ξενόγλωσση τάξη

Evanthia AVGEROU & Kosmas VLACHOS

Key words: blog, writing, ‘nodes’ of learning, online communities, intercultural awareness, new literacies, connectivism, situated learning, digital ethics
1. Introduction

The present paper seeks to explore blog writing as a tool for the development of new literacies in the Greek educational context. It is an undeniable fact that technological advancement has played a revolutionary role in contemporary education, transforming traditional classes into innovative hubs of learning where learners create and share knowledge themselves instead of acting as passive recipients of language rules and paradigms presented to them in an uninspired way by an authority figure.

With the expansion of the World Wide Web and the installment of high speed internet connection in most schools, learners have the opportunity to apply their existing expertise in blogging by exploring new learning environments, question existing knowledge and build online communities with their classmates that offer the opportunity for synchronous or asynchronous communication. Language learning is no longer restricted within the strict confines of the classroom where one is asked to assimilate-more often than not- outdated material but becomes an ongoing process where everybody is welcome: the learners themselves, their peers from other classes, teachers, blog readers who happen to be native speakers of English or other members of online communities who can also be assisted in language learning.

The blog can offer the opportunity to give inspired feedback on topics already discussed in the classroom or become the creator of new knowledge by researching and commenting on topics that have some special appeal. In this way, language learning ceases being a burden and becomes an active process to which the participants commit themselves in an enthusiastic manner and helps them learn in a trial and error way: blog members create the content, review other members’ material, correct their peers’ mistakes, take into account the cultural values of other people and withdraw comments that violate digital ethics.

The paper attempts to explore the degree to which the writing skills of secondary education students have improved through participation in the class blog, while the participants follow rules of propriety that apply when writing for a global audience. Blog writers do not write independent texts but they also try to create ‘nodes’ of learning, developing new literacies in an environment of genuine communication instances. Through interacting with peers from other cultures, a certain degree of intercultural awareness is bound to emerge. The present research is an attempt to shed light on the above issues.

After a short presentation of learning theories and their potential development in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context through blogging, there is a presentation of the actual research design, pointing out the methods for collecting and analysing the findings as well as the research questions that need to be addressed. After the completion of the project, the researcher was able to draw conclusions as to the extent to which the blog has fulfilled its purpose and covered the issues raised by the research questions. The implications of the research are also highlighted and there are suggestions for further work regarding blogging in the Greek EFL class.
2. Theoretical background

2.1. Blogging and the development of new literacies

2.1.1. The characteristics of new literacies

With the advent of new technologies and their gradual incorporation into contemporary educational systems, a new term ‘new literacies’ has been coined referring to those literacies that have appeared in the post-typographic era (Semali, 2001). Literacy is no longer an issue of knowing the conventions of reading and writing but involves a series of socially organized practices that make wise use of a symbol system and new technologies in order to produce and disseminate knowledge (Scribner & Cole, 1981).

According to Carlson (2005), the iGeneration (learners born in the 90s and 00s, defined as ‘digital natives’) best functions in autonomous, independent and self-regulated learning environments. This generation is accustomed to creating autonomous learning environments due to their ingrained capabilities of seeking and retrieving information from an array of online resources and media (Tapscott, 1998). Therefore, as Glenn (2000) maintains, the creation of self-directed learning contexts that incorporate interactive environments, a multitude of diverse resources and personal choice through the filtering of information are intrinsic components of meaningful learning experiences for these learners.

Social interaction is another intrinsic component for the development of new literacies. Social interaction is realized through social networking tools which establish and maintain social ties among people in a digital network in a multifunctional and multisensory environment (Jones & Bronack, 2008). Identity in such networks is essentially performative, you actually become what you write, as Slater (2009) very artfully describes it. Individuals may construct very dynamic and shifting constructions and presentations of themselves (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008). This identity development is pervasive within digital communities, is further encouraged through feedback by the members of the community and reinforces the individual’s sense of self (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009).

Taking all the above into consideration, one could argue that new literacies are often fluid, continuous, open and coincide with other practices. As Leander (2003) points out, online and offline lives as well as ‘literacyscapes’ often merge, making their description as discernible entities almost impossible. The weblog is an ideal means to explore the extent to which new literacies can be developed in a meaningful context.

2.1.2. Blogging and the development of new literacies in an EFL context

Blogs can be seen as the ideal way to develop and consolidate a great number of new literacies and mark the transition to a post-typographic era, as Semali (2001) pinpoints. Through blogs students have got the chance to create online portfolios that display their work over a period of time. Such portfolios can function as knowledge artifacts as Zhang (2009) maintains, thereby giving the chance to students to reflect on the development of their writing. Through reflection on their written work, students become aware of their preferred approaches to writing or consider alternative approaches and more productive strategies for a particular task (Zhang, 2009). This is the best realization of an autonomous,
independent and self-regulated learning environment where members of the iGeneration thrive.

Blogs can also be seen as a perfect example of social networking through which participants can establish and develop social ties with other people in their network in a ‘multifaceted and multisensory environment’ (Jones & Bronack, 2008, in Mills, 2011, p.347). More specifically, blogs can be seen as creating ‘social alliances’ (Blood, 2002, in Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p.15). The comments feature gives digital writers the possibility to comment on the blog content, either favorably or unfavorably, providing additional relevant resources or linking their blog through their posts to more general conversations and affinity spaces (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

Finally, blogs can be seen as eternally modifying learning spaces through the exchange of multimedia information, microcontent of digestible length, synchronous and asynchronous feedback and collaboration (Rosen, 2010). These informal learning environments signal a transition in the role of school from ‘curricular gatekeeper to a learning hub’ (Luckin, Clark, Graber, Logan, Mee & Oliver, 2009, p.102). Knowledge and literacy are no longer static but dynamic and eternally developing and the representatives of the iGeneration are no longer the passive receptacles of information but ‘navigators of knowledge, content creators, producers and publishers’ (Luckin et al. 2009, p. 103).

2.1.3. Digital media ethics

The rules and norms governing new literacies are more fluid and ambiguous than solid conventions that govern traditional written discourse. In terms of ethos, collaborative learning spaces such as blogs favor free support and advice, knowledge construction, collective benefit, cooperation instead of competition, transparent rules and procedures and everyone being assigned a winner status (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

The new term that could best describe ethics in the world of the new media is ‘netiquette’, a hybrid term that refers to the social code on the Internet (Richards, n.d., p.1). Netiquette is an umbrella term that covers issues such as the appropriate language and tone, the guidelines that govern an online community, the reference of sources in online communication, the profiling and identity of interlocutors in social media and the way Internet users approach the increasingly blurred line between private and public (Richards, n.d.).

In terms of ethos, collaborative learning spaces such as blogs favor free support and advice, knowledge construction, collective benefit, cooperation instead of competition, transparent rules and procedures and everyone being assigned a winner status (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

2.2. Blogging in the light of new pedagogical theories: A vehicle of intercultural communication

2.2.1. Class blogging as a ‘node’ in a learning community: a connectivist approach

According to connectionism, learning is a network phenomenon, further aided and enhanced by socialization and technology (Siemens, 2006). There is no single holder of information or the truth but, on the contrary, knowledge is scattered or ‘resides in a distributed manner’ (Siemens, 2006, p. 8) across a network.
There has been a giant leap from the linear acquisition of knowledge in solid blocks that succeed each other to a more content-centered view of learning that sees language as a conduit, ‘a medium through which individuals are able to create shared meanings or interpretations of concepts’ (Siemens, 2006, p. 10). Knowledge in our digitized era is seen as ‘distributed cognition’ (Garcia, Brown & Elbeltagi, 2013, p. 254) where there is a shift from external to internal knowledge with the internet playing the role of a ‘connected structure’ (Siemens, 2006, p. 13), allowing the development of knowledge and learning, not just the storage of data and information. Learners become therefore ‘knowledge navigation enablers’ (Siemens, 2006, p. 14), interacting between internal and external elements in their acquisition of knowledge, deciding which nodes are of importance and which are unimportant and judging when a network is no longer useful for their intended purpose (Siemens, 2005).

Blogs are an ideal environment to implement the principles of connectivism, since a) they provide opportunities for learners to collaborate and interact online with others (Richardson, 2010), b) help create social structures (Efimova & Hendrick, 2005) and c) allow continuity of conversation (Macduff, 2009). Text types are relentlessly subjected to modification, hybridization and rule breaking. Traditional values of author/authority, expert control and authenticity are less important than participation and mass collaboration for the creation of new content that is less policed by centralized authority but continually and dynamically changes to offer the interactants a sense of collective authorship where everyone’s ways are acceptable. Credibility and scientific exactness are subordinated to the establishment of social relationships and the ‘celebration of sociality’ (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 10).

2.2.2. Blogging as a realization of situated learning

Situated learning adopts a more realistic stance towards learning, seeing it as the acquisition of knowledge and skills in contexts that reflect real life situations (Collins, 1998). Blogs are an ideal environment for interactants to view life as members of social and cultural groups, expressing and further constructing their identity through various discourses, such as providing feedback, support, sharing knowledge and expertise, explaining rules, sharing ideas or debating over an issue (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007).

Educators are therefore encouraged to immerse learners in environments that resemble as closely as possible genuine instances in which the new knowledge will be applied (Shell & Black, 1997). In the case of foreign language learning, students get gradually involved in ‘communities of practice’ (Lave, 1988, p.1) that embody certain beliefs and behaviors to be acquired. As the learner moves from the periphery to the centre of the community, he/she becomes more knowledgeable to the intricacies and culture of the target language, thereby becoming an expert, an old-timer.

Another eminent characteristic of situated learning that can be realized through blogging is the notion of cognitive apprenticeship. Learners construct knowledge by using cognitive tools in authentic domain activity. Learning is not a solitary endeavor but rather it takes place through collaborative social interaction and knowledge is mainly socially constructed (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1988).
2.2.3. **Blogging as a vehicle of intercultural communication**

In an educational context, blogs are an ideal means that allows participants to work independently by creating context whereas at the same time they have the opportunity to reflect upon cross-cultural issues (Lee, 2011). During social interaction with blog users from other cultures, learners develop higher order thinking processes by observing, analyzing and evaluating information and gradually become autonomous (Lee, 2011). Through the engagement of higher order thinking skills that are developed in the process of interaction with bloggers belonging to a different social milieu one can analyze, reflect upon, synthesize and develop new perspectives of the world (Lee, 2011).

To take this capacity one step further and become competent intercultural interlocutors and not just fluent foreign language speakers, bloggers need to approach people from other cultures with an open mind and a non-judgmental attitude as regards their outlook on life (Bennett, 1993). As Tan (2005) and Tennenboim-Weinblatt (2010) very skillfully pinpoint, through blogging a new, hybrid, fluid and relativised identity occurs as the product of online communities free from temporal and spatial restrictions, thus challenging the authority and stability of cultural identity.

In a learning context, educators, instead of being omniscient and omnipresent proprietors of knowledge tend to assume a supporting and facilitative role in learning by assisting and encouraging learners to be actively engaged in the process of problem-solving, decision-making and critically reflecting upon the acquired knowledge through social interaction (Lee, 2011).

### 3. Research design

#### 3.1. **Research questions**

The present study focuses on the development of writing through blog in the context of a Greek Junior High School with the aim to shed light on the following issues:

- The extent to which the learners’ writing and research skills improved as a result of writing in the class blog taking into consideration rules of propriety when writing for a global audience.
- The extent to which learners created ‘nodes’ of learning through their blog posts that enhanced foreign language learning.
- The extent to which learners developed new literacies in an environment of real life communication instances that helped them improve their foreign language skills.
- The extent to which intercultural awareness in a learner community increased as a result of the class blog.

#### 3.2. **The learner profile**

The research was conducted in a state Junior High School and addressed students from all three classes as well as both levels of linguistic competence, beginners and advanced. Of the 55 students that participated in blog writing, 30 were 1st class students, advanced level, 20 were 2nd class students, of whom 11 were at the beginner level and 9 at the advanced level. The remaining 5 participants were third class students, beginner level. The student sample
consisted of 33 girls and 22 boys. All students, beginners and advanced, fall into the categorization A2 (Way stage or elementary user) -B1 (Threshold or intermediate user) of the Common European Framework.

3.3. Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods

The methods used for collecting and evaluating data in the present research are quantitative, qualitative and mixed ones. Quantitative research involves the collection of numerical data that is analyzed by statistical methods. The main characteristic of the quantitative research is the *a priori* categorization that is achieved by assigning values to categorical data, as Dörnyei (2007) pinpoints. Therefore, quantitative research uses standardized procedures to assess objective reality (Dörnyei, 2007).

On the other hand, qualitative research is concerned with the analysis of objective opinions, views, experiences and feelings of the subjects under question (Dörnyei, 2007).

Mixed methods research involves the mutual interpenetration of quantitative and qualitative methods (Dörnyei, 2007). By using mixed methods, quantitative and qualitative data render themselves to multi-layered analysis, enhancing the validity of research and help gain a better understanding of a complex phenomenon, as Dörnyei (2007) pinpoints.

3.4. Questionnaires, the teacher’s journal

Data collection from blog participants was done in the form of questionnaires. Questionnaires are an ideal way to collect a great amount of information in limited time, conducting a large scale research including many subjects. There were two questionnaires used in the present research: the pre-writing questionnaire that explored the views of participants regarding blog writing and the post-writing questionnaire asking the students to evaluate the whole experience of blog writing after the completion of the process.

The teacher’s journal was another tool used in the research because it was considered to be an ideal way to keep a record of the most important learning experiences that have taken place in the class, help the participant keep in pace with the process of self-development that is taking place, give the participant the opportunity to boldly express this self-development and foster creative interaction between participants and their coordinator in the learning process, as Powel (1985) and Bailey (1990) point out.

4. The findings of the research

The findings of the research rendered significant results as to the issues being researched, such as the improvement of learners’ writing skills, their willingness and/or ability to establish ‘nodes’ of learning, the development of new literacies as well as the enhancement of intercultural awareness. More specifically, analysis of the pre-writing questionnaire (Appendix I) has shown that the majority of respondents have had the experience of blogging before, with 67% answering yes, while 33% giving a negative answer (Question 4).

The participants in the project would write in the blog to get extra marks (55%), 25% think that the blog can improve their writing skills, 15% of the participants find blog topics more interesting than those in the course book, whereas 5% fell safe to comment on other posts. (Question 5). The blog writers in their vast majority seem to use a combination of data from
reference sources and their own ideas when it comes to writing an essay (92%), in contrast to those who use their own ideas exclusively (4%) or only ideas from reference sources (4%) (Question 6). The respondents were also willing to comment on other posts (71%) or receive comments for their own posts (84%). The majority would prefer to comment on their classmates’ ideas (69%) rather than try to use the appropriate vocabulary (18%) or correct grammar and syntax (13%) (Questions 7, 8, 9, 10).

Analysis of the post-writing questionnaire (Appendix II) has shown that the vast majority of the participants (80%) have improved their writing skill, (Question 12) with better use of vocabulary taking the first place (35%), followed by the improvement in the quality of ideas (25%), grammar and syntax (20%), better spelling (13%) and paragraphing (7%) (Question 13).

As far as the issue of intercultural awareness is concerned, there is a marginal majority (55%) that expressed the view that the blog experience increased their awareness of other people and cultures (Question 14). More specifically, since the relevant blog posts involved the narration of experiences with German peers during summer exchange visits, the majority of the respondents stated that they would visit Germany again (40%), followed by the understanding that Germans can be good friends with Greeks (25%) and that a lot of cultural stereotypes are wrong (15%). Finally, a moderate percentage of the participants appeared willing to host German students next summer (20%). (Question 15).

The teacher’s journal (Appendix III) indicated that blog writers mostly responded to topics that have to do with popular culture that appeal to their age. So, the topics with the most traffic were those referring to famous people and music (40%), followed by topics on sports (30%), endangered animals (15%), recycling (10%) and world mysteries (5%) (Question 2).

5. Evaluation of the findings

5.1. Improvement of writing skills

In interpreting the findings of the research, it seems that an important percentage sought to improve their writing skills though blogging and confess that topics in the blog were more interesting, even though most of them bear a close resemblance to the topics discussed in the course book. The vast majority stated that they use a combination of their own ideas and materials from reference sources, which brings to the foreground the surprising fact that today’s teenage learners are aware-even unknowingly-of the basic principles of project writing, that is, reformulating and paraphrasing ideas from sources combining them with their own ideas. Blog writers seem to have consolidated the ideas of assignment writing and the ethics that are an integral part of it. It should be noted here that, unknowingly, blog participants became contributors to web-initiated authorship by modifying Wikipedia content and adding their own experiences and information. By enriching and expanding content found in online resources, blog commentators decentered authorship and distributed expertise as Lankshear and Knobel (2007) mention. Learners seem to assimilate the main tenets of online writing that celebrates contribution to a collaborative project, inclusion of several viewpoints, equality, acknowledgement, valid and rewardable roles for all participants to the construction of knowledge (Lankshear & Knobel, 2000).
The vast majority also admitted that blog writing improved their writing skills, focusing more on qualitative aspects such as the correct use of sometimes sophisticated vocabulary and less on technicalities, such as grammar and syntax.

5.2. Establishing ‘nodes’ of learning through blog posts

The participants mostly responded to topics that have to do with popular culture that appeal to their age. So, the topics with the most traffic were those referring to famous people and music, followed by topics on sports, endangered animals, recycling and world mysteries. Sophisticated topics such as works of art had the least appeal even though the topic had been covered in detail in class.

At the beginning of the endeavor, the bloggers also seemed to be willing to make and receive comments on their posts, mainly focusing on the content of what they read and write rather than minute details such as grammar, syntax or proper vocabulary choices. Nevertheless, during the process of writing for the blog the participants appeared reluctant to comment on other posts and focused on their primary goal to write posts in order to have fun, exhibit their knowledge and writing skills or to gain an extra mark in the trimester. Therefore, the submission of original articles took precedence over commentary on peer posts.

It is noteworthy that blog posts were not self-initiated and networks did not grow outside the strict confines of the school environment. As a result, the conditions to create a connectivist-learning network with the participation of members from other schools or learning communities and the conditions for creating ‘nodes’ of connectivist learning were not eventually met. The blog itself came to be an authoritative tool aiding the traditional language learning process rather than the liberating medium that would initiate learning communities outside space and time limits.

The whole blog experiment was taken one step further, with the majority of the participants showing eagerness to become bloggers themselves, initially in their teacher’s blog of course, and initiate their classmates’ comments with innovative posts. This is quite expected, since teen learners are already active members of digital communities and have already been engaged in micro-blogging through regular posts in social media such as Facebook or Twitter. Discussing or debating over an issue or simply posting and responding to comments is already second nature to them and they were willing to add a flavor of sophistication to these processes by starting a blog of their own, which would elevate their status in their peers’ eyes.

However, the spirits of participants about starting their own blog were divided. Nevertheless, it is significant that the intention to be active members of online communities has dynamically been voiced, taking into consideration the strict confines of the Greek educational system where the use of technological means in the classroom is quite sparse in most schools nationwide.

5.3. Development of new literacies

Quite surprisingly, it seems that the majority of blog participants have had the experience of blogging before, which points to the fast rates by which they assimilate changes in technology and (unfortunately) the stagnant nature of materials used for language
instruction in the Greek educational system. Regarding the results of the post-writing questionnaire, the fact that the majority of blog users submitted more than three articles shows that they consider blog writing as a unique opportunity to express their thoughts, vent their feelings or exchange ideas with other students.

As to the degree of ease of writing in a blog instead of traditional ways of submitting assignments in a notebook, the participants responded that they found the medium of blog more attractive and interesting than traditional classroom practices. The main reason for feeling this way is that they felt more comfortable to write and submit their assignments in their own time than having strict day-to-day deadlines. This is indicative of the emerging trend of doing class projects that have to be implemented in a specific period of time set by the teacher, which has been the rule for many years in western countries but has only recently been introduced in the Greek secondary education. It also points to the direction of distance learning practices that may be exploited by technology-savvy students in order to implement educational goals in their own time.

It was also stated that blog writing is more modern and fancier than traditional writing since blogs have funny, fascinating or sophisticated interfaces that can often change and posts appear with attractive avatars in linear form, thus constructing a permanent virtual community.

5.4. Development of intercultural awareness

Considering the intercultural awareness that the blog sought to promote, there was limited response in the relevant posts, showing that students were reluctant to comment on personal experiences with people from other cultures or disperse stereotypes that are prevalent about them in Greece. On the contrary, even though students who submitted posts under this category viewed the foreign culture in a positive light, some deeply ingrained issues such as work ethic, food preferences or ways of enjoying life in the Greek and German culture still hold their ground.

However, there is a marginal majority of participants who admitted that their view on other cultures has improved, with a significant percentage being willing to travel to Germany as part of a school exchange program or host German students and stating that Germans and Greeks can be good friends. Some even concluded that cultural stereotypes are wrong, taking into consideration their experience from hosting and socializing with their German peers. The fact that the degree of cultural awareness of other people is low must be attributed to the Greek cultural introversion, especially in the provinces where this research was conducted and the fact that there are negative views about other Europeans expressed both by the media and families, of which blog writers have been unwillingly passive recipients. The challenge to rearrange and restructure communication behaviors within their own community in order to be able to learn a new way of interaction with people from different cultures as Chen (2012) points out, was unfortunately not met.

6. Implications of the research

This research has brought to light some important issues regarding the usefulness of the blog as an innovative tool for the improvement of writing skills and as a unique means for language learning that is in tune with the emerging theories regarding online communities and social media.
First, it was proved that the participants were challenged by blog posts inviting them to write about issues that were previously taught in the course book. The ‘stale’ class material was seen in a new light and the challenge to do some further research and write about highly technical or scientific issues such as recycling or renewable sources of energy was accepted. The blog users felt compelled to use sophisticated vocabulary and correct grammar and spelling in order to polish their writing, being aware that what they write receives global status.

In the later stages of blog writing, the participants took the initiative to suggest topics of their own such as music or famous people that received a warm welcome by their peers. Almost half of the participants in the research appeared willing to start a blog of their own, establishing thus ‘nodes’ of online learning, which shows that the new generation of teen learners are ‘digital natives’, leaving traditional ‘typographic’ instruction methods behind.

Teenage blog authors welcomed the opportunity to write in their own time, freeing themselves from the strict confines of the school schedule and were fascinated by the multimodality of the blog that used attractive pictures and intelligent avatars to highlight the posts. The weblog users even confessed their aversion towards the traditional error correction in red ink and seemed more willing to embrace feedback from peers and teacher in electronic form. Even though limited in extent, peer feedback focused on judging the quality of ideas in peer posts, thus initiating critical writing that is difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom. The participants appeared more mature to voice their opinion in a non-threatening environment where all members—even the teacher—receive equal status and accept as well as assimilate comments made by their peers or their teacher that would be derided or looked down upon in a class environment.

Finally, the blog writers were invited to write about their experiences from visiting another country and employ their critical skills in order to corroborate or refute commonly held views about different peoples of Europe. There was considerable effort not only to produce meaningful pieces of writing giving an account of the days spent in Germany but there was also an invitation to view their foreign peers as individual members of a global community with whom they can find common ground and forge a new European community in the future, devoid of racist stereotypes.

7. Towards the future with learning outcomes

The present research indicates that blog writing comes to fill a void in modern language instruction. The blog has proved to be a revolutionary tool that can boost writing performance even among the most reluctant of learners since it includes a lot of elements that already exist in their lives, such as multimodality, instant editing, commentary on other people’s posts and links to other blogs or resources.

The creation of learning ‘nodes’ by the participants through their own blogs that can be interconnected could prove an invaluable teaching and learning aid in the future. Even though traditional class instruction cannot become obsolete, a parallel ‘classroom’ consisting of students-bloggers, where learners view themselves as members of a community contributing to the construction of knowledge no matter what their linguistic competence would boost literacy to a great extent. No one would feel ‘left behind’ or ostracized from learning; each would have a say in the online community.
Finally, the fact that blogs become more and more sophisticated, enriching even their free editions with a lot of tools that allow multimodality can make them an intrinsic part of educational reality, as this research has shown. Instead of being viewed as a forum of ‘prestige’ writers, blogs can nest noble endeavors made by teenage authors to explore new topics, express their feelings and give an account of their experiences without being degraded to the inferior status of other social media.

8. Suggestions for further research and future work

The present research could be the starting point for certain ameliorations in the issue of digital writing in the Greek educational system. To begin with, learners could start their own blogs which they could update regularly with topics of their own preference and invite their classmates to comment on them. Prospective bloggers could also invite teenage students from other countries with whom the school was involved in exchange programs in the previous years and who are not native speakers of English. In this way, aspiring bloggers would initiate a discussion that would exceed the boundaries of their school community, establishing thus ‘nodes’ of language learning and intercultural awareness.

Moreover, teenage bloggers could link their weblog with other blogs that contain similar topics, receiving and offering valuable feedback that forges the construction of digital communities worldwide. In this way, novice bloggers would be themselves navigators in an ever-evolving world of information offered in English and actively participate in the creation of knowledge on a global scale, instead of mindlessly regurgitating language paradigms and performing repetition drills.

After such activity has matured over the course of a few years, the future researcher will be able to decide to what extent student populations have migrated online, being able to ‘cross-pollinate’ learning environments with their own knowledge and experiences, as Siemens (2005) points out. The researcher will also be able to observe the extent to which language acquisition has become circular instead of linear. In such a model, the learner would move from the periphery to the centre of the community, becoming more and more knowledgeable to the intricacies of the target language, thereby becoming an expert, an old-timer as Lave & Wenger (1990) maintain. One should not forget that today’s teenage learners are already ‘old-timers’ in almost all kinds of social media, so they are ‘digital natives’, according to the newly-coined term and – to a greater or lesser extent – citizens of the digitized world.

9. Conclusion

The present article indicated that blogging (apart from being a favorite pastime for contemporary teenagers) can easily be employed as a charming and innovative tool to assist in foreign language learning. The participants (being already digital natives and participating in online communities long before new technologies were introduced in the state educational system) have shown remarkable willingness to act as creators of new learning environments and materials.

Language content that was transmitted in typographic form (often in an unattractive or outdated manner) took the form of vivid narratives or descriptions in the blog that helped even the weakest members of the online community and, quite surprisingly, unbeknownst to them, be dynamic creators of learning environments that kept reformulating themselves
through feedback and dealt with the most appealing issues to learners of that age: music, sports, famous people, technology, mystery quests. The participants were more challenged than deterred by the advanced language and knowledge level demanded for most of these topics and proved to be active researchers and prolific authors themselves that utilized a variety of online sources and came up with some exquisite pieces of writing for the class blog.

Language learning escaped from the strict confines of the classroom where it was seen as a series of sterile exchanges of stereotypical expressions that tried to assume the form of a dialogue or role play as well as the mindless regurgitation of grammar and syntax rules and was transformed into an ongoing process where everybody was granted equal status and was invited to contribute to the blog content irrespective of his/her language competence. Moreover, the linear conception of class time where every activity is strictly timed and certain outcomes are expected was completely dismantled. The participants were free to submit comments and articles any time, day or night, holiday or not, within the three months that the project lasted. That seemed to be more in tune with their hectic schedules and seemed more realistic in today’s world: one can learn any time, anywhere.

Finally, whereas the teacher introduced most of the topics for discussion and commentary and set the rules for the whole process, she was pleasantly surprised to discover that she soon assumed a background role. A series of budding authors suggested and finally produced impeccable pieces of writing or innovative short stories that would be envied even by native English writers.

All in all, the present research proved that blog writing can be a dynamic restart to the way in which foreign languages are taught and leaves room for further work that could help incorporate new media that are already an extension of the teenagers’ world into the educational process, especially in areas deprived of cultural stimuli, such as the area in which the present research was conducted.

References


APPENDIX I

Pre-writing questionnaire

1. Age:............
2. Gender: Male □ Female □
3. Level: Beginners □ Advanced □
4. Have you written in a blog before? Yes □ No □
5. If yes, what is different in writing for your English class?
   □ Topics more interesting than in the course book
   □ Blog articles will help me improve my writing skills
   □ I feel safe to comment on other students’ posts
   □ I’ll get extra marks for the articles I’ll submit
   Other, please specify..........................
6. Do you usually write essays using your own ideas or do you get ideas from other sources such as Wikipedia?
   □ I use only my own ideas
   □ I use ideas from other sources
   □ I do both
7. Do you feel comfortable to comment on other students’ posts?
   □ Yes □ No
8. If yes, what would you comment on?
   □ Use of grammar/syntax
   □ Use of vocabulary
   □ If I like and/or agree with other students’ ideas or not
9. Would you like other students to comment on your posts?
   □ Yes □ No
10. What would you like them to comment on?
    □ Use of grammar/syntax
    □ Use of vocabulary
    □ If they like and/or agree with my ideas or not
11. Would you ask your teacher to include more topics that interest you in her blog?
    □ Yes □ No
12. What topics would you like to be included in the class blog?
    □ Famous people
    □ Music
    □ Recent trends in technology
    □ Sensitive topics such as school bullying
    Other, please specify..........................
13. Would you write an introductory article on topics of your preference and invite your classmates to comment on them in your teacher’s blog?
    □ Yes □ No
APPENDIX II

Post-writing questionnaire

1. How many posts did you submit in your teacher’s blog?
   □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ More than 3

2. What was the most difficult part for you when writing in your teacher’s blog?
   □ Topics were not interesting
   □ Topics were too difficult for me
   □ I had trouble writing the post in the appropriate space and then post it
   Other, please specify..............................

3. Did you comment on other students’ posts?
   □ Yes □ No

4. What did you comment on?
   □ Grammar/syntax
   □ Vocabulary
   □ If you liked/agreed with other students’ ideas or not

5. Did you receive comments on your posts?
   □ Yes □ No

6. What did other students comment on in your posts?
   Grammar/syntax
   □ Vocabulary
   □ If they liked/agreed with my ideas or not

7. Did you feel more comfortable writing in the blog than writing in your class notebook for your teacher?
   □ Yes □ No

8. If yes, what were the reasons that made you feel more comfortable?
   □ I could write in my own time
   □ Blog writing is more modern and fancier than traditional writing
   □ I don’t have my mistakes corrected in red ink!
   □ Other, please specify..............................

9. Did you use your own ideas to write your posts or did you take ideas from other sources such as Wikipedia?
   □ I used only my own ideas
   □ I used ideas from other sources
   □ I did both

10. Did you teacher delete any of your posts because of plagiarism (copy-paste) from other sources?
    □ Yes □ No

11. If yes, did you try to submit your piece of writing again taking into consideration your teacher’s feedback?
    □ Yes □ No

12. Has blog writing made you more willing to write in English?
    □ Yes □ No

13. If yes, what aspects of your writing skills have improved?
    □ Use of grammar/syntax
    □ Use of vocabulary
    □ Spelling
14. Do you feel that you understand people from other cultures better after writing and reading posts in the blog?
- Yes □ No □

15. If you answered yes, tick which points of those below are true for you:
- I realized that Germans and Greeks can be good friends □
- A lot of commonly held views about Germans are wrong □
- A lot of commonly held views about Greeks are wrong □
- I would like to visit Germany next year as part of an exchange visit between schools □
- I would like to host German students in my house during their stay in Greece □

16. Would you create a blog of your own after this experience of blog writing?
- Yes □ No □
APPENDIX III

Teacher’s journal

1. **Degree of response to blog tasks**

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<tr>
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<td>December</td>
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2. **Topics students mostly responded to:**
- Famous people
- Music
- Sports
- Endangered animals
- Recycling
- World mysteries

3. **Strongest points in students’ posts**
- √ Vocabulary
- √ Grammar
- Spelling
- Paragraphing
- Originality of ideas

4. **Weakest point in students’ posts**
- Vocabulary
- Grammar
- √ Spelling
- Paragraphing
- √ Originality of ideas

5. **Students mostly**
- √ submitted original articles
- commented on other students’ posts

6. **When commenting others’ posts, what did students most focus on?**
- Originality of ideas and if they liked the posts or not

7. **Were students willing to comment on direct personal experiences, such as exchange visits with German students and their views on other cultures?**
- Participants commented on their experiences from hosting Germans as well as the experiences from visiting Germany themselves.

8. **What was the students’ strongest motive in submitting posts?**
- √ Improve their writing skills in English
- √ Students found the whole process of blog writing fun to do
- Prestige issues (prove that they are technology savvy)
- √ Being assigned extra points in their overall trimester mark as bonus

9. **Were students able to use information from other sources, paraphrase it and embed it into their writing?**
- Participants were able to use a variety of original resources making any necessary adjustments and/or add their personal experiences in order to write ad submit original posts.

10. **Were there occasions that students plagiarized? How were they penalized for that?**
There were few occasions where the participants plagiarized submitting whole entries from Wikipedia or other resources, sometimes more than a page or two long. Those posts were automatically deleted.

11. Did students have any difficulty writing and/or submitting their posts? How were such problems solved?

There was difficulty writing posts in the comments area and/or use the required data such as a valid e-mail and a name/nickname in order to upload the post. There were quite a few public displays of the whole process in class using the interactive whiteboard for all participants to see and the problem was successfully resolved.

12. Did students suggest any further topics of interest to them to be included in the blog?

The participants suggested a number of topics of special appeal to them to be included in the blog such as sports, famous pop or rock singers, actors/actresses and famous athletes.

13. What was the degree of response to topics suggested by students themselves?

Low Average √ High

14. Did students look forward to continuing their blogging activity after the end of the first trimester?

√ Yes No

15. Other suggestions made by students:

The participants were willing to submit collaborative posts in groups of 2 or 3. Some participants suggested more sophisticated topics such as architecture, famous youtubers, theatre or topics about Greece. However, it was decided not to include those topics in the blog at the present moment since they seemed to be appealing to a limited number of participants. Some participants appeared willing to start a weblog themselves, assisted by the teacher, where they would upload posts about their favorite topics and invite their peers to comment on them.

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Creating digital comics to motivate young learners to write: a case study

Δημιουργώντας ψηφιακά comics με στόχο την παρακίνηση των μαθητών στην παραγωγή γραπτού λόγου: μία μελέτη περίπτωσης.

Angeliki DELIGIANNI-GEORGAKA and Ourania POUROUTIDI

The incorporation of technology in the foreign language classroom is a usual phenomenon nowadays which seems to affect students’ motivation to learn due to the satisfaction they feel when learning new things or their enjoyment associated with the learning process. The advantages of using computers in English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction are plenty and this paper aims to focus on the combination of technology with writing as an alternative way to motivate learners to write. In particular, it investigates whether creating stories by means of digital comics increases students’ interest in writing in English and develops their writing skills. Creating stories are very important in children’s lives and useful in primary education. There are a lot of online sites where students can easily construct digital comics using simple steps and with little guidance by their teacher. Furthermore, there are a lot of projects like Educomics and The Comic Book Project that deal with the issue of using comics in education. The participants of the present investigation are a classroom of sixth graders of primary education studying English in a private school in Central Greece. The specific research is characterized as a case study since its focus is on a single instance. The research tools developed for data collection include observation, interview and questionnaires. Opting for a multi-method research study, triangulating data, can ensure validity of the investigation. The particular investigation yielded positive results regarding the combination of technology with writing and specifically the creation of digital comics in a young learners’ classroom. The results of the study offer useful information to teachers of English regarding the different ways that the writing skill could be taught and practiced leaving behind the traditional passive methods and using more alternative and creative ways.
συγκέντρωση και ανάλυση δεδομένων από τρία διαφορετικά ερευνητικά εργαλεία επιβεβαιώνει την εγκυρότητα της έρευνας. Η συγκεκριμένη έρευνα απέφερε θετικά αποτελέσματα όσον αφορά τον συνδυασμό της τεχνολογίας με το γραπτό λόγο και πιο συγκεκριμένα τη δημιουργία των ψηφιακών κόμικς στην τάξη μικρών μαθητών. Τα αποτελέσματα προσφέρουν χρήσιμες πληροφορίες στους καθηγητές Αγγλικών σχετικά με τους εναλλακτικούς τρόπους με τους οποίους ο γραπτός λόγος μπορεί να διδαχθεί και να εξασκηθεί, αφήνοντας πίσω τις παραδοσιακές μεθόδους.

**Key words**: digital comics, motivation, writing, young learners, collaboration, case study

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### 1. Introduction

Writing is considered a difficult and highly complex process especially for young learners whose linguistic competence is limited. Imitating models, following guidelines and treating writing as a final product are elements that characterize traditional approaches to teaching and practising writing. These tend to focus on accuracy and correctness of the written text. Therefore, as Zamel (1985) asserts, linguistic properties, in particular phonological, lexical or grammatical, should be the focus of students’ attention during the procedure of creating a piece of writing. This means that students are deprived of the enjoyment that is likely to derive from true communication in written speech. It is implied that due to the difficult nature of writing and the way it is taught, students’ demotivation and boredom increases. However increasing learners’ motivation is of high significance as in Dörneyi’s (2001, p.2) words “the study of motivation is a prominent area in the field of psychology and education”.

The incorporation of technology in the EFL classroom nowadays offers the opportunity for new and alternative methods to be applied in the class. Consequently, technology and in particular computers can be used for the development of the writing skill. Creating stories which are finally converted into digital comics, is a method used in the specific research study in an attempt to raise learners’ interest and participation. Comics can be easily created by means of computers instead of the difficult manual drawing and colouring process. The aim is for the passivity of the traditional methods to be turned into creativity. As Cameron (2001. p. 156) stresses it is important that students be engaged in activities that will help them express themselves, have an audience, are meaningful and creative and allow children freedom in writing.

Comics and stories are interesting topics which children are familiar with, consequently, according to Zemach (2010), interesting topics increase motivation and make learning easier. They are often used in classrooms as a method for practising the reading skill but in the specific lesson writing is practised. An additional element, characteristic of the applied lesson, is that the focus is placed on the process and stages of creating a written text in contrast to the traditional methods which treat writing as a final product focusing on accuracy and not in the meaning communicated.

This research study seeks to find whether creating digital comics can a) motivate learners to write, and b) promote group collaboration and encourage collaborative writing. It also investigates whether digital comics can be used as an alternative new way of writing creatively and as such to be integrated into the syllabus.
2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Technology in education

Students’ boredom and demotivation is a usual phenomenon in the language classrooms. Integration of technology in the foreign language classroom can offer new and alternative ways of motivating learners by replacing traditional methods.

According to Oxford (1993) technology will be beneficial under certain circumstances, such as (a) if it takes into consideration students’ needs and interests and tries to promote motivation (b) if the most suitable technology is used for each part of language learning and acquisition taking into account the goals and the type of learners, (c) if it can face the difficulties that learners may encounter. Furthermore, concerning the activities that the educator will use or design through the use of technology, Sadik (2008, p.488) argues that “the key in using educational technology is to utilize meaningful activities that may engage students to construct their knowledge in different ways, not available before the technology was introduced.”

It follows that technology has become very significant in the domain of education. It is used for educational purposes even in the primary school where students learn to use a computer at the age of six. No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), through the Enhancing Education through Technology Act of 2001 requires States to provide evidence that “every student is technologically literate by the time the student finishes the eighth grade, regardless of the student’s race, ethnicity, gender, family income, geographic location, or disability” (Dellicarpini, 2012, p. 562). Even the notion of literacy has changed meaning because of the use of technology in every aspect of life and especially in education. Coiro (2003, p. 458) argues that “the definition of literacy today has expanded from traditional notions of reading and writing to include the ability to learn, comprehend, and interact with technology in a meaningful way”.

There have been various advantages of using technology in the foreign language classroom and one of the major ones is motivation increase. Students are dealing with new ways of learning that are interesting, leaving behind the boredom of the traditional approaches. Warschauer & Healey (1998) support that the use of technology has benefits like: multimodal practice with feedback, individualization in a large class, pair and small group work on projects, either collaboratively or competitively, the fun factor, variety in the resources available and learning styles used, exploratory learning with large amounts of language data, real-life skill-building in computer use. Chen (2005) revealed that computer assisted language learning constitutes a novelty that presents learners with attractive ways of learning and as a result even tedious drills can become more interesting. Additionally the use of technology makes students feel that they can successfully complete tasks and this encourages them to continue to work on tasks as according to Schunk (1991) they tend to take on activities they can handle.

2.2. Digital Comics

Comics are considered to be children’s favorite reading material. The combination of pictures with words is the key characteristic of that type of texts. Various definitions have been presented for comics. Greg and Pratt (2005, cited in Yunus et al, 2011, p.53) defined the comic as “a sequence of discrete, juxtaposed pictures that comprise a narrative, either in their own right or when combined with text.” It is emphasized that comics are a form of art,
or a method of expression as Eisner (1995) claims and that “comic strips capture all the essence in a narrative and can tell us a story in a very effective way” in Alves, et al, (2007, par.2) words. Comics are based on Dual Coding Theory (DCT), which emphasizes the significance of imagery in cognitive operations and mentions that the presentation of information in both verbal and visual form enhances recall/ recognition according to Clark & Paivio, (1991 cited in Vassilikopoulou, et al, 2007). Their difference from digital comics is that digital comics are entirely created on a computer and not by manual drawing and coloring process.

Language teachers as well as teachers of other subjects are constantly looking for alternative methods and techniques to improve the effectiveness of their teaching. There are lots of sites available on the Internet where digital comics can be easily designed. Plenty of projects have been implemented intending to show the importance of using comics for educational purposes. “Graphic novels across the curriculum” as reported in Educomics (2011), presented a description of school projects in Great Britain, having as the main focus the use of comics in promoting learner’s interest in Literacy. Additionally, the Comic Book Project that started in 2011 in USA aimed to help young learners to write, design and publish their own comics according to their interests (ComicBook Project, 2011). Furthermore, Educomics, a European Union education project in the context of the Life Long Learning Programme Comenius Action attempted to show how web comics can be used in education to promote learning and motivation (Educomics, 2011).

Yunus et all (2011, p 54) states that by using digital comics, it can spur students’ interest to write” therefore using them for practising the writing skill, may prove valuable and Salehi (2012) supports that creating digital comics to tell stories would make the difficult task of writing in the English language a much more enjoyable experience for learners. However the most difficult part of creating comics is, according to Faulkner (2009), the decisions that learners should take since there is not much space for text and they have to find the image and just enough words for it to make sense. This is a procedure that requires critical ability since learners have to find the most essential parts in a story.

The benefits of using comics and digital comics in the classroom are numerous. Yang (2003 cited in Drolet, 2010, p.124) argues that “one of the strongest benefits of using comics to teach is the ability to motivate students”. Developing the writing skill is the most difficult part of acquiring a foreign language for the majority of learners. According to Salehi (2012, p.3467, “low-achieving ESL learners need motivation to write in English” Many students complain that they cannot manage to acquire the writing skill and that a lot of effort is needed as finding the right things to write for every occasion is a difficult task. They also complain that they do not have any ideas and ask if they can draw pictures when they write to support their ideas (Bledsoe, n.d). Images are very important in the learning procedure, especially in early ages since they enhance students’ memory. Creating comics digitally is a way that will enable students to use text and images in combination. It is important that language as well as arts teachers become aware that children are both visual and verbal learners and research supports the fact that visuals enhance learning (Bruning et al, 1999).

2.3. Stories and young learners

According to Wright & Sherman (1999) the first step in the process of developing a comic strip is the scripting of the story. Therefore, before the design of the comic scenes, young learners are required to use their imagination and their experiences in listening to stories in order to invent and write their own story.
Children love stories and stories are the first part of literacy children meet. Additionally, as Cameron (2001) argues "they offer a whole imaginary world created by language that children can enter and enjoy". They are claimed to offer many benefits to young learner classrooms. Increasing motivation, stimulating imagination, and developing fluency in language skills (Almutrafi, n.d) are some of the advantages of using stories. Furthermore Zigardyova (2006) maintains that they are fun and they create an interest and a desire to continue learning by linking fantasy and imagination to the children’s real world. One of the most frequently mentioned benefits, according to Fitzgibbon & Wilhelm (1998), is that stories lower affective filters allowing learning to take place more naturally and more readily. Consequently educators should help students to make writing purposeful as Ellis and Brewster (1991) support, adding that writing activities can be divided into those that encourage copying and those that encourage creativity. Creating and writing stories is not an activity encouraging copying but creativity, since children’s imagination is a prerequisite for the accomplishment of such an activity. Creating and writing stories is a valuable procedure concerning the practice of the writing skill and as such it should be incorporated in the teaching procedure.

2.4. Motivation

Motivation is a central concept of the teaching procedure. Lucas et al (2010) report that a lot of research has been done the last thirty years in order to explore the role and nature of motivation in learning a foreign language classroom. According to Rost (2006, p.2), "motivation provides a source of energy that is responsible for why learners decide to make an effort, how long they are willing to sustain an activity, how hard they are going to pursue it and how connected they feel to the activity" a prevailing motivational perspective in Csikszentmihalyi’s(1992) work. The term itself indicates that motive is a force that prompts, incites or stimulates action and Beck (2004) argues that motivation derives from the latin verb ‘movere’ that means to move and such motivation is responsible for people’s actions and behaviors.

Three types of motivation related to the particular research are going to be described here: Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which are included in the self-determination theory, and collective motivation.

The self-determination theory, one of the most important theories that was introduced by Deci et al (1989), define self determination as initiating and regulating one’s actions. According to this theory, motivation is divided into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation should be the ultimate goal of every educator. “Intrinsic motivation based on autonomy and competence, describes a situation in which material is engaged in for its inherent interest and the satisfaction and enjoyment it engenders” as Bernard (2010, p.5) asserts. Put simply, a student enjoys learning a language due to the satisfaction he feels when he learns new things or the joy associated with the learning process. On the other hand, Covington (1999) claims that students with extrinsic motivation are engaged in a goal, such as rewards, praise, grades, certificates, gold stars, basically external to the act of learning and this means that once this need has been satisfied there is no any particular reason to continue learning. Finding ways to promote intrinsic motivation should be one of the major tasks of educators. A lot of authors propose such ways among which Wang (2001) who argues that intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by designing challenging tasks and tasks that create disequilibria which can elicit curiosity. Additionally, Palmer (2005, p 1860) states that intrinsic motivation can be enhanced by providing fantasy and control and that “novelty is particularly important in gaining students’ initial attention for a task”.
Collective motivation is another type of motivation, meaning that students enjoy when working and playing with others as Bouniol (2004) states. Co-operative learning activities are those in which students must work together for the accomplishment of a task or for solving a problem. According to Lightbown & Spada (1999, p.57) “these techniques have been found to increase the self-confidence of students including weaker ones, because every participant in a co-operative task has an important role to play.” Nowadays, most of the schools implement group work in order to motivate students. Through group work, students learn to cooperate and depend on each other for the accomplishment of a task sharing at the same time responsibility.

2.5. Writing

The majority of students find practising and acquiring the writing skill the most difficult part of studying a foreign language as writing is a challenging task that requires constant making of decisions and choices at the level of ideas, planning, organization, and expression among others. Cimcoz (1999) also adds that learners find writing difficult since they usually do not know what to write, they cannot find ideas or even the right words. Finding the appropriate words for every writing occasion is a difficult part of writing and students spend much time thinking of an idea and then they face the problem of grammar, choice of words and coherency.

There are two approaches that have been formed for the teaching of the writing skill. The Product approach, a traditional approach implemented even today in the language classrooms and a relatively new teaching method called Process approach. In the traditional approaches of teaching writing, the focus is on the product which means the creation of grammatically correct pieces of writing. White (1998 cited in Ho, 2006) asserts that the focus is on grammar and adherence to given models and guidelines, which means that students imitate models and as a result they do not have the opportunity to express their own ideas and thoughts, leaving out their creativity.

The Process approach seen as an answer to the traditional Product approach, focuses on the process of creating a piece of writing and not on the final product. The Process approach will be applied during the lesson implemented in this research study for an additional reason related to the aim of this study, that is stated by Czerniewska, P. (2002, p. 76) as follows: “Children learning to be literate are involved in a collaboration venture with others”. The process approach instruction, includes pre-writing tasks to activate background knowledge on a specific topic, drafting of ideas to communicate meaning through the medium of writing, revising to clarify meaning taking into account peer feedback, editing to correct spelling, grammar, punctuation and publishing (Hedge (1994), Raimes (1993), Conover, n.d). Calfoglou (2004, p. 198) supports that “dividing up the writing lesson into stages makes the whole process manipulable, while on the other hand, the cognitive load is reduced, which may facilitate especially novice writer processes” (Calfoglou, 2004, p.198). It is an approach where the process, the stages someone comes through and not the product is stressed, an approach that constant revision is promoted and a procedure requiring constant changes until the final text is formed.

Writing requires interaction between the writer, the text, and the reader and significant for the theory of writing is the primacy accorded to each pole in this triangle of the writing process as Calfoglou (2004) maintains. Adding to that Cimcoz (1999) claims that it is an interactive process, meaning that the writer should take into account the audience during the process in order to create a good piece of writing. It is important to consider the fact
that when students realize that they are writing for real purposes and readers, and that their writing is not simply an in-class exercise they do get more involved.

2.6. Peer feedback

One of the tasks that young learners are required to accomplish, during the particular research study, is the task of providing and receiving feedback from their peers, during the process of writing their compositions. A new feedback technique, the peer feedback technique, different from the traditional one where the educator is considered to be the sole source of knowledge and the only evaluator, is applied in the broader context of alternative assessment. According to Rieber (2006 cited in Hashim, 2011) there are three types of peer feedback depending on teacher’s instructions: open-ended peer-review, guided peer- review and directed peer review. The type of feedback used in this research study is directed peer review, which is used with less experienced students who lack good writing skills and work with a checklist given to them as “checklists provide guidelines for students to read and assess other students’ writing” according to Raimes (1983, p. 148). Furthermore, learners should be prepared by the teacher regarding the steps and the way of providing feedback. Teachers should model and role play how to provide constructive feedback before having students meet their own. (Intel Corporation, 2012).

A lot of benefits of peer feedback have been mentioned by many authors. Pishghadam & Kermanshahi (2011) maintain that it is less threatening by creating a more supportive atmosphere and as a result, the authoritative role of the teacher is no more reinforced. Hansen and Lui (2005 cited in Hashim, 2011, p.4) advocated peer review for the following three reasons: “First, students can avoid being penalized for errors they do not detect in their work. Secondly, it provides another real audience for students rather than only the instructor. Thirdly by having to evaluate other students’ papers they improve the ability to judge their own writing”. Furthermore, learners’ responsibility is increased and as Farrah (2012) claims, this is a characteristic of learner-centered approaches. Additionally, Wakabayashi (2008) assumes that the fact that students act as feedback providers enables them to gain more insight into writing and revision processes, gaining a better understanding of the necessary steps required for successful revision. What is of great importance is that this approach to feedback encourages students to develop their thinking processes and gradually become independent as Stobart & Gipps (1997) claim.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research procedure

The focus of the lesson taught was on an alternative way of teaching the writing skill. The context of the research was a private language school classroom situated in a small village in Central Greece. The class consisted of nine learners aged twelve years old in the 6th grade of primary education. They are native speakers of Greek language learning English as an L2 and their proficiency level is A2 according to Common European Framework level (Council of Europe, 2001). They have been studying English for four years.

According to the lesson plan (see Appendix I, p.18 ) a pre-while-post instructional sequence was implemented and before the beginning of the designed lesson, students accomplished some pre-writing activities. In the second part, students were divided into three groups by the teacher and the teacher taught the basic steps for the creation of comic and let students explore the things that they can do to create comics. The site for creating digital
comics is www.Pixton.com. Having explored the site, learners chose three cards from categories of words (see Appendix II, p.20). Based on the words they have chosen students created a story collaboratively. Each member of the group thought of a story at home and then the group decided which story would be written including the changes that each member of the group proposed. After the completion of the first draft the groups exchanged papers in order for a peer evaluation and peer conferencing to be accomplished based on a writing checklist given to students before they had started writing. Through this activity collaboration is promoted and students are engaged in the procedure of evaluation so that they become capable of evaluating their own writing texts. Cameron (2001, p.235) claims that “In Vygotskian terms, a pupil who learns to assess his or her own work moves from being “other-regulated” to being “self-regulated” or autonomous.” Taking into consideration the comments that the other group made, each group re-wrote the draft making the appropriate changes. The focus is on the process or stages a writer goes through when writing a text. There is no final text, but there are multiple drafts before the final. In the following step each group made the dialogues of the story and designed the comic (see Appendix III, p.21). The created comics were printed and given to the rest of the private language school and their parents. As Cunningham (2000) argues when students are invited to write for real reasons they tend to be more motivated. Furthermore, Miller & Pennycuff (2008) support that the identification of the audience and the purpose during the writing process positively affect learners’ writing. Finally, each student wrote a composition about his/her experience in creating comics.

3.2. The study

The present study is a case study research which is defined by Gerring (2004, p 341) as “an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units” with the focus, in this specific occasion, on a class including nine students. A major feature of case studies is triangulation by combining different methodologies, illuminating a case from different angles, using evidence from different sources to corroborate the same finding (Rowley, 2002). Current trends towards mixed-method research designs as supported by Creswell (2003) and Dörneyi (2007) drawing on both quantitative and qualitative approaches ensured a more rounded picture of the situation under investigation and also complementary findings to be revealed.

According to Weissberg & Boker (1990), after a specific topic has been found, the next step is to formulate the research questions which are the basis on which the investigation is planned and carried out. Therefore the current investigation aims to answer the following research questions:

1. How can digital comics motivate students to write?
2. In what way can digital comics promote collaboration?
3. Why should digital comics be integrated into the syllabus as a new way of writing creatively?

3.3. Research tools

Since triangulation is the main characteristic of the research methodology, a mixed methods design was adopted and consisted of various research tools with the intention of answering the above mentioned research questions. Firstly, two questionnaires were delivered to the class, after they had been piloted with three potential respondents. Richards & Lockhart (1996, p.10) support that “surveys and questionnaires are useful ways of gathering
information about effective dimensions of teaching and learning such as beliefs, attitudes, motivation and preferences, and enable a teacher to collect a large amount of information relatively quickly”. However, a main disadvantage of questionnaires, from the perspective of Dorneyi & Taguchi (2010) is that there is brief and superficial engagement with the topic. This is the reason why additional research tools like observation and interview, have been designed and implemented.

*Needs analysis questionnaire.* A needs analysis questionnaire was delivered before the implementation of the lesson (see Appendix IV, p.30). Through the questionnaire, the needs and likes of students were identified. The first thing to be discovered in the needs analysis questionnaire was students’ motivation for studying the English language. Except for the demographic questions like students’ name and the years of studying English, learners’ preferences about the procedure or methods of studying English are discovered. Additionally, learners’ attitudes towards writing and their experience in using a computer were explored.

*Feedback questionnaire.* At the end of the procedure learners completed a feedback questionnaire (see Appendix V, p.32). Through this, students’ feelings about the activities, the problems they faced, things they liked or disliked, feelings about the cooperation with the members of the group and the use of technology as an alternative way of practising the writing skill, were discovered.

*Observation.* Due to the fact that questionnaires are not enough as research tools in a case study, during the lesson students were observed by their basic teacher. Bell (1993) asserts that through observation you can discover characteristics which are difficult to be discovered in other ways. The focus of the checklist (Appendix VI, p.33) is on children’s interest and pleasure about the activity, their willingness to cooperate and ask help from the teacher, whether their participation in the activity is equal and finally about the noise created during the procedure. In the second part of the checklist, some comments about the teacher’s behavior were sought.

*Interview.* The following research tool applied in the investigation, contributing to triangulation, is the interview. Students were interviewed answering a list of questions (see Appendix VII, p.34). It is highly accepted that in-depth interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research according to Rossman and Rallis (1998). The questions of the interview focus on feelings about the procedure, the problems created, the things students liked and feelings about cooperating with others for the accomplishment of a task. On the other hand, one main drawback is that interviews, as Nisbet and Watt (1980) point out, provide important data, but they reveal only how people perceive what happens, not what actually happens, and this is the reason why observation has been added to the research procedure.

4. *Presentation, analysis and implications of the research findings*

4.1. *Needs analysis questionnaire findings*

Except for the demographic questions each question and answer will be analyzed. The answers given to the first question revealed that four out of nine students 44% study English in order for a certificate to be obtained, four out of nine 44% study English because they are forced by their parents and only one learner 11,1% targets at easier access on the internet by means of the English language. The type of learners’ motivation for studying English is the focus of the second question. It is confirmed by students’ answers that the type of learners’
motivation is extrinsic. Students with extrinsic motivation are engaged in a goal that is separate from the activity to recall (Bernard, 2010). Therefore, an alternative lesson would reinforce their intrinsic motivation.

According to the following two questions, although comics are students’ favorite reading material, the opportunity to use them for practising the reading skill in their school was not offered to them. Consequently, comics are introduced in the designed lesson. According to the results, the majority of students, eight out of nine, (88,9%) stated that their native language is of equal importance to the foreign language learned. Only one learner (11,1%) preferred the English language as the only medium of communication in class. Therefore, both languages should be used in the lessons. Oluwole (2008, p.43) points out that it is “generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the mother tongue of the child is of utmost importance.” Regarding students’ preferences about the teaching methods, the majority of students (seven out of nine- 77,8%) responded to group activities positively, finding them interesting (eight out of nine, 88,9%) and a very small percentage (two out of nine- 22,2%) considered individual activities better. Only one student considered group activities difficult. Since technology and specifically computers are of utmost importance in the designed lesson, it is crucial that learners’ experience in using computers be discovered. According to the answers given (eight out of nine learners, 88,9%), technology is part of students’ life since they use them at home and as a result, the tasks would be more easily accomplished.

The focus of the last section of the questionnaire was the writing skill. Practicing the writing skill in a foreign language is a procedure which is considered difficult by the majority of children (eight out of nine, 88,9% even boring (one out of nine- 11,1%). Salehi (2012, p 3467) argues that “low-achieving ESL learners need motivation to write in English”. Despite the difficulty of the writing skill, all students admitted that creating and writing stories is preferable than letters, description and articles. According to Rixon (1992, p.82), stories “have been recommended as memorable and pleasurable ways of presenting and practising language with children”. The way writing is treated in the coursebook is an issue that most of the learners, six out of nine, (66,7%) are disappointed about. Only three (33,3%) were satisfied with the exercises.

The final issue to be raised is the kind of error correction students prefer. As it was expected teacher correction was the prevalent answer (eight out of nine, 88,9%) to the question. Students were accustomed to a traditional way of correction coming from their teacher. That is the reason why only one child (11,1%) responded positively to peer correction.

4.2. Research question: 1. How can digital comics motivate students to write?

The information provided by the research tools revealed that the activity of creating digital comics was considered interesting by all students As previously mentioned, creating digital comics can spur students’ interest to write (Yunus et al, 2013). The use of technology made the lesson more interesting, a fact supported by all students who considered the activity of creating digital comics more creative than the traditional activities of practising the writing skill. Writing skills are also promoted through technology because using computers and especially graphics makes writing an enjoyable experience (Ybarra & Green, 2003).

According to the educator’s observation comments the majority of students seemed to enjoy the whole procedure of creating digital comics showing pleasure as well as interest and additionally being attentive to teachers’ instructions. The interview was used as a
research method in order for the true feelings and opinions of students regarding the teaching situation to be discovered. The fact that they would practise the writing skill in a different way using technology made all students enthusiastic even before the beginning of the lesson. Fortunately, their enthusiasm also remained after the accomplishment of the tasks. They liked the fact that they were using computers. They preferred the specific alternative way of practising writing than the traditional book-based method used before. Writing was more creative than simply following guidelines and they additionally liked the fact that there was a real purpose and a real audience for their product. Consequently, the results indicated that students are positive to alternative ways of teaching, increasing their motivation to write.

4.3. Research question 2: In what way can digital comics promote collaboration?

According to the feedback questionnaire findings, the vast majority of students (eight out of nine- 88.9%) indicated their preference in doing an activity collaboratively rather than individually, finding the experience interesting. This finding takes us to Lightbown & Spada (1999) who claim that cooperative activities increase the self-confidence of students, including the weaker ones, because everyone in a group has a role to play. According to question 7, the focus was on the technique of peer evaluation where six out of nine students (66.7%) reported that they liked the specific experience. Comparing the results of the needs analysis questionnaire with the results of the feedback questionnaire, concerning peer feedback, students’ negative views turned into positive. Finally, according to the last question accomplishing a writing activity in collaboration proved to be important regarding the improvement of the writing skill. Through similar projects collaboration is promoted, students of mixed ability are drawn together and opportunities for individuals to contribute in ways which reflect different talents and creativity are created as Fried-Booth (2002, p. 6) maintain.

According to the observation checklist, there was cooperation among most members of the group but not all the students participated in all stages of the process. Regarding the interview, they liked the fact that the responsibility of accomplishing the task successfully was shared among the members. As a result, cooperation contributed to students’ improvement with peers learning from each other. Almost all the students enjoyed working with others. Using groups for the accomplishment of each step of the process of creating digital comics proved to be very useful for the particular students since they learnt to cooperate for the completion of a task.

4.4. Research question 3: Why should digital comics be integrated in the syllabus as a new way of writing creatively?

According to the fourth question of the feedback questionnaire, all students (100%) responded positively regarding the creation of digital comics in the future and seven out of nine students considered that the whole procedure improved their writing skills. During the interview, using the same method of practising writing in future lessons was the prevalent suggestion on the part of learners. Acquiring the writing skill in a foreign language is usually a difficult and laborious task in comparison to the other three language skills. The majority of students find practising and acquiring the writing skill the most difficult part of studying a foreign language. The particular view is also supported by Cimcoz (1999) adding that learners find writing difficult since they usually run short of ideas and appropriate vocabulary. Therefore based on the data, creating digital comics is a process that should be
integrated into the syllabus due to the fact that it was students’ desire. The specific alternative way of writing made them change their opinion regarding the writing skill.

4.5. Implications

The findings of this research study indicated that changes should be made in the English classroom especially in the methods of practising and teaching of the writing skill. The traditional book-based teaching of writing should be changed with the aim to develop creative students. This is reinforced by Kern (2000) who asserts that specific guidelines and models for creating a piece of writing produce passive learners who experience boredom being at the same time unable to use higher thinking skills. Bahous et al, (2011) encourage students to be active participants in the lesson and not passive, consequently, activities should aim at developing creative thinkers. Additionally, as Williams & Burden (1997) maintain, giving a sense of real purpose and real audience to every piece of writing will increase students’ interest and motivation and decrease boredom. The fact that there was an authentic purpose in the present study motivated learners.

Another change that should be introduced refers to the treatment of writing not as a final product but as a process of constant modification and to the role of the educator as a facilitator and coordinator of the classroom encouraging, praising and motivating students, offering help and suggestions. Furthermore cooperation should be a major part of every teaching procedure because through cooperation children have the opportunity to share thoughts, knowledge and responsibility with other classmates. Finally, alternative ways of assessment should be implemented promoting learners autonomy and increasing their responsibility for their own learning.

5. Limitations and suggestions

One of the major limitations of the present study was the extremely limited number of students. There were many difficulties encountered in getting permission to conduct a research study in a classroom. Therefore this research study provides illustration rather than representation. The fact that there was only one computer in the classroom and no laptops, was an additional limitation faced. Consequently the lesson was adapted to the specific occasion. Razak & Eswaran (2013) mention that one of the factors that prevent computer use in the classroom is the amount of computers in educational institutions. Furthermore, it could be considered as a time consuming activity to be applied in the classroom on a daily basis and it could be alternatively used once a week. It is suggested that this type of project should be applied to more classrooms of private or public institutions to increase validity. Educators could use digital comics not only for creating stories but other genres additionally, where students would convert every piece of writing into comics with the help of technology.

6. Concluding remarks

In conclusion, the findings of the present investigation indicated many positive effects in the teaching of the English language and specifically in the teaching of the writing skill that is considered a complex and difficult process increasing demotivation. The data analysis revealed that learners were enthusiastic about the procedure of creating digital comics by means of technology, supporting that the task of creating comics should be part of their writing lessons. It is apparent that the creation of digital comics promoted group collaboration and collaborative writing creating positive feelings to learners. Digital comics
can and should be integrated in the syllabus as a new way of writing creatively since the majority of learners suggested the replacement of the traditional teaching of the writing skill with more alternative ways. Additionally, it should be stressed that the focus of writing should not be on the final product and grammar correctness but on the meaning communicated and the process and stages followed till the final product. Additionally, writing should have a real purpose and audience since writing is the result of creating something that is useful and has meaning and is not just an exercise where grammar rules are practised and applied.

References


Hashim, H.H. (2011). Peer feedback with checklists in writing classes: Saudi learners’ and teachers’ attitudes and perceptions, at: [http://repository.ksu.edu.sa/jspui/bitstream/123456789/19286/1/D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87.pdf](http://repository.ksu.edu.sa/jspui/bitstream/123456789/19286/1/D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87.pdf), accessed 13 July, 2015.


APPENDIX I: Lesson plan

LESSON PLAN
Private classroom (frontistirio)
Number of students: 9
Age: 11-12
Student level: A2
Materials: copies, computer
Overall purpose: practicing the writing skill.

Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROCEDURE</th>
<th>OBJECTIVES</th>
<th>TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher explains the purpose of the research and the needs analysis questionnaires are delivered.</td>
<td>Activate relevant schemata. Activate background knowledge.</td>
<td>approximately 15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE-WRITING STAGE: 1. The teacher asks questions about comics.</td>
<td>Activating background knowledge and practicing the reading skill.</td>
<td>10 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Students read two comic stories and translate them.</td>
<td></td>
<td>20 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Students have to draw images in a comic where there are dialogues but not images.</td>
<td>Promoting imagination for the accomplishment of a task.</td>
<td>45 min</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Students should write the dialogues in a comic which includes only pictures. Then each student reads the dialogues he/she wrote.</td>
<td>Promoting imagination for the accomplishment of a task. Practicing the writing skill.</td>
<td>45 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Students are divided into groups. The teacher shows the basic steps for the creation of a comic and then lets students to explore the things that</td>
<td>Explanation of the way a comic can be designed. Preparing students for the task.</td>
<td>45 min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Time</td>
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<td>------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>they can do. Then students choose cards from three categories of words.</td>
<td><strong>30</strong> min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WHILE-WRITING STAGE:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Based on the words chosen, students write a story collaboratively on paper and a writing checklist is given to them.</td>
<td><strong>45</strong> min</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Students exchange papers with the other group and based on the writing checklist they do peer-evaluation.</td>
<td><strong>30</strong> min</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>RE-WRITING STAGE:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Students re-write their drafts taking into account the comments made by the other group.</td>
<td><strong>15</strong> min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Based on the story written, students write the dialogues and create the comic on the computer.</td>
<td><strong>90</strong> min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POST-WRITING STAGE:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Each student writes a composition about the experience in creating comics on the computer. Students are given the feedback questionnaire</td>
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</table>
and are being interviewed.

Practicing the writing skill. The teacher will try to find any improvement in students’ writing performance.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>35 min</th>
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<tr>
<td>55 min</td>
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APPENDIX II: Words

ANIMALS
DOG, BIRD, REINDEER, HORSE, SHEEP, COW, GORILLA, BEAR, PIG, MOUSE, LION, SQUIRELL, CHICKEN, BEE, FISH, SNAKE, BAT, BUTTERFLIE.

FRUIT
BANANA, PINEAPPLE, NUTS, CHERRY, ORANGE, APPLE

OBJECTS
CAR, COMPUTER, TENT, PLANE, CAMERA, ROSE, ENVELOPE, BAG, TREE, BOAT, SHOP, BOOK, VASE, MIRROR, FLOWER, HELICOPTER, PIZZA, UMBRELLA, CAKE, GUITAR
APPENDIX III: Students’ comics

GROUP 1
SANTA CLAUS STORY

Two children are sitting next to their uncle in front of a fireplace.

Uncle John, would you like to tell us a story?

yes, yes, yes, a story!

I will tell you a story about something that happened years ago.

When I was young, I decided to visit Santa Claus in his country.

Tell us uncle John.

This is the story.

Mom, I’m going to visit Santa Claus. Please, find my bag. I want to take some things with me.

Ok, I will find it.

I want to give to Santa some things.

What are you going to take with you?
The boy arrived at Santa's house. It was snowing and it was very cold. Two bears were looking for food.

Can I take a photo?

Yes, of course. Where are you going?

I want to see Santa.

The boy went to Santa's house.

Santa is not here. This place is full of presents.

I heard a noise. Santa Claus is coming and I'm very happy.
GROUP 2
THE RIVER AND THE NOISE
Once upon a time, two children lived in a forest. They hadn't parents.

Peter, we should leave the forest. We should go and live with other people.

I agree with you. I'm very happy.

The children left the forest. They stopped near a river because they were tired.

Let's drink.

Let's sit and drink some water. I'm thirsty.

I'm very tired. I want to sleep.

You are right. Let's take a nap.

Suddenly, something fell and caused a loud noise.
The children woke up.

Did you hear the noise?

Yes. I'm scared. Run run....

Suddenly, they saw a cow.

What is going on? Why are you running?

Someone is chasing us. We heard a noise near the river.

I'm coming with you.

Then, they saw a sheep.

What is going on? Why are you running?

Someone is chasing us. We heard a noise near the river.

I'm coming with you.

Then, they saw a dog.

What is going on? Why are you running?

Someone is chasing us. We didn't see him but we heard a noise.

Let's go back to see what happened.

When they arrived a nut fell and caused the same noise.

It's just a nut. Nothing dangerous.

We made a mistake.

Let's go back to the forest, this is not a place for us.

Goodbye!

Goodbye!
GROUP 3
THE CIRCUS

A family lived in a house near a forest.

Maria, didn't obey her mother and went to find bananas.

Mom, I want to go for a walk and find some bananas.

No, it is dangerous. You can't go to the forest alone.

Mom, I'm not a baby anymore. I can go alone.

Wow, a tent. Who is in the tent?

Someone came and threw something at her.

I feel dizzy.

The girl fainted.
When the girl woke up, she was in a car. The car driver went to buy some things. The woman was with her.

Don't worry, we are going to take you to a circus.

The strangers put the girl in a cage. She was very sad, she was crying. A guard was with her.

Two strangers took her to a circus.

Hello bird! Where is our daughter Maria?

Hello, I'm very worried, our child is late.

We are looking for her.

Let's go to find her.
Ok, follow me.

My daughter is in danger.

Please, let's go to the circus.

The bird and the parents went to the circus.

Stay here. I'm going to save her.

Ok, thank you.

Hello Maria. I came with your parents to save you.

The guard has the key. Take it. He is sleeping now.

Maria returned to her family.

Mum, Dad. I love you. I will always obey my parents.
APPENDIX IV: Needs analysis questionnaire

FULL NAME:…………………………
How long have you been studying English? ........................

CIRCLE

1. I study English:
   a) to get a certificate
   b) to find a better job
   c) to access the internet
   d) because my parents want
   e) it is part of the school curriculum
   other ..................................

2. Do you like reading comics? YES / NO

3. Have you ever used comics in English in your school or in the frontistirio? YES / NO

4. I would like my teacher to:
   a) speak in English
   b) speak both in English and Greek

5. I prefer doing an activity:
   a) In groups
   b) alone

6. Working in groups to do an activity is:
   a) boring
   b) difficult
   c) interesting

7. Do you use a computer at home? YES / NO

8. Do you find writing in English:
9. What do you like writing in English:
   a) articles
   b) stories
   c) letters
   d) descriptions
   e) other

10. Do you like the way writing is treated in the textbook? YES / NO

11. What kind of error correction do you prefer?
   a) self-correction
   b) teacher correction
   c) peer-correction

APPENDIX V: Students’ feedback questionnaire

After the completion of the activity

CIRCLE

1. I found the activity of creating comics:
   a) easy
   b) difficult
   c) interesting
   d) boring

2. Did you face problems during the comic activity? YES / NO

3. Did you like doing the activity in groups? YES / NO
4. Would you like to create comics in the future? YES / NO

5. Do you think creating comics improved your writing skills? YES / NO

6. I found working with others/classmates:
   a) useful
   b) not useful
   c) interesting
   d) difficult

7. Did you like evaluating your classmates work? YES / NO

8. Using technology made the lesson more interesting? YES / NO

9. Creating comics was more creative than the traditional activities? YES / NO

10. All group members participated equally in the activity? YES / NO

11. I needed more time for the activity YES / NO

12. Collaboration was useful for me to improve writing. YES / NO

APPENDIX VI: Observation checklist

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<th>S1</th>
<th>S2</th>
<th>S3</th>
<th>S4</th>
<th>S5</th>
<th>S6</th>
<th>S7</th>
<th>S8</th>
<th>S9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shows interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participates in all stages</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enjoys the activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Attentive</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Shows pleasure</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>cooperates</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Feels anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Asks the teacher for help</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Makes noise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Reluctant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Equal participation. Comments:........................................
Noise. Comments:......................................................
Teacher facilitator. Comments:........................................
Teacher encourages. Comments: ...................................
Teacher keeps motivation alive. Comments:......................
APPENDIX VII: Interview

1. How did you feel before you did the activity?
2. What was in your mind after the completion of the activity?
3. What problems did you face while working on the activity?
4. Things you liked and didn’t like.
5. Did you like creating comics?
6. Would you like to do writing by creating comics?
7. Do you think that the activity helped you?
8. Did you like working with others?
9. Any problems?
10. Did you like peer-evaluation?
11. Did all the members of the group participate equally?
12. Any suggestions?

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Using a WebQuest to develop the reading strategies of 6th grade EFL learners

Georgia MAKROGIORGOU and Leda ANTONIOU

The present study aims at investigating the effectiveness of a WebQuest in the development of online reading strategies in Greek primary education. A WebQuest was designed and forty 6th grade learners participated in the implementation of the project. Small-scale action research was conducted combining both quantitative and qualitative research tools that aimed to identify the strategies employed by the learners in their attempt to comprehend Internet texts through the WQ application. The results were very positive as the learners employed a variety of reading comprehension strategies, such as goal setting, reviewing and repairing comprehension, adjusting their reading rate and evaluating information according to their reading purposes. The results of this study indicate that WQs could be useful tools in the hands of English language teachers in state primary schools.

Key words: WebQuests, reading, strategies, primary school
1. Introduction

It is without doubt that online reading serves as the source of input for thousands of L2 learners and the Internet has entered the language classroom permanently. Learners search for information or answer questions using the Web almost on a daily basis. The new features of online texts aid the reader map out his or her own route when reading on the Internet (Dobler-Schmar, 2003), so the conventional perceptions of the reader, text and task have changed when applied to electronic environments (Coiro, 2003; Leu et al., 2011). It therefore becomes imperative to provide a broader definition of reading, one that includes the concept of ‘new literacy skills,’ which include identifying the most important problems, locating useful information faster, evaluating information critically, synthesizing information appropriately to develop the best solutions, and then communicating these solutions to others effectively (Coiro et al., 2008).

The WebQuest (WQ) model, “an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet” (Dodge, 1995), provides practice in these new literacy skills and strategies that are necessary in today’s world, its most significant benefit being that it provides scaffolding in higher-order thinking processes (Dodge, 1995; March, 2004; Şen & Neufeld, 2006; Sox & Rubinstein-Avila, 2009), thus promoting thoughtful literacy (Ikpeze & Boyd, 2007).

Given the usefulness of WebQuests in EFL teaching, studies that have been carried out in the Greek reality have yielded promising results concerning the application of Webquests. Katsoulaki (2010) and Liakou (2011) underlined the potential of these tools to reinforce metacognitive skills, creativity, collaboration and intercultural awareness. Popota (2011) concluded that WQs reinforce motivation by lowering the affective filter in the classroom and providing opportunities for the development of multiple intelligences. However, the only case study that focused on reading strategies was conducted by Manou (2012), who concluded that the WQ format has the potential to instigate a more strategic reading behavior in 6th grade students.

Taking into account the call for further research in various subject and grade levels, expressed by a number of researchers (Ikpeze & Boyd, 2007; MacGregor & Lou, 2004; Polly & Ausband, 2009), the present study attempts to bridge this gap in the body of research by exploring the effects of a WebQuest on the reading comprehension strategies that 6th grade EFL learners use to make sense of Internet texts.

2. Literature review

2.1. Reading comprehension processes and strategies

Reading has been described as a complex skill that involves a multiplicity of cognitive processes (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). These processes are categorized as “top-down” and “bottom-up,” the former denoting the application of prior knowledge to working on the meaning of a text, and the latter having to do with the decoding of letters, words and language features of a text (ibid).

According to Grabe & Stoller (2002), balancing the processes and skills needed for comprehension also requires that the reader be strategic, in other words, “able to read flexibly, in line with changing purposes and the ongoing monitoring of comprehension” (p.
18). In the same vein, Pearson et al. (1992) describe the overall reading comprehension process as a set of strategies employed by successful readers.

Thus, thoughtful reading includes:

- specifying a purpose for reading;
- using prior knowledge to make meaning;
- reading with flexibility, monitoring comprehension, looking back and employing repair strategies;
- distinguishing important from unimportant information;
- synthesizing data and creating summaries with the most appropriate information;
- drawing inferences before and while reading;
- asking questions.

Focusing on online reading, Anderson (2003) classified strategies under three categories: global, problem solving and support strategies. Global strategies relate to the overall comprehension of a text, such as skimming, scanning and applying prior knowledge to understand the general idea. Problem solving strategies include repair processes, such as monitoring of comprehension, rereading, paying closer attention, adjusting one’s reading rate, inferring, and visualizing new information. Finally, support strategies include translating, using an online dictionary, reading aloud, and using a hardcopy of the text.

2.2. EFL reading in Greek primary schools

In the Greek reality, the Unified Cross-Disciplinary Curriculum for the English Language (Pedagogical Institute, 2003) places emphasis on active learning, life skills and learner autonomy, which can be achieved through authentic tasks, self-assessment, projects and portfolios. Ideas of ‘learning how to learn’, lifelong learning, and holistic knowledge are put forward. Young learners, at the centre of the educational process, have to experience learning, a fact that will make them understand our multicultural world. Towards the aim of learner autonomy, the curriculum places particular emphasis on strategies and skills, such as cooperation, negotiation, problem solving, critical thinking and new literacy skills.

In the same vein, as far as new literacy skills are concerned, the governmental strategic plan of action for the ‘New School’ (Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, 2010b) puts forward the necessity for the learners to be competent in ICT and to acquire critical skills and strategies in order to be able to choose among the information and knowledge that is available to them. The revised Unified Curriculum for Foreign Languages (EPS-XG Curriculum) makes specific reference to the concept of multiliteracy and its connection to the variety of text types that are produced in today’s communication environments and stresses the need for EFL teaching to provide learners with the skills they need to communicate effectively in today’s social media (Pedagogical Institute, 2011).

However, the coursebook English 6th Grade (Efraimidou et al., 2009) does not include sufficient material for nurturing new literacy skills and strategies in young learners. Moschidou (2010), whose study evaluated the reading component of this coursebook, suggests supplementing it with authentic texts either from magazines or newspapers or the Web. Similarly, relying on data collected from EFL teachers in the 6th grade of Greek primary schools, Papaioannou (2011) proposes the design of a parallel language syllabus that would integrate the Internet into the EFL classroom.
2.3. WebQuests

Bernie Dodge, professor at San Diego University, who initially conceived the WebQuest model, described it as “an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the Internet” (Dodge, 1995). Years later, March (2004, p. 42) provided a detailed definition which highlighted the key attributes of WebQuests:

A real WebQuest is a scaffolded learning structure that uses links to essential resources on the WWW and an authentic task to motivate students’ investigation of an open ended question, development of individual expertise and participation in a group process that transforms newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding.

This scaffolded learning structure consists of components that function as “building blocks that comprise a tightly formatted Internet lesson” (Watson, 1999)—an introduction, a task, a process, an evaluation and a conclusion.

The introduction introduces the topic of the WebQuest and aims to arouse curiosity in the learners. The task provides a focus for the learners by describing the end-product they will create. The process takes the form of a traditional lesson plan (Dodge, 1995) as it illustrates the steps learners should follow to achieve the complex task. This component is accompanied by resources in the form of hyperlinks and other supportive materials that are necessary for the completion of the task. Reflecting all the elements of the project that are included in both the task and process (Schweizer & Kossow, 2007), the evaluation presents the learners with the criteria the assessor will use to evaluate their work. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the whole project and asks the learners to reflect on their learning.

This scaffolded learning structure, which WebQuests provide, is compatible with social-constructivism, which emphasizes social interaction as one of the main presuppositions for learning (Bruner, 1966; Vygotsky, 1978). It also promotes the development of higher-order thinking processes, which work at the levels of understanding, application, analysis, evaluation and creation according to Bloom’s revised taxonomy of educational objectives (Krathwohl, 2002).

More specifically, when engaged with a WebQuest task, learners do not just transfer information, but they have to transform the knowledge gained in order to achieve their goal. This transformation requires their engagement in higher-order thinking skills (Dodge, 1995; March, 2004; March, 2007; Şen & Neufeld, 2006; Sox & Rubinstein-Avila, 2009). First, they have to comprehend what they read, analyzing and synthesizing information. Throughout this process, they have to employ metacognitive strategies as they activate prior knowledge in the introduction and then are engaged in goal setting and planning through the task and the process. Through the evaluation stage, they are provided with the tools they need to assess their end product. Finally, through the conclusion, they look back, self-assessing and reflecting on the whole process. Additionally, as learners are guided in their reading step by step, they do not spend time using search tools (Lamb, 2000) and at the same time, they practise reading authentic texts online, developing new literacy skills (Sox & Rubinstein-Avila, 2009).
3. The research design

3.1. Aim and research questions

Taking into account the reports on the numerous benefits of WebQuests and the call for further research on their use in a variety of educational contexts in Greece (Katsoulaki, 2010; Liakou, 2011; Manou, 2012; Popota, 2011) and abroad (Alshumaimeri & Almasri, 2012; Halat, 2013; Ikpeze & Boyd, 2007; MacGregor & Lou 2004; Polly & Ausband, 2009), the present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of WebQuests on online reading strategies in primary education.

The research questions posed were the following:

1. Can the WebQuest application combined with appropriate teaching techniques (modeling, scaffolding, exemplifying, and demonstrating the use of graphic organizers) in the pre-reading phase enhance online reading comprehension?
2. Is there evidence of reading strategy use when the learners are engaged in the tasks within the WebQuest framework?
3. Which reading strategies are mostly applied through the WebQuest application?

3.2. Participants

The participants were forty learners in the 6th grade of a state primary school in Thessaloniki, Greece, divided into two groups. The first group consisted of 9 boys and 11 girls, while the second group of 12 boys and 8 girls. They were heterogeneous classes, mixed on the basis of language skills, language aptitude, and levels of self-confidence. Their level ranged from A1 to A2 according to the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001).

3.3. Research method

The study employed a mixed methods classroom-based research approach combining qualitative and quantitative data to achieve ‘triangulation.’ As Dornyei (2007) points out, if a finding can be verified by different methods, it is considered more valid than a finding which results from a single method. Because questionnaires are “easy to construct, extremely versatile and uniquely capable of gathering information quickly in a form that is readily processible” (Dornyei, 2007, pp. 101-102), two questionnaires were designed to gather quantitative data for this study—a needs analysis questionnaire that was administered before the WebQuest application and a post-WebQuest questionnaire that was administered after the implementation of the project.

The needs analysis questionnaire aimed at drawing an outline of the participants’ characteristics related directly or indirectly to the focal points of the present study and led to the design of the particular WebQuest. The post-WebQuest questionnaire, aiming at the collection of quantitative data, adapted 19 items from the Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS) that was developed by Anderson (2003). The questionnaire items were organized in a 3-point Likert scale and reflected the global, problem solving and support strategies of Anderson’s (2003) classification.

Additionally, the study used the ‘stimulated recall’ approach, which, according to Dornyei (2007), is an introspective method of collecting data related to the inner processes,
thoughts, feelings, and motives of the individual participants. One of these took place immediately after the learners had read the Internet texts to collect information, and one at the end of the WebQuest application. Responding to the first stimulated recall, the participants had to write down their first impressions, the problems they faced while reading and the strategies they used to comprehend, using the notes on their worksheet as a ‘stimulus’. In the second recall, the learners wrote down which strategies they might consider helpful for a future project using their final products as a ‘stimulus.

Finally, a journal with entries was kept by the teacher, during the implementation of the WebQuest. The journal entries were completed after each teaching period, and the teacher judged whether the objectives set in the lesson plans had been achieved. The entries focused on the employment of strategies such as goal setting, planning skimming, note-taking, activating prior knowledge, chunking, monitoring, repairing comprehension, self-reflection, as well as on problems that emerged.

3.4. The research procedure

The needs analysis questionnaire was administered in November 2012, and the data collected led to the design of the WebQuest “Christmas without borders” which was implemented in December and which adopted the stages of a Project Based Framework. According to Legutke & Thomas (1991, p. 160), the Project Based Framework is “a theme and task-centred mode of teaching and learning which results from a joint process of negotiation between participants”; it is experiential, bridging the gap between theory and practice, balancing between the process and the end product (ibid).

The major goals of the project were:

• to develop an understanding and appreciation of different customs around the world;
• to provide practice in reading and writing reports within an integrated-skills syllabus;
• to engage learners in using the present simple to describe customs;
• to provide practice in new literacy skills and online reading strategies;
• to foster positive attitudes towards online reading.

The whole project lasted five two-hour sessions, which took place in the classroom and in the computer lab.

3.4.1. The preparation stage

The pre-WebQuest phase took place in the classroom with the use of a laptop and a projector. To introduce the theme smoothly and create a pleasant atmosphere, the teacher showed the learners the video clip of a Christmas song and the video of Christmas from the WebQuest ‘introduction,’ and a small discussion ensued. As brainstorming activities are an effective means for the activation of “schematic” knowledge (Skehan, 1998), and the use of graphic organizers has been acknowledged as an important means for enhancing comprehensible input (Echevarria et al., 2000, in Sox & Rubinstein-Avila, 2009), the learners engaged in a brainstorming activity and completed a Christmas mind map, both of which aimed at activating prior knowledge and vocabulary.

The ‘introduction’ and the ‘task’ of the WebQuest were demonstrated, with the aim of providing the learners with a global idea of the situation and the final product. The purpose
for reading was clarified for the first step—the learners had to keep notes on three categories concerning Christmas in a country of their choice.

According to schema theory, organizing one’s notes in an ideational framework is one of the “best models we have of how the mind organizes ideas in information sets” (Burgess, 1994, p. 309). To this end, a worksheet for notes, functioning as a concept map for note-taking, was distributed, with a focus on specific categories: decoration, food, customs, Santa Claus and wishes. The ‘process’ page of the WebQuest was demonstrated and the teacher used texts from the resources of the WQ as examples to model the employment of reading strategies. Towards the goal of lowering the affective filter (Krashen, 1984), the teacher tried to provide modified input and demonstrated the use of an online dictionary in case the learners needed to look up unknown words. Finally, learners formed groups of three and moved to the computer lab in order to decide on the country of their research.

3.4.2. The implementation stage

During the implementation stage, the learners produced a magazine about multicultural Christmas, which was published in their wiki and then photocopied. To accomplish their goal, the learners read texts about Christmas in other countries, they kept notes and wrote reports. Throughout the process, they also created mind maps and drawings with key expressions.

At the beginning of the ‘reading’ step, the evaluation rubric of the WebQuest was discussed, to clarify the main criteria used in the evaluation and provide learners with a framework for their work. Subsequently, the learners started their research using the hyperlinks of the ‘process’ page, collecting relevant information, trying to categorize their notes in their worksheets. The teacher monitored, acted as facilitator, and ensured that the learners were not disoriented. Following the suggestions for WebQuest implementation with young learners, the teacher had prepared simplified versions of texts and lists of possible unknown key words to support weak learners. In the end, the groups were engaged in the first stimulated recall. For homework, they had to prepare mind maps with words and expressions from their notes.

At the beginning of the ‘preparation of the final product’ step, there was a class discussion, during which the groups had to report to the rest of the class the newly-acquired information, consulting their notes and showing their mind maps. Then, learners had to assemble the information gathered to prepare illustrated reports for the classroom magazine. At this point they were engaged in process writing with the use of the word processor. Towards the creation of the end product, which was a written text, the word processor was chosen, since this tool can contribute to the improvement of learners’ writing (Piper, 1987). Through word processing, learners can produce texts which look attractive quickly and easily, they are likely to spend more time on improving their text and concentrate harder on what they are doing while errors seem to be ephemeral (ibid).

Throughout this process, the learners had the chance to revisit the WebQuest texts in order to download pictures and to write short summaries of their reports in their mother tongue for the magazine. The Word files were saved on their computers and were sent to the teacher’s e-mail address.

As Zamel (1985) pinpoints, in writer-based approaches, learners understand that they produce a text which evolves over time. So, in the third step of the implementation stage,
conferencing took place in the classroom and a whole-class discussion about the learners’ reports was initiated. The teacher made comments on content and points to be clarified, while after the conferencing, learners went to the lab for improvements. The learners who finished early helped their classmates.

3.4.3. The evaluation stage

Phillips et al. (1999) suggest that during the evaluation stage of a project, both the teacher and the children reflect on the process and the final product; they add that this kind of evaluation contributes to the improvement of teaching techniques reinforcing learner autonomy. Accordingly, the evaluation stage took place in the classroom. The teacher had photocopied the learners’ products with notes for feedback. Then, the learners had to grade themselves according to the evaluation rubric of the WebQuest. At this point, learners completed the post-WebQuest questionnaire and the final stimulated recall sheet.

Finally, as Halat (2008) pinpoints, through the ‘conclusion’ of a WebQuest, learners may be encouraged to extend the experience into other domains. In this study, apart from triggering reflection, the ‘conclusion’ of the WebQuest engaged children in singing along familiar Christmas songs watching video clips. Then, they made ‘Christmas without borders’ drawings to decorate the classroom. The reports of the children were published in the learners’ wiki.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Evidence of strategy use

According to the quantitative and the qualitative data of this study, there was evidence of strategy use when the learners were engaged in the tasks within the WebQuest framework. The learners employed a combination of reading strategies that took place simultaneously and not in a linear order.

Taking into account the students’ answers to the post-WQ questionnaire, problem solving strategies had a prevailing role. Learners monitored their reading (85%) to figure out if particular parts of a text fit their purposes, and they reread a text (70%) adjusting their speed (70%) in their struggle to comprehend (see Fig. 1). Secondly, application of global strategies was reported at high percentages: goal setting (88%), scanning-skimming (65%), and making inferences (63%). Lastly, concerning support reading strategies, learners were mostly engaged in downloading images (68%), translating to their mother tongue (63%), and note-taking (63%) (see Fig. 2).

From the beginning, as it was depicted in the teacher’s journal, the learners were engaged in goal setting and planning. After they conceived the real purpose for their reading, they started working towards achieving their goal. As the material was lengthy, preliminary scanning and skimming were necessary to distinguish important from unimportant information. They rapidly moved their eyes over texts to get the main ideas and to acquire a general idea of the content. Also, through the links of the WebQuest, they visited all the texts that had information concerning the country they had chosen before deciding which text to choose for more careful reading. After reading fast, they chose a text and they started reading more carefully and slowly, looking for key words that fit their categories.
Fig. 1. Frequency of employment of reading strategies with the WebQuest (How much did you use the following strategies in order to comprehend the texts?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>a lot</th>
<th>a little</th>
<th>not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking of the information in both English and your mother tongue</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translating into your mother tongue</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downloading images related to the text</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using an Internet dictionary or translator</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a print copy of the text to underline the key points</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading out loud</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking notes</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to get back on track when you diverged from your goal</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing the meaning of unknown words or phrases</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rereading the text when you had difficulty comprehending</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualising</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading more carefully when the text was difficult</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading more slowly and more carefully to understand what you were reading</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading quickly to understand if the information helped you reach your goal</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using graphic organizers</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding what to read carefully and what to ignore</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to get a general idea of the texts in the beginning</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the knowledge you already had</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading the texts with a specific goal in mind</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 2. Most frequently employed reading strategies (according to the questionnaire)

The evidence yielded from this study corroborates the results of the case study conducted by Manou (2012), who explored hypertext reading strategies through a WebQuest. As she reported, the students were “acting as participants of a treasure hunt”, employing an array of strategies, scanning, skimming, assessing every context clue of the Web pages.

4.2. Most frequently employed strategies

Taking into account the notes from the teacher’s journal and the stimulated recalls of the students, the strategy of making inferences was at the heart of the reading comprehension process. The learners tried to infer the meaning of sentences they considered important using their background knowledge. While reading, they made predictions, checked comprehension and asked questions to verify their initial guesses. Then, before writing anything on their worksheets, they had discussions evaluating the information in order to choose which parts should be noted down, simultaneously making decisions about classifying this information according to the categories listed on their worksheets. Furthermore, the online dictionary was used extensively; learners found the translation of unknown words in Greek, noted them down and then reread the sentences that they perceived as important according to their reading purposes. Apart from the online dictionary, another feature of the Internet that was used was images. If their text did not include images, they downloaded pictures from the Internet to create their illustrated reports. These images also helped them make connections between text and pictures and, thus, comprehend difficult parts of information.

4.3. Reading comprehension and scaffolding

Regarding the qualitative data of this study, there were different degrees of comprehension among learners, depending on their prior knowledge. Therefore, learners who came from other countries activated their prior knowledge about their countries easily and were eager to share their information with their peers in the pre-WQ phase. Moreover, during the implementation of the project, these learners encountered fewer difficulties in comprehending crucial information. In the same vein, learners with prior linguistic knowledge did not face any comprehension problems. On the contrary, some weak learners who also lacked content schemata seemed to have comprehension difficulties at the
beginning. At this point, scaffolding provided by the teacher was reported by the learners as being very helpful (see Fig. 3). When the learners seemed stuck, the teacher supported them in their top-down processing, facilitating them to activate their prior knowledge of similar customs in Greece they were already familiar with. Towards this end, she asked them questions or she modeled the use of strategies. Additionally, in their bottom-up processing, these learners were supported with the Greek translation of key words or they were encouraged to use the online dictionary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not at All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussing with your teacher and classmates about the way in which you worked</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing how you would be assessed for your work</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to create mindmaps</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being given specific websites for your topic</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to follow specific steps to reach the final result</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a separate worksheet to keep notes on the different categories</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying a mindmap in the beginning</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your teacher explaining how you should work by giving you examples from the beginning</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a specific goal from the beginning</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 3. Students’ perceptions about the most helpful features of the WQ and the teaching procedures (How much did the following help you understand?)

Furthermore, the diagrams, the worksheet and the tasks to keep notes and create mind maps, along with the particular steps and the pre-selected Web sites of the WQ, proved very helpful for most of the learners. Apart from enhancing the learners’ bottom-up processing, they helped them remain focused and triggered the use of crucial strategies, such as goal-setting, rereading, skimming and scanning. Similarly, reflective procedures, such as sharing information within the groups, conferencing and self-assessment through the evaluation component of the WQ, reinforced class interaction, monitoring of the whole comprehension process, metacognition and peer feedback contributing to the solution of comprehension problems. The development of metacognitive skills, creativity and collaboration through WQs has also been reported by the studies conducted by Katsoulaki (2010) and Liakou (2011) in Greek primary schools with EFL learners.

A problem that appeared was distractibility due to the limited attention span that is characteristic of young learners (Bouniol, 2004). In the pre-WQ phase, some learners were anxious to start their exploration without paying much attention to important warm-up class procedures. The result was that at the beginning of their first reading they asked for the
teacher’s help. Similarly, some children very soon claimed that they had finished their task and asked for permission to play games. At this point, the teacher asked them to evaluate themselves and their products according to the evaluation component of the WQ. Through self-assessment, they understood that they had to employ repair strategies to improve their notes or their reports.

Overall, the components of the WQ combined with monitoring and support by the teacher—group or individualized—contributed to enhancing reading comprehension. Taking into account both the quantitative and qualitative data that were collected, the learners acknowledged goal setting and scaffolding provided both by the teacher and the WQ itself as the most valuable elements that facilitated them in planning their reading towards comprehension.

In the end, the learners synthesized the information they gathered and were proud to see their illustrated reports about Christmas in various countries published in their wiki. By gaining knowledge about different cultures in the world, they developed their intercultural awareness through the WQ, a finding also reported by Katsoulaki’s (2010) research with EFL learners in a Greek primary school.

5. Implications

The findings of this small-scale study that implemented the use of a teacher-designed WQ to develop various reading strategies and positive attitudes towards online reading in forty primary school students can be used as a tool for the realization of the governmental strategic plan of action for the ‘New School’ (Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, 2010b) and the revised Unified Curriculum for Foreign Languages (EPS-XG Curriculum) (Pedagogical Institute, 2011), both of which emphasize the need to provide learners with new literacy skills, necessary in today’s fast-paced reality. Through WebQuests, ICT and authentic reading skills can be smoothly incorporated into EFL teaching practices, helping learners overcome the challenges of reading online and providing them with a sense of achievement that can lead them to becoming more autonomous lifelong learners.

Consequently, teachers who have access to a computer lab could use WQs to promote strategic online reading in their students. They can choose a project from the theme areas of the coursebook and design or select a WQ according to the interests of the learners. Above all, there has to be careful planning in setting a framework for group work. Before the application, strategic behaviour has to be modeled and time for activation of schemata has to be provided, whereas throughout the implementation, constant monitoring, support, and class procedures that engage learners in reflection, metacognition, self-assessment and peer interaction have to be maintained.

In order for all this to be realized, however, English language teachers should be provided with expertise and support in using technology tools such as WQs. Warschauer (2002, p. 29) puts emphasis on the essential role of teachers “with the knowledge, skills, and attitude for innovatively designing, adapting, and applying technology in the classroom, appropriate to local context” in order to equip students with valuable lifelong learning skills and strategies toward autonomous learning. According to Papaioannou’s (2011) study, there is a call by EFL teachers for professional development to cater for the actual implementation of CALL for EFL purposes. Her data converge with the statistical results drawn from the survey conducted in Greece within the framework of the ‘Major programme for professional
development’ (Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, 2010a), which reflects the teachers’ need to receive training for using ICT in their instructional settings.

Finally, it is important to refer to the limitations of this study. The most serious restriction was the limited availability of the computer lab, which was occupied during most teaching hours and was available only two hours a week for each group. Also, time restrictions, combined with a tight school schedule, did not allow the researcher to carry out a longer-term experiment and to provide more sophisticated statistical analyses of the results. Therefore, the results of this small-scale action research cannot be generalized to the whole student population of the EFL context.

6. Conclusion

This study proved that WebQuests as an instructional tool can be used to promote reading strategies in a Web environment. Clearly, they have the potential to instigate the employment of reading strategies, such as goal-setting, monitoring, rereading, scanning-skimming, and making inferences. The WQ components can provide young learners with a concrete task, a real, meaningful goal for reading and a plan for implementing this goal.

Overall, regardless of the limitations and the restrictions, this study proved that with WQs and with the teacher’s support, even the weak learners can be motivated to read online towards autonomous learning. However, more WQ projects have to be implemented with different participants and different tasks focusing on online reading strategies in the Greek EFL context. In this way, there is a possibility that the conclusions of this study will be verified and more insights will be provided in the area of online reading.

Notes

2. There are ICT classes in the school, so the teacher had to organize the reading sessions in the computer lab according to the schedule of the ICT teacher.

References


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Metacognitive awareness development through CALL

Ανάπτυξη μεταγνωστικής επίγνωσης με υποβοηθούμενη από υπολογιστή διδασκαλία ξένης γλώσσας

Evdokia KATSANIS

In a world where technology is blooming, where life is greatly benefited by it in every aspect, and the impossible becomes not only possible, but most of the times easily accessible, it is only natural to make an effort to apply the technological wonders on education. In the case study of this dissertation, an effort has been made to investigate whether CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) not only facilitates accessibility to information but also creates the appropriate environment to enhance learners with both cognitive and metacognitive skills and serves as a means of motivation. On these grounds, a qualitative case study research has been conducted, with the help of a group of 6 male students of a vocational school in Haidari. The results received were very encouraging as they indicated that CALL both motivates learners but also serves to lead them to metacognitive awareness.

Key words: metacognitive awareness, metacognition, CALL, learner autonomy, web quest, wiki, cognitive and metacognitive skills, learners’ strategies, learner autonomy, motivation
1. Introduction

Internet applications have become more and more advanced and the use of technology has become a popular practice among foreign and second language educators (Kern, R. & Warschauer, M., 2000). Web based instruction is provided utilizing hypermedia and multimedia technology to access various resources online (Brown 1998; Jonassen, 1989). Web based instruction makes possible learning experiences that are open, and flexible, providing opportunities for engaging, interactive, and efficient instruction (Kahn, 2001).

Furthermore, there is an influence of metacognitive knowledge on language learning (Wenden, 1998). Attempting to enhance learners’ strategy skills, lead them to metacognitive awareness, and reinforce learner autonomy, in an EFL (English Foreign Language) classroom, this study sets and examines the hypothesis that CALL along with its tools, its numerous applications, and processes may be beneficial and of effective use. Consequently, the purpose of this dissertation¹ is to investigate: a) CALL’s effectiveness in activating learners’ willingness to proceed into a deeper inner reflection, in order to adopt techniques and develop skills that shall lead them to metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy and b) look into CALL’s motivational power.

2. Literature Review

This section refers to theories concerning metacognition. An effort shall be made to define metacognition in correlation to language learning. Additionally, metacognition is discussed in correlation to CALL, accompanied by theories that indicate how the use of hypermedia may support students to be led to metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy. A reference to the expectancy and value motivational theory is also included. And last but not least, since group work, class discussions, and process writing are used as research tools, and in order for the findings to be corroborated, literature on process writing as well as cooperative learning shall be included.

2.1. Defining metacognition

Metacognition is a complex issue often discussed by linguists. In very simple words one would say it includes higher order thinking that enables understanding of one’s cognitive processes, especially when engaging in learning. It can be referred to as a synonym to reflection in applied learning theory. A number of linguists have defined metacognition. For example:

- Metacognition is knowledge and awareness about one’s cognitive processes, (Mayer, 2003)
- It is the knowledge of one’s own cognitive and affective processes, as well as, the ability to consciously and deliberately monitor and regulate those processes and states (Hacker, 1998).
- Metacognition is intentional, purposeful, conscious, and directed at accomplishing a particular outcome (Flavell, 1971).

¹ This article is based on a dissertation which can be reached at the Academic Digital Repository of the Hellenic open University
Based on Flavell’s definition, this case study took place, in an effort to confirm that CALL can be an effective means that leads students to goal directed thinking, and planning of a sequence of actions, in order to reinforce metacognitive skills and ultimately support learners’ metacognitive awareness.

2.2. Metacognition and CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning)

The term Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), was agreed upon at the 1983 TESOL convention to describe language learning with the aid of a computer (Chapelle, 2001 in Kazoullis & Vlachos, 2012). The ultimate justification for the use of computers in language teaching and learning is that it promotes learner autonomy (Jones, 2001). The issue extends beyond a language course and CALL materials, and it is the need to develop learners’ strategies to help them make use of the extensive language and resources available on the Internet. Fortunately, it seems that in the age of web 2.0, teachers have the means to help learners develop their skills (Vlachos, 2010).

2.3. The Writing Process theory

‘The cognitive process theory of writing’ introduced by Linda Flower and John R. Hayes (1981), (“Writing Process”, 2015), includes the following steps:

- ‘brainstorming’
- ‘quick writing’
- redrafting
- editing stage

The notion of metacognition is not absent. The process writing approach seems to develop students’ metacognitive functioning and equip them with the ability to be reflective and strategic when completing writing tasks, rather than just rely on learning and applying rules for producing certain text types (Glasswell, Parr, and Aikman, 2001). Through process writing responsibility concerning writing, is gradually transferred from teacher to student (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988).

2.4. Cooperative learning in second language instruction

Cooperative learning (CL) also known as collaborative learning involves more than just asking students to work together in groups. Instead, conscious thought goes in to helping students make the experience of collaboration as successful as possible (Jacobs, 2004). It is defined from different researchers’ sources as follows:

- The instructional use of small groups of students who are to work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1993).
- Techniques and principles for helping students work together more effectively (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002).

Cooperative learning offers many potential benefits that include increased self-esteem, greater liking for school and improving complex thinking (Jacobs, 2004).
2.6 Expectancy-Value motivational theory

The potential that technology motivates learners is strongly related to the expectancy – value model of motivation (Wigfield & Eccless, 1992), and the main focus is on three basic areas of the particular theory:

a) **Value**: How important learners believe that a task is.

b) **Expectancy**: Their beliefs about their ability or skill to perform the task and

c) **Affective**: Emotional reactions to the task (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

The *value* component of motivation defines the students’ beliefs about the importance or value of a task and the reason why students avoid or approach a task. (Brophy, 1983). *Expectancy* relates to self – efficacy, how confident students feel about their cognitive skills (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). The question set in this case is can I do what is being asked? Self-efficacy is influenced by past experiences and how familiar one is with the task in question (Bandura, 1993; Schunk, 2000). *Affect* refers to learners’ emotional reactions to the task and self-worth evaluation. It is very important for students to be able to protect their sense of worth of personal value in the classroom (Covington, 1984). Everyone needs to approach success and therefore social recognition and to avoid failure or disapproval (Covington, 1984; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996). Students are motivated by a task they believe to be fun, requires a moderate amount of effort, and is reasonably challenging. Therefore, the perception a learner has about a task influences students’ motivation for approaching or avoiding the task. (Blumenfeld, Mergendoller, & Swarthout, 1987; Eccles et al., 1983).

3. Research Methodology

The qualitative case study approach has been adopted for this paper, in order to allow the researcher/teacher to explore whether learners’ metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy is reinforced by CALL, and whether the implementation of technology functions as a motivational power towards knowledge.

3.1. Teaching context and learners’ profile

This research took place in a public technological and vocational high school, situated in Haidari, a western suburb of Athens. The target group is a class of 6 students, aged between 16-18 years old. The learners, all male in gender, belong to approximately a B2+ level, according to the Common European framework. They form one of the two groups of car mechanics of the school and are taught English, concerning their field of studies, from a book provided by the Greek Ministry of Education and in particular from the Institute of Technology and Computers. They constitute, though, a rather heterogeneous group. Apart from the characteristics of puberty that they share and perhaps their social and educational backgrounds, they show differences concerning their nationality, and mother tongue, as well as their personalities, their learning styles, and aptitudes.

3.2. Research tools

The basic research tool of this paper is a web quest, and one by one all of the tasks it included, such as: a wiki, an interview, class discussions, qualitative classroom observations, problem solving, video viewing, social media, and last but not least creating a collage.
Web quest

In this research a long-term web quest, including a number of tasks has been used as a research tool. Feedback sessions took place after the completion of each task, as well as assessment sessions. The duration of the project was 11 to 12 weeks. The data collected from the web quest tasks, were used as evidence to answer the research questions, and shall be displayed below.

The web quest designed for the car mechanics class (see Figure 1) included the following parts:

![Figure 1: Web quest title page sample](image)

- a) Title page: ‘Automobiles’
- b) Introduction: Car mechanics were invited to solve a real life problem, relevant to the students’ profession to be.
- c) Task: Students were to work on structured organized activities of an instructional purpose, that is, students were provided with particular links to follow. They were to visit forums discussing car mechanical problems, in order to collect information to find the cause and the solution to the problem set. A number of additional tasks were also included:
  - In one of the tasks the students were to watch a You Tube video on clutch function and then answer a set of questions.
  - Dealing with social issues. The students were to draw particular information, deriving from forums, concerning social behavior.
  - Following a wiki in order to learn how to write an informative report.
  - Working on something entertaining by watching a film trailer and also a review of a You Tube video.
  - Last but not least a task that helped learners reveal their creativity, by drawing or creating a collage of their dream car.

Within the task instructions learners were also informed that the whole procedure as well as the end product should be the result of a joint decision project, through
group work. They were divided into two groups of three and were provided with tips of useful advice.

d) Problem: The problem set: “what could be wrong when it is hard to shift into gears after the car has warmed up, and what are the possible solutions”.

e) Process: It contained the series of steps learners were to follow in order to complete their project. Generally, the steps were embedded in the following categories:
   i. Guidance to solve the problem and learn extra information concerning technical components of a car (Steps 1 and 2)
   ii. Critical thinking concerning social aspects (Step 3)
   iii. Having fun and becoming creative (Steps 4 and 5)
   iv. Writing and practicing a report (A wiki tutorial and practice), (Step 6).

f) Task Sheets: Eight tasks were assigned to the students. Their aim was to help them organize their information, chunk the input retrieved, so as to become concrete and manageable. Tasks became the means to think, analyze and become able to synthesize in order to accomplish their projects. The tasks were closely relevant and based on the links provided.

g) Evaluation: The form of evaluation applied was peer and self-assessment. Teacher assessment was to follow as complementary and only in the condition that it was particularly necessary. It was a formative assessment type and it was carried out every week. The aim of this assessment approach was to encourage students to become autonomous learners.

h) Conclusion: This part highlighted to students the web quest’s aims and encouraged them to create a web quest of their own (Halat, 2007; Kelly, 2000).

Wiki

Among other tasks, a wiki (see Figure 2) has been embedded in the web quest discussed above. Students were invited by the teacher to a wiki host cyber space called Wiki spaces, http://carmechanics.wikispaces.com. The wiki aimed to teach students, online, how to write an informative report. The steps of the writing process theory were clarified and followed, drafting, redrafting and feedback exchange took place online and the final product, the report, was also uploaded. The reports produced by the students have as well functioned as interviews, as within the essay rubrics, a couple of questions were posed, concerning the effectiveness of the whole project, and their feelings about it, as shall be further clarified below, and the data received have been collected to serve the research aims. The online chats and interaction of the learners while working on the wiki project were also of great value. The data analysis and findings shall be described in detail below.
Interviews

The interview type in our case was a semi-structured interview where a couple of key questions helped define the area of interest. This means learners were to answer how they felt about the whole research project, what they liked or disliked about it, and comment on its effectiveness as a whole. They were provided with some guidance on what to write about, and therefore were facilitated to answer in more detail (Britten, 1999). As already mentioned, the report produced by the students within the wiki, could be partially characterized as a personal interview.
Group discussions

Group discussions produce both data and insights to others by verbalizing thoughts, emotions shared and comprehended by participants. Before each task, one or perhaps two discussion sessions would take place. Within these discussions one basic step that had been followed was to ensure that students had understood their roles in the content they were trying to master each time. This way the range of roles created each time was supported and students were challenged to respond to the material accordingly. For example, during the sessions that preceded and followed the wiki and the informative report writing, their role in their assignment had been discussed (i.e. their role as the author). They received benefit from thinking not only about who their audience was but also who they were as they addressed that audience. Group discussions have been used as data collection tools and are further analyzed below.

Qualitative classroom observation

Another medium of this research was that of qualitative classroom observation, achieved through regular consultative and evaluation sessions. The researcher has placed himself in the setting of the case study and has systematically observed the various dimensions of the setting – interactions, events, actions as well as the relationships developed within the groups (Mason, 1996). Through the medium of observation the teacher, (researcher and observer) aimed at investigating how the use of CALL is effective in activating learners’ willingness to move on into a deeper inner reflection in order to reinforce metacognitive awareness, as well as, whether the use of CALL has a motivating impact on learners as already stated. Observation was conducted with the use of a simple observation checklist.

4. Presentation of research results

This section presents the results of the research conducted. An analysis concerning the results of each of the web quest tasks as well as the rest of the tools used shall be presented.

4.1. The Web-quest outcomes analysis

The Wiki

The wiki included 3 main parts: pre, while and post-writing. Every completed stage was uploaded by learners in order to be read and commented by their peers.

• The Pre-Writing stage aimed to focus attention to form (Jacobs, 1986). Observing the students, one realized that this step helped them build an understanding on what they were supposed to do.
• While Writing: The topic was given to the students followed by a short summary of writing tips. Its role was mostly that of a reminder of the basic form a report should have. The while writing stage contained the following parts:
• Quick Writing: Prompts led the students towards the goal they needed to set and accordingly the way they should arrange their thoughts and information given. It was a brainstorming activity. At this point learners begun to plan by arranging their thoughts, focus on ideas, create mind maps, and also list and outline. In other words, they adopted cognitive strategies. Free quick writing served as an idea generator.
• Structuring/First draft: It aided learners to group their information and combine existing ideas with new. Peers became readers and their comments became feedback. It was in fact scaffolding as learners used their ideas produced while quick writing, and added the new ideas that came up. They dealt with the step by step text development, organization, and elaboration of ideas.

• Revising/Second Draft: Learners were to make positive use of the preceded feedback and redraft.

• Editing: It was the final stage of the writing process. After a number of times of writing and re-writing they were to produce the final text.

• Post-Writing Stage: This stage was an entertaining reward after hard working. It was used as an opportunity to develop learners’ musical intelligence (Gardner, 1983). At the same time as it concerned the use of car terminology it worked as an opportunity to activate background knowledge in order to come up with a meaningful rhyme. Learners were to write a rhyme, and particular skills were needed. A thinking process took place and words were synthesized in order not only to rhyme but also become a coherent whole that transferred a message. What learners did was retrieve obtained knowledge in order to choose vocabulary that both rhymed and made sense. The more elaborate the rhymes were, the more they indicated a sense of control. A software was suggested for them to use and CALL has proved to be motivating and of great use. For example a students’ rhyme wrote:

“It must be confessed, this Web – quest has caused me a pain in the chest. And though, I was trying to lie down and rest, this quest I must tell you, has made me obsessed. The Web-quest we worked on, on teacher’s request, has turned to becoming a great treasure chest.” (Wiki spaces)

All the writing stages led learners towards goals they needed to set and accordingly ways to arrange their thoughts. For example, the quick writing prompts led the students towards acknowledging the goal, arranging the information given and accordingly their thoughts. They created content and aroused consciousness concerning learners’ roles as writers. Scaffolding was promoted as well as elaboration and organization of ideas. Feedback was exploited and used in order to eventually become an automatic conscious self – mechanism, in other words students were led to metacognition. CALL was certainly motivating and of great use (Wiki spaces).

Interviews

The data retrieved from the learners’ reports in the wiki, which also served as interviews, pertained to the students’ motivation from the use of computer and Web tools in order to complete this computer, web based project. The data retrieved is the following:

Students were excited about the whole web quest project and they displayed great pride about a number of sections of their work. At the same time they acquired and consolidated cognitive and metacognitive skills:

“I learned many things because I had to discuss them with my friends, find ways to help them, read particular things many times, and also talk about them many times, so now I remember them, and I can also use them when I need to.” (mentioned by one of the students in his report).

The use of computer made students want to continue to work on the tasks because they felt that with the help of web tools and computer software they had the power to successfully complete them:
"What I liked the most was the fact that we worked using our computer all the time. I think computers make life easier and generally I use the computer a lot. The fact that I communicated with my friends through the computer, the report that I am uploading right now on Wiki spaces, the whole Web quest that was based on computer work, etc., made me feel as if I was surfing the net and speaking to my friends on Facebook. Not to mention that the whole project wouldn’t have worked unless a computer, the computer programs such as word and the internet did not exist.” (One of many examples of what a student wrote in his report).

They viewed the use of technology as more facilitating, interesting and entertaining. Access to information was easy, as well as communication among them. Decision-making, and problem solving, as well as communicative skills, had been facilitated through technology.

Moreover, due to the nature of the tasks that require higher order thinking and were facilitated by technology, a collaborative learning environment was created that promoted self-worth, enabled friendships to grow, and reinforced the value of group work in learners’ conscious:

“I liked this whole project very much, and I know I have learned many things, mostly because I really liked the way we were learning and because I talked about what I had read so many times and thought about it in many different ways, that even if I didn’t want to I would still remember them. I hope we can do something like this again because it was really nice, and I think that my friends and I became even closer friends because we worked as a team and helped each other when one got stuck or couldn’t work on something.” (Another student’s statement in his report)

Technology was not only challenging but steadily led to metacognition and functioned as a valuable means to motivation.

Group-work

The fact that the web quest project was actually a joint action of two groups has proved of extreme benefit to the learners. They were able to learn from their peers’ ideas and from the classroom feedback as well. The product of these interactions and collaborative work was that the learning behavior and metacognition of one student, eventually came as an influence to the other. Through collaboration and interaction learners managed to complete their web quest tasks as well as their informative reports. The group context also proved highly beneficial for students, as it gave opportunities to think aloud, and interact their thoughts with one another. They worked to solve a problem and find answers to tasks collectively, which for many students, seemed to have led to an increased persistence in the problem solving effort.

Problem-solving

Strategizing was required, and a number of skills were used in order to solve the problem: (e.g. problem definition, problem analysis, establishing goals, generating possible solutions, analyzing the solution and implementing), as well as critical thinking towards the information collected from the forum pages. A student, for example mentions, “...[w]e had to compare and contrast ideas from a number of forums and posts and decide which made more sense...” Learners worked together and developed meaning collectively. They
managed to find the solution to the problem by using the web and categorizing information, becoming active by asking fathers or friends already car mechanics to affirm what they read in the forums, perhaps collect further information and ensure that the solutions they came up with were actually correct. This connection of learning from both in and out school contexts offered a place where individual metacognition was called into service.

Video-viewing

Learners of this case study were highly motivated by video watching and even excited, their learning has been definitely enhanced. The nature of videos helped a lot, since learners had the opportunity to pause and restart the video as many times as needed in order to clearly understand what they were looking for. As mentioned from the learners themselves, they were able to recall new knowledge as their memories were triggered through making connections of the visual clues and the discussions that followed (Mayer & Gallini, 1990; Shepard & Cooper, 1982). They also admitted that in all three videos the moving images and sound were greatly motivating and challenging, and the film promoted was worth watching.

For example, one of the students wrote:

“The Web quest also included a video about how the clutch works followed by comprehension questions and many other fun extra activities. For example, a movie of 1968 that was called 'The love bug'. It is about a car called Herbie. We had to watch an advertisement video about the film and a video about the storyline of the film and answer questions. I laughed very much and I think I will watch this film. But to tell you the truth I had a little bit difficulty with the videos, but we found a trick with my team. We stopped it and watched it again and again when we didn't understand something and then we discussed what each other understood and that's how we answered the questions.”

The way the topics were communicated was perceptive and engaging. From viewing and reviewing discussing and being led to conclusions and answers to their questions learners admitted that knowledge and transferable skills for a number of different learning situations had been acquired (Allam, 2006). Students would revise, organize, monitor and evaluate their work in order to achieve the desirable goal. All in all memory, meta-memory, knowledge and skills to retrieve the acquired knowledge in many different circumstances had been acquired, therefore, metacognition, had been accomplished (see section 4.3).

Social Media, Wiki, and Facebook

A great amount of time was spent interacting and communicating online. All of the above would only seem natural to the “digital natives” generation, but the truth is that particular skills were essential in order to navigate and succeed in such environments and higher order thinking skills had become a prerequisite for the learners. Students did not join these networks passively, they were actively engaged, interacted and worked in order to complete their tasks and communicate with their team members. They were exposed to a number of data that they needed to question, organize and analyze and among everything else when they communicated they had to instantly answer to suggestions, comments, as well as criticism and mutual judging. “It was a very exciting project firstly because we did group work and second because we used our computers and communicated with our group mates through the internet and it all seemed like chatting through Facebook and it was fun…”, (learner’s comment in his report). Furthermore, they were to discern social issues deriving from the forums they visited and apply critical thinking towards the information received.
in all, they were actively engaged in critical thinking and higher order thinking skills. The whole project was totally learner centered leading step by step towards learner autonomy (Wiki spaces).

Creating a collage

![Dream cars collage](image)

*Figure 4 (Group A): “... Super cars with absolutely super technology!”*

![Dream cars collage](image)

*Figure 5, (Group B) “...Dream cars to us are those which made us feel our childhood's magic... Dimitris, Paul, Thanassis.”*

Students were challenged to become creative. Even this simple creating a collage task has proved to be a valuable research tool. They were asked to either draw one or a number of their favorite cars, or make a collage. Both teams decided to make a collage of cars they liked (see Figures 4 and 5). Again, computer assistance prevailed, it was observed that students dealt with extreme comfort to this image creation, without any prompting, nor resources to support them, they were in position to figure out the appropriate software
which helped them create an impressive car collage. Students explained in one of the consulting sessions that the absolute ease of handling and selecting the correct software each time, depending on what they desired to create or work on, derived once again from their great and constant exposure to social media which had encouraged all sorts of skills from writing posts, jokes, blogs, to photography and image editing, as well as the creation of gif images and video creating and uploading. It was proved that learners knew what they knew, and further, how and when it was appropriate to use each skill acquired. Metacognitive elements were displayed, but also computer assistance for such skills to be obtained was evident.

4.2. Discussion sessions

The present research has proved that when students’ talk was restricted to answering questions concerning their tasks, their contributions amounted to no more than two or three word cases. It was observed however, that slowly but steadily, when class discussions took place, students started feeling more comfortable, and their contributions instead of “yes” or “no” answers, took the form of complete sentences, using terms such as “think” and “because” which indicated reasoned dialogue (Black et al, 2003). In the discussions preceding each task, students:

- Discussed the processes that needed to occur, so that they would successfully complete the task.
- Identified areas of the prompts that needed clarification.
- Realized their role in particular tasks, who they were, whom or what they referred to, and for what purpose.
- Considered the purpose of a task, meaning its role and its potential use for the future.
- Made lists on what was needed to learn.
- Laid plans of action, and also deadlines for task completion were clearly set.
- Were encouraged to ‘Collaborative Troubleshooting’.
- Reflected and discussed a skill, or a set of skills developed by working on the tasks and imagined hypothetical situations that the particular skill(s) could be of use in order to simplify a task experience that would follow. “Transferable Skill articulation” (Metacognition – Cultivating Reflection to Help students Become Self-directed Learners, undated).

4.3. Observation checklist

The analysis and results of the observation checklist were the following:

Classroom Activities and reaction to tasks: Concerning their classroom activities and their reaction to the tasks all of the class behaved more or less appropriately. However, two of the students were prone to being easily distracted and half the class were impulsive.

Motivation and Effort: The whole class remained on task and four students initiated tasks independently. Two of the students were hesitant to begin work at first but after the first one or two weeks they were more than willing. One of the students gave up easily but managed to handle it during the first one or two weeks. Three of the students were at times dependent on peer support and two were easily frustrated. However, all six students participated with great interest.
Affect/Mood: All of the students in the class were happy and content about the novel project. Only one student would get anxious at times but mostly due to enormous zeal to complete tasks both within the deadlines but also successfully. All of the students were flexible with the other team members and only two students were not confident only within the first week of the project. However, all of them were happily willing to go on.

Web quest - Reading: Five out of the six pupils applied and reflected on most cognitive and metacognitive skills. They analyzed arguments, made inferences using inductive or deductive reasoning, found the web quest task interesting due to its internet based nature, made decisions or solved problems, used effective reading strategies e.g. thinking about what was needed to know, mind maps, speed reading, note keeping etc., used the dictionary or even created a glossary of their own, and reviewed gathered information concerning the Web quest reading comprehension tasks during the project. Students attested that they had consolidated the skills and were ready to easily apply them again when needed, “transferable skills”. To be more precise all the learners analyzed arguments in forums concerning the solution to the problem set. The same whole made inferences from what they read using inductive or deductive reasoning. Each and every one found the Web quest as a total, extremely interesting due to its Internet based nature. Five of the learners could make decisions and solve problems, and all six used effective reading strategies. They thought of what they needed to know, they made mind maps, they applied quick reading and kept notes. All used the supporting dictionaries and made comments on how much help they had received due to their existence in the resource links. For example, a student writes in his report, “…I think I learned a lot, even from the dictionaries. Because I needed to look up for words, that then I had to remember…” A small number however, proved to be a little lazy. Two of the students would not review the gathered information.

Web quest – Listening and Video viewing: Five of the students applied the cognitive and metacognitive skills concerning the Web quest Listening and Video Viewing tasks, and were able thereafter to transfer them to other tasks, when, and in the case they were needed. (Such skills included figuring the purpose of listening and viewing, activate background knowledge in order to predict, attend the relevant parts of viewing, check comprehension while listening, pause the video to monitor, rewind to clarify, infer assumptions from the video, summarize main ideas, recall emotions and categorize information). More analytically all the students knew the purpose of listening and / or viewing. All pupils activated background knowledge in order to predict the content. Five learners attended the parts of listening that were relevant to the identified purpose and ignored the rest. Four students checked comprehension while listening and after the listening task was over. All stopped or paused the video in order to monitor their own understanding. All students would rewind in order to grasp subtle meaning and clarify understanding. All students were also able to clarify information, opinions, ‘author’ position, etc. After viewing, four students summarized the main ideas and supporting details, five students recalled emotions and thoughts during the video and again five students categorized information. Four of the students could even infer underlying assumptions of the video.

Wiki: The wiki proved to be the ultimate success. Learners were thrilled with the whole process and perhaps, due to the fact that the wiki was one of the last tasks included in the web quest. Learners, after so many weeks of hard work, were able to effectively use cognitive and metacognitive skills in order to successfully complete their wiki writing task. For example, the writing topic had been clearly understood by everyone. All students had thought of the purpose of writing and had participated in the class discussions about it. All of them ritually followed the Wiki steps of quick writing, drafting, re- drafting, etc. They
accepted without any problem all their peers’ criticism, analyzed it and were able to ameliorate their texts in order to become reader friendly. All students reflected on their thinking and writing and catered for their readers’ best possible understanding. This final part of the case study’s web quest was the most vivid proof of how CALL leads to metacognitive awareness.

5. Conclusion

All in all, in the present case study an attempt was made to prove whether or not CALL promotes metacognitive awareness, learner autonomy, and whether it has a motivational power over learners. It was a web quest project of 11 to 12 weeks, approximately 36 teaching sessions, including a number of tasks as well as a wiki. It was designed using as many computer and web tools as possible in one project, in order to enhance learners’ motivation, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, promote collaboration through teamwork, and explore the learners’ reactions and inclinations towards the use of CALL in the English Language Classroom. The data collection instruments used in this case study were the web quest and wiki themselves and a number of tools surrounding them, such as the internet, video viewing, social media, e – mail, power point, etc. Formative assessment was also used as a tool, embedding self and peer evaluation, discussion sessions, as well as an observational checklist from the teacher’s / researcher’s part. And last but not least the students’ informative reports that functioned as interviews. The project was successfully completed despite some limitations and delays.

The results gathered from the research indicated that the use of CALL apart from definitely promoting cognitive skills, does lead learners to metacognitive skills also, meaning higher order thinking, self – regulating knowledge, it was even noticed that learners greatly became psychologically attached to the whole process and very soon during their work, they easily connected previous knowledge to what was needed to be done, as well as planned, monitored and evaluated their work. All in all they were actively engaged to the whole experience and became confident enough in order not to avoid challenging tasks. On the contrary, they saw the whole project as a great opportunity to refine their technological skills as well as confront the problems and the challenges with incredible zeal. They gained self – confidence, but also a sense of self – esteem for who they are and what they are capable of doing. They learned to appreciate team work and developed a very special bonding with their group members. This innovating task approach was totally accepted by them and was treated as a precious discovery that brought enthusiasm and interest in their class.

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