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The Effective Provision of Preschool Bilingual Education (On the example of Greece)¹

ABSTRACT

The present article: "The Effective Provision of Preschool Bilingual Education (on the example of Greece)" aims to study and analyse the problem of bilingualism, bilingual education at pre-school age, bilingual memory and the relationship between first and second languages in this context, innovative methods of teaching a second language and psychological factors influencing a child. Some main factors that influence success in second language acquisition: integration, motivation, instrumental motivation, language skills self-esteem and child's nursery self-concept. The interest of the given research contains: the observation on kindergartens pupils in the city of Athens and Attica region. One of the core objectives of the research is to determine amount of bilingual children in the kindergartens every year, the teachers' and pupils' role in learning foreign language. The article focuses on the questions regarding the use and development of language of bilingual children in a kindergarten, aims at studying psychology related to bilingual children, using different approaches of modern methods, creating an effective teaching plan intended to meet learning outcomes relying on good results at the end of the year, making parents aware of children's problems, arranging frequent contacts between parents and teachers, exchanging of the ideas as well. We have conducted extensive research and interviews among teachers in kindergartens. According to the interviews we found out that, kindergartens are quite highly developed and among twenty three interviewed teachers we can say that they are sufficiently qualified and adequately prepared in order to give all bilingual children opportunities for a good quality education relating to learning the Greek language easily. Bilingual education can completely promote positive attitudes to a child. Developing learning skills of two languages simultaneously is important in the child's daily experiences.

Keywords: *bilingualism, bilingual education at preschool-age, role of teachers in learning foreign language, modern teaching methods in kindergartens.*

¹ The research was conducted at National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

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"Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all".

Aristotle

As is known bilingualism is found in all parts of the world, at all levels of society and in all age groups. Children growing up in bilingual homes and/or receiving bilingual education easily acquire both languages. Many linguists view bilingualism as a specialized case of language development. Bilingualism has some obvious advantages and improves the following skills: verbal and linguistic abilities, meta-linguistic abilities, general reasoning, concept formation, divergent thinking, linguistic skills, etc.

Motivation of our study was stimulated by a bilingualism problem, its actuality and complex character. We consider the problem of bilingualism, and the present thesis: *"The Effective Provision of Preschool Bilingual Education (The example of Greece)"* aims to study and analyse the problem of bilingualism, bilingual education at pre-school age, bilingual memory and the relationship between first and second

languages in this context, innovative methods of teaching a second language and psychological factors influencing a child. Some main factors that influence success in second language acquisition: integration, motivation, instrumental motivation, language skills self-esteem and child's nursery self-concept. Bilingualism is commonly defined as the use of at least two languages by an individual. Bilingualism may be acquired early by children in regions where most of them speak two languages (e.g., Georgian, Greek and English and other languages or dialectal languages). We have conducted extensive research and interviews among teachers in kindergartens in the city of Athens and Attica region, Greece.

1. Some effects of preschool

It is estimated that there may be as many children who grow up learning two languages as one. Despite this, childhood bilingualism is poorly

understood by many and regarded with scepticism by others. Because of lack of familiarity or knowledge about childhood bilingualism, parents, educators, and early childhood specialists may express doubts about childhood bilingualism and expect negative consequences as for result of children learning two languages during the preschool years.

What does it matter type of preschool? There are significant differences between individual preschool settings and their impact on children, some settings are more effective than others in promoting positive child outcomes. Good quality can be found across all types of early years' settings; however quality was higher overall in settings integrating care and education and in nursery schools. High quality pre-schooling is related to better intellectual and social/behavioural development for children. Pre-school quality was significantly related to children's scores on standardised tests of reading and mathematics at age 6. It is noteworthy that, at age 7 the effect of quality on social behavioural

development was no longer significant. Also, here we add that, high quality preschool provision combined with longer duration had the strongest effect on development. The type of pre-school a child attends has an important effect on their developmental progress. Integrated centres that fully combine education with care and have a high proportion of trained teachers, along with nursery schools, tend to promote better intellectual outcomes for children. Similarly, fully integrated settings and nursery classes tend to promote better social development even after taking account of children's backgrounds and prior social behaviour (Sylva, 2004: pp. 2-4).

2. The main aims of nursery education

The family and home has traditionally been the centre of the young child's world, and the site of the young child's earliest learning experiences. Nursery education is an umbrella term that covers any organized provision for pre-school children from birth until the beginning of compulsory

formal education at the age of five, six or seven years.

The aims of nursery education tend to include the following areas:

1) *Social and cultural integration*: The children learn to interact with adults outside the family and to socialize with their peers; The children learn about their local culture, which may be a minority or a majority culture.

2) *Physical and cognitive development*: The children have the opportunity to run, climb, dance to music and go for walks; By means of games and activities, the children develop understanding of mathematical concepts and logical reasoning.

3) *Readiness for literacy and oral language development*: The children learn to follow a story in a book, to recognize individual words and to make patterns with a pencil; *Oral language development* is the most fundamental factor in a child's total development. Through activities, stories and interaction with the teacher, the child is exposed to a linguistically rich environment (Baker, 1998: pp. 486-487).

In general, nursery education in two languages is carefully planned. Nursery education in two languages is often the first step in a complete program of bilingual education. When two languages are used at a kindergarten or nursery school, one of these is usually first language of the children. This may be a minority language or a majority language of the country. The two languages are kept separate and are used at different times. If native speakers of both languages are present in a dual language nursery school, careful consideration is given to the balance of languages within the school. The bilingual children spend half of each day in activities using a mother tongue and the other half with a teacher speaking a second main language to them.

3. Research and analysis

Our following research of interest includes the observation of kindergartens and pupils. In the research our interest was focused on a number of bilingual children in the groups, the teachers and pupils' role in the process of learning foreign language, studying

psychology of bilingual children, using a different approach of modern methods and teaching principles, creating an effective teaching plan intended to meet learning outcomes relying on good results at the end of the year. Our research contains the questions regarding the development of bilingual children in a kindergarten.

We have conducted our research in the centre of Athens (Greece) and in the western districts of Attica (Athens) and interviewed 23 nursery teachers from five kindergartens. Based on the interviews we found out that kindergartens often take 10 bilingual children every year, rarely up to five, although in some places the number of children exceeds fifteen.

Unfortunately nearly 97% - of teachers, have not studied the psychology of bilingual children and special approaches they need. Proceeding on differences between the bilingual and Greek children's behaviour, we have received a negative response from the majority of the teachers, only 30% of them pay attention to this fact.

As the teachers say at the beginning of the academic year bilingual children mostly feel melancholy, self-isolation and are biased on teachers. However, after the first barrier, we found out that bilingual children usually communicate both with each other, as well as with Greek children during the learning process and they do not have problems and complex relationships with children. 50% of teachers say, that they get involved in their relationships when they need, they try to engage them in group games and music activities, as well as they make them to speak and explain foreign words with each other.

At an early stage teachers use the following methods with children: pantomime, a variety of entertaining games, songs, dances, toys, pictures, illustrated books. Songs are also enjoyable, and funny method for teaching bilingual children. Teachers try to use above-mentioned teaching methods according to each child's opportunities. They speak slowly with them and show subjects and drawings using dictionaries (rarely), phrases (simple), tales, and exercises. Only 1% of

teachers have noted that they use a list of basic words from parents for communicating purposes. In several kindergartens teachers also noted, that in kindergartens there are bilingual children possessing the Greek language who were born in Greece. As the teachers say, bilingual children contact with them by clasping hands, they are in a good friendly relationship and some of them even talk to teachers in their native language.

At the end of school year, 60% of teachers say, that proficiency levels of Greek and bilingual children's language are approximately equal, while 40% notes, that knowledge of the language cannot be equated with each other, despite the fact that 90% of the bilingual children learn Greek language easily. Most of the teachers agree that parents must speak with their children in both Greek and their native language at home, which will be the basis for a successful future for their children, if they intend to live permanently in Greece.

Kindergarten teachers often invite parents and give them advice how to help their children with learning foreign

language. Unfortunately, only 45% of parents are interested in language learning problems in kindergartens. Also, we found out that parents often are not well informed about the kindergarten staff.

4. Research results

Our interviews and research have shown that training-educational institutions such as kindergartens are quite highly developed, also the staff and their teachers are enough qualified and adequately prepared to support, development and give appropriate education to children; bilingual children learn the Greek language easily and the language knowledge level is almost equal in both Greek and bilingual children at the end of the year; the only thing is that the majority of teachers do not have the psychological education; The fact is that the teachers who have completed a course in psychology is easier to manage the children's mental state suffering depression, as well as parents pay particular attention to bilingual children's psychological, emotional,

academic and other problems in overcoming difficulties.

The following scheme below summarizes the results of our research (see: Table №1):

Bilingual education can completely alter a child's ability, while acquiring bilingual education, a child gets knowledge and applies a foreign language culture and in its turn, creates a new identity inside a person. Developing learning skills of two languages

simultaneously is important in the child's daily experiences.

Results given in practice have revealed some main factors that influence success in second language acquisition: integration, motivation, instrumental motivation, language skills self-esteem and child and adult's school self-concept. The importance of bilingualism is great in intercultural competence and information-communication areal development.

Table №1

Table of test analyses		
Questions		Results
1.	Bilingual pupils in the kindergartens	Up to 10: 70% Up to 5: 25% Other : 5%
2.	The teachers' knowledge of Psychology	No: 97% Yes: 3%
3.	Observe children's different behavior	No: 70% Yes: 30%
4.	Emotions at the beginning of academic year	Melancholy, self-isolation and adherence to the teacher: 95% Other: 5%
5.	Communication of bilingual children: a) Communicate with each other b) Communicate with Greek children c) Communicate with both d) Teacher's intervention in children communication e) ways of communication in class	a) 99% b) 98% c) 99% d) 50%

		e) Group games with song accompaniment, to speak and to explain foreign words with each other
6.	a) Teacher's contact with children at the beginning of learning process	a) Pantomime, entertaining games, toys, pictures, speak slowly, simple phrases, etc.
	b) Children's contact with teachers	b) Clasping hands, pointing
7.	a) Methods at the lessons	a) Group games, songs, computer, pictures, videos : 80%; tales, speaking, dances,(theatrical performances), dramatization, drawings, illustrated books : 20%
	b) More often	b) Computer and songs
8.	Language level is equal at the end of year	Approximately equal: 60% Yes: 0.1% No: 39.9%
9.	They learn the Greek language	Easily: 90%
10.	Teachers' advice to parents on language use at home	In both languages: 80% Only Greek: 20%
11.	Meetings with parents	Very often: 5% Often: 95%
12.	Advice for parents how to help children at home	Yes: 98%
13.	Parents' interest in their children's progress or difficulties	A lot: 45% A little: 55% Not at all: 0%
14.	Parents are informed by other teachers at school	Rarely: 95%

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