

The education of Pomako-speaking students in Western Thrace. An empirical investigation with students' and teachers' opinions on the school textbook of the Greek Language (6th Grade Minority Schools)

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Abstract: In the minority schools of Thrace - and especially in those where Pomak students attend - the problem of teaching the Greek language in relation to the mother tongue presents the peculiarity that Pomak students are taught in the two official languages of the Muslim minority, Turkish and Greek. .

As far as Greek language, is concerned to examine the contribution of the textbook to its learning in this environment. Of particular interest is the Greek language textbook for the 6th grade of minority schools, especially with Pomak-speaking students.

It is logical to ask the question -through the students and teachers' answers- to what extent this school textbook, of the Greek language for the 6th grade (Greek program for minority schools) and especially in the schools attended by Pomak students, helped in the successful learning of the Greek language.

The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to find out the students and teachers' views about the textbook of the Greek Language (SSS Classroom of Minority Schools) in the Minority schools and especially in the Pomaks of Western Thrace.

The research was conducted using questionnaires on 177 students and 125 teachers, who were selected through sampling.

The results show that the students and teachers' views seem to go hand in hand, leaning both groups towards a neutral to an overall negative view of the textbooks.

Keywords: textbook, Greek language, Pomak-speaking students, W. Thrace, minority schools.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of this doctoral dissertation, the opinions of teachers and students of the 6th Grade of Minority Schools regarding the school textbook of the Greek Language are researched. In particular, the extent to which the textbook in question fulfills its teaching function, the learning of the Greek language by the students of the specific minority group, is examined.

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The recorded students and teachers' opinions are related to the formal characteristics (external appearance, structure) of the textbook in question, its contribution to the promotion of student cooperation and the removal of discrimination, as well as the existence (or not) of references from the cultural environment of the ethnic group of the Pomaks. Finally, it is sought to show that the relevant opinions of both students and teachers who are called to use the manual in the teaching practice should be taken seriously before the writing, approval and distribution of the manuals in the school units.

Problematic Research

The school textbook is an important tool for teaching the Greek language in minority schools. Considering that the Greek language is taught as a second or foreign language to students, it is understood that its teaching requires a particularly systematic, structured and organized approach.

The textbook is the connecting link between the student and the Greek language, culture and civilization, the source through which the student will look for elements of the Greek language, will be taught how to use it in his daily life. Despite the fact that the role of the teacher is considered equally important in this educational process, as it determines the way knowledge is communicated, the textbook can facilitate his role, guide him, operate in such a way as to promote knowledge in greater degree.

The purpose of this research is to investigate whether the school textbooks of the 6th grade of primary school for minority education in Western Thrace positively influence the development of the learning of the Greek language by the Pomaks.

At the same time, we seek to capture the opinions, thoughts and perceptions of the students of this racial group both about the Greek-language books of the 6th grade and, by extension, about the Greek-language education provided to Pomako children. Answers regarding their views on the specific manual are also given to us by the teachers, from the point of view of the educational officer himself.

The education of the Pomacian students of Thrace

Education is an issue of great importance for the minority and is based on the Lausanne Treaty of 1923 (Articles 40 and 41), the Greek-Turkish Cultural Agreement of 1951 and the Greek-Turkish Cultural Protocol of 1968.

However, the general policy change of 1991 towards the minority and the Greek-Turkish Cultural Agreement signed in 2000 point in the right direction.

Furthermore, the European Program for Reforming the Education of Muslim Children funded from 1997–2004 would drastically change the scene.

In 1997, Greece signed the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of Minorities. This was an important milestone as it was the first legal text that Greece signed after the Treaty of Lausanne regulating minority groups (Skordas, 1997, Tsitselikis, 2001).

Subject selection criteria

Primarily, the work attempts to expose the reality, regarding the teaching of the Greek language, and, in particular, with the use of the Greek textbook in the ethnic group of the Pomaks. With the deposition of the opinions of the directly involved, the students of Pomak, and, especially, those of the older class of the Primary School as well as the teachers of the Greek language.

Purpose of the research

The study presented in this paper has as its main goal to approach and present the pedagogical interaction that develops between the students of the minority elementary schools and their textbooks. The purpose of this research is to find out the opinions of the students and teachers of the Greek language program about the Greek language textbook used in the 6th grade of the primary (minority) school and in particular to record their opinions about the specific textbook.

Necessity of research

Through this work, an attempt is made to examine the gap that exists regarding the teaching of Greek in minority schools and regarding the effectiveness and functionality of the school textbook used. Taking into account that the researches and

bibliographic references that exist on the subject are minimal, it is important to mention that a research on the school textbooks used would help to understand both the level of teaching and the effectiveness of the educational process related to using the manual.

At the same time, in most cases, we find in the literature the approach of the subject from the perspective of the teacher or the approach of the educational process. In a few cases in the bibliography, there seems to be an attempt to examine in more detail and to interpret the opinion of the teachers, but also of the students themselves, about the school textbook of the Greek language they use.

Questions - Cases

The research poses some questions regarding the Greek language textbook of the 6th grade of minority schools. These questions, which are attempted to be answered through the presentation of the research results, revolve around four main axes for students and teachers.

1. What are the opinions of the students and what of the teachers regarding the 6th grade textbook?
2. The opinions of the respondents (students or teachers) are influenced by their Demographic data, characteristics:
3. Are the opinions of the interviewed students and teachers related to each other?
4. How do the opinions of students and teachers differ?

2. RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Primary quantitative research was used to collect the research data.

Because questionnaire research is the most common form of empirical research, we chose it as the data collection method.

For the implementation of the specific research, we constructed an impromptu questionnaire, which was drawn up based on the research requests and with the aim of immediate delivery and receipt of the questionnaire by the research participants (without difficulty in understanding it).

The snowball method was chosen because the respondents wanted to receive and answer the questionnaires confidentially and confidentially.

The student questionnaires that were administered concerned those Pomaks students who were taught the Greek language with the specific textbook in the 6th grade (Minority Schools), during the years (2018-2019). Regarding the teachers, the questionnaires were given to those who taught with the specific manual, during the last 10 years.

Types of questions

For the construction of the questions of the students' questionnaire in the present research concerning the textbook of the 6th grade we took into account four important thematic axes. That is, the opinions, which in the recording of the results of the research are also declared as the judgment of the interviewed students, will concern the specific axes. The first concerns the "opinion on the content", the second concerns the "opinion on the external appearance", the third concerns the "opinion on the existence of cultural elements of the specific minority (Pomaks)", while the fourth concerns the "need for the creation of a separate book". All seven of the opinions of the teachers interviewed will be added to these axes. These are, in order, 'content', 'illustration', 'form', 'assessment of learning outcome', 'language', 'existence of elements of culture' and finally 'need to change textbook'.

The questions used in the questionnaire are closed type, graded scale questions.

3. CONCLUSIONS

The sample of the research consisted exclusively of children (Pomak students) of Minority schools and teachers in minority schools where they (Pomak students) study in the Municipality of Thrace.

For *students*, the sample was almost equally divided between boys and girls, with a slightly higher participation of girls. Regarding the area of residence, the majority of participants came from Rural-Mountainous or Semi-Urban areas with a small participation of people from Urban areas.

From the students' questionnaire, 4 dimensions were identified in this research, which are: the "Opinion on the external appearance" of the book, the "Opinion on the content" of the textbook, the "Opinion on the existence of minority culture elements" in the textbook and the "Need to create a separate manual". The participants strongly believe that a separate textbook should be created for Pomak students, different from the one that exists in public schools, with elements of the culture of the minority and by differentiating the material of the existing textbook, regarding the teaching of the Greek language. Impressions are moderate regarding the external appearance of the manual, negative regarding the content, and very negative regarding the information the manual contains on minority characteristics.

The opinions of the research participants do not seem to be influenced by gender, but by the region of residence. Specifically, the group that differentiates itself is the small population group in urban areas. Residents of urban areas have more positive impressions of the content of the manual than residents of semi-urban areas, believe more that there are elements of minority culture in the manual and express less desire for a separate manual, compared to all other residents (semi-urban, mountainous-rural areas). This is perhaps justified by the fact that residents of urban areas have more stimuli and are more "open" in their views. Finally, the correlation of the mentioned dimensions is strong. A strong positive correlation occurs between the view of content with that of external appearance and the presence of minority culture elements, and a moderate positive correlation between the view of external appearance and the view of the existence of minority culture elements. Furthermore, strong negative correlations were found between the need to create a separate textbook with the view of having minority culture elements and the content view, and a moderate negative correlation with the view of external appearance. We conclude, therefore, that the lack of elements of minority culture, the poor content and the unattractive external appearance of the manual, lead the participants to desire the creation of a new, more complete and better manual.

Regarding *teachers*, almost 2/3 of the sample consisted of men, over 51 years of age, with 21-30 years of experience, while the sample was almost equally divided regarding their area of work. Also, just over half had completed anything other than their basic degree and simulation.

From the teachers' questionnaire, 7 dimensions are respectively identified, which are "content", "portrayal", "form", "assessment of learning outcome", "language", "existence of elements of culture" and "need manual change". The participants believe "Very much" that the illustration of the book is satisfactory and that there is a need to change the textbook, "Moderately" that the content, the language of the textbook and the assessment of the learning outcome from it are satisfactory and "A little" that the format of the textbook and that there are elements of culture in the textbook.

The opinions of the survey participants do not seem to be affected by gender, region of residence, primary education and age, but by years of service. Specifically, participants in the 31+ group have a more positive view of portrayal and participants in the 21-30 group have a more positive view of format and language. Finally, the correlation of the mentioned dimensions is strong. A strong positive correlation occurs between visualization with content, format, the presence of cultural elements and the need to change the textbook and format with language and learning outcome assessment, and a moderate positive correlation between visualization with learning outcome assessment and between of the format with the need to change the manual. There also appeared to be a strong negative association of format with the presence of acculturation and the need to change textbook and language with the presence of acculturation. We conclude, therefore, that the deficiencies identified by the teachers in the manual lead them to propose the creation of a new, more complete and better manual.

In addition, we believe that the differentiating factor of our textbook in the corresponding foreign language is inhibiting, which makes it impossible to compare our own research with other related research abroad.

We conclude by pointing out that the conclusions obtained from conducting the research on the population we selected cannot in any way be reduced to the entire population that comes into contact with this manual at the level of minority education in Western Thrace. As a result, the conclusions we draw from this study are relatively limited and relate to a specific subgroup of the Muslim minority. Therefore, there is an urgent need to accurately determine the size of the population of Pomako-speaking students who come into contact with the Greek language textbook (6th grade of minority schools) throughout the territory of Thrace. This precise identification of the specimen will, in turn, allow us to carry out a new, larger survey in the area in question, which will lead us to a more complete and accurate evaluation of the manual.

4. SUGGESTIONS

The present research is an attempt to decode the opinions of Pomak students and teachers about the language textbook of the 6th grade of minority schools. The results presented and the interpretations given concern exclusively the answers of students and teachers on the relevant issue. A more systematic study of the subject is necessary in order to better understand it. Most likely, these opinions, that is, of students and teachers, can be new fields of research for the specific language textbook by the university community. In addition, by capturing these views, it is possible to investigate in depth the role and place of the textbook in the educational process, the connection of the research results with the social, educational and cultural factors that led students and teachers to give the specific answers, the study of creating a textbook adapted to a greater extent to the needs of Pomak students (of the minority schools).

Finally, the results of the research could also serve as a springboard to extend the research on the next school level for the students of this Muslim minority subgroup, and also be used as evidence for research on language textbooks in other minorities.

The findings of our research provide some conclusions, which lead us to formulate some propositions. These suggestions are based on the weaknesses identified by the teachers.

Regarding the *content of the manual*, it is recommended that:

Improving the content and reducing the teaching material so that it corresponds to the time set by the Detailed Program.

- Improving the content to meet the interests and needs of students of this age.

Regarding the *format of the manual*, it is suggested:

- Correction of chapters that do not follow the logical sequence of the contents of the manual.
- Connecting the new knowledge to the previous one, through the existence of paragraphs, images or sources that remind the student of what precedes or has been learned in the previous chapter.
- The existence of various and conflicting images that will stimulate the student's interest and with the help of the teacher, will motivate the student to mobilize for dialogue in the classroom.

Regarding the language of the manual, it is suggested:

- Adapting the language to the cognitive level of students of this age, including the diversity of the country's student population.
- Improvement - simplifying the language through short and understandable periods. The language should be clear and the text should not be condensed.

To assess the *learning outcomes* of the textbook, it is recommended:

- The widest range of cognitive media (text, sources, images) and activities that will allow the student to develop a creative and investigative spirit. For example, questions and activities can be added that will allow the student to think more creatively, research information or even make connections to their everyday life and experiences.
- Introduction to the student's manual of activities for a thematic approach to the language in which the attempt is made for a thematic approach to knowledge.
- Improving, in general, the activities of the textbook so that they respond to the different levels of education of the students, act as a feedback loop and help to identify the weaknesses of the students in the classroom.
- Introducing assignments that will promote collaboration among students and help cultivate critical thinking.

In conclusion, from the problems identified, especially in the activities of the school textbook and, above all, in terms of encouraging the cooperation of students both with the teacher and among themselves, we propose the reformulation and reformation of the questions and their scaling from the easiest in the most difficult ones, with an emphasis on questions that promote cooperation between students, their autonomy, respect for each student's individual work pace, their critical thinking and their initiative.

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More generally, it is deemed necessary to produce multiple, easy-to-use, short, scientifically valid, interdisciplinary and interdisciplinary textbooks, which are in common with new technologies, libraries and modern bibliographic research, pedagogically valid, with a social scope (multiculturalism, political-ideological moods, social values, absence of prejudices and stereotypes, etc.) (Glavas, 2005). In this light, the oriented strategy for the organization and operation of school libraries that will provide higher quality knowledge and education, as well as the organization and operation of appropriate technologically equipped rooms (to meet modern technological requirements) is considered particularly important.

We believe that these suggestions are worthy of discussion, as they are based on the evaluations of teachers and students who used the manual in the teaching process. In addition, teachers and students are directly involved in the teaching process and are in daily contact with the textbook. For this reason, in our opinion, they are the most important evaluators of a textbook.

In conclusion, the comparative process in which the opinions of students and teachers regarding the Greek language textbook were submitted proved their convergence, in terms of the inadequacy and inability of the existing textbook to achieve its functional goals, especially the one related to the promotion of cooperative spirit of the students. The opinions recorded come from key contributors to the teaching process (teachers - students), and are therefore evaluated as particularly important. Based on the results of the research, it is necessary, in our opinion, to reform and adapt the textbook in use to the needs of both the students of the minority group and the teachers who are called to use the textbook in the teaching practice. We believe that the creation of an easy-to-use, scientifically valid and harmonized with modern pedagogical guidelines can contribute to the better learning of the Greek language, but also to providing motivation to students for self-motivation and the development of their critical skills.

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