

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Stauroula Kalliontzi

Abstract: This article examines teachers' views on linguistic and cultural diversity of children in preschool and primary school. Teachers' views reveal that their knowledge is limited and they are asked to teach students based on their personal beliefs and efforts. The teachers' lack of knowledge about linguistic and cultural diversity affects both the direct contact they have with the children and the cooperative relationships with their parents. This implies communication problems between them which in turn affect the education of children who have linguistic and cultural diversity. The need for teacher training is therefore highlighted in order to be able to effectively utilize the cultural and linguistic capital of children and their families at all levels.

Keywords: teachers, linguistic diversity, cultural diversity, children

ВЪЗГЛЕДИ НА УЧИТЕЛИТЕ ЗА ЕЗИКОВОТО И КУЛТУРНОТО МНОГООБРАЗИЕ В ПРЕДУЧИЛИЩНА ВЪЗРАСТ И В НАЧАЛНОТО УЧИЛИЩЕ

Ставрула-Елисавет Калионгзи

Резюме: Статията разглежда възгледите на учителите за езиковото и културното многообразие на децата в предучилищна възраст и в началното училище. Възгледите на учителите разкриват, че техните знания са ограничени и от тях се иска да преподават на учениците въз основа на личните си убеждения и усилия. Липсата на познания на учителите за езиковото и културното многообразие се отразява както на прекия им контакт с децата, така и на отношенията на сътрудничество с техните родители. Това предполага проблеми в общуването между тях, които на свой ред се отразяват на образованието на децата, които имат езиково и културно многообразие. Ето защо е подчертана необходимостта от обучение на учителите, за да могат те ефективно да използват културния и езиковия капитал на децата и техните семейства на всички нива.

Ключови думи: учители, езиково многообразие, културно многообразие, деца

INTRODUCTION

In terms of pre-school education, the school comes to "bridge" family literacy with school by expanding and strengthening family literacy practices (Kondyli & Stellakis, 2006). According to Hasan (2006), the acquisition of emerging literacy by young children follows a "natural" course of development. In particular, the emergence of literacy refers to the first of the two lines of its evolution (natural exotic) and develops through daily activities, where there is a significant influence from the circumstances of the individual's social life. The second line of development of literacy is the specialized or exotic and occurs through systematic teaching, and follows the first (Hasan 2006).

In terms of cognitive development, children involved in pre-school education and care are better prepared for primary school. Children acquire strong social skills, literacy and numeracy skills, richer vocabulary and a desire and curiosity to learn more. In addition, pre-school education and care have a positive effect on the child's learning progress in later school life (UNICEF, 2019).

Research conducted on fifteen-year-olds with an immigrant background shows that the degree of literacy skills acquired in children who participated in pre-school education and care programs is higher than in children of immigrants who did not participate (OECD & European Union, 2018). In addition, education is more effective and efficient, as children attending pre-school are less likely to drop out of school, repeat classes and more likely to finish Primary and Secondary Education. It is a powerful strategy that helps all countries meet their goals for primary, secondary and higher education (UNICEF, 2019). From a financial standpoint, preschool education and care lay the groundwork for an adult worker who has acquired the skills needed in a modern job market, such as critical thinking, communication collaboration, bargaining skills, resilience and creativity (UNICEF, 2019).

TEACHERS' VIEWS ON THE TEACHING OF REFUGEE CHILDREN IN EDUCATION

Gkaintartzi, Kiliari and Tsokalidou (2015), in their research examine the views of teachers from all levels of education regarding the teaching of the mother tongue of immigrant students in Greece. The research was conducted on kindergarten teachers, teachers and professors during the school year 2010/11 and 2011/12. Data collection tools include questionnaire, observation, free and semi-structured interviews. According to the results of the research, the teachers of the present research consider the mother tongue of immigrant students as an obstacle in learning the Greek language at school and that its learning should be supported by the local immigrant communities. Thus, the research teachers are cut off from the responsibility of teaching the mother tongue to immigrant students and consider that such lessons do not belong to the "normal" school, but should take place after the end of the daily school curriculum. Furthermore, the attitudes of teachers, including kindergarten teachers, towards the mother

tongues of immigrant students reflect the legitimacy of the Greek language as the only school language and the exclusion of linguistic minorities from the "normal" school curriculum. The research shows that there is an "invisible" monolingual attitude of teachers in the teaching of immigrant children, and this is the teaching of only Greek and that bilingualism is also "invisible" in the Greek public school.

Mattheoudakis, Chatzidaki and Maligkoudaki (2017), explore the views and practices of primary education teachers regarding the linguistic and cultural diversity in the Greek school. The sample of the research consisted of eighty teachers and the questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. Based on the results, most teachers consider the preservation of the mother tongue and bilingualism as an obstacle to learning the Greek language. The research also concludes that the attitudes of teachers towards the use of the motherboard both at home and at school are not encouraging. Furthermore, the research showed that the participating teachers do not implement many activities or do not apply many practices to strengthen bilingualism. Although teachers say they are trying to adapt their teaching practices to bilingual students, researchers are skeptical about whether this is the case in educational practice.

Maligkoudi, Tolakidou and Chiona (2018) examined the views and practices of Primary Education teachers regarding the language development of refugee students in Greece. In particular, their work is a case study in a primary school in Macedonia. Five teachers and the principal of the specific school participated in the research. Interview and observation were used to collect data. The interviews focused on four areas: a) teachers' profile b) teachers' views on students' bilingualism, c) teachers' practices in teaching students with different language backgrounds and d) teachers' attitudes towards language teaching taking into account refugee students as well. Based on the findings, the research teachers do not seem to adopt practices that support students' language and cultural background. Teachers say they are unwilling to "sacrifice" indigenous students' education to help refugee students join the classroom. The research also concludes that teachers adopt a "monolingual" educational practice applying the Greek language as if it were the first language for all students. The researchers note that the application of such a practice in combination with the low self-esteem of refugee students can create attitudes of disgust among students about the school and society in general.

Maligkoudi and Tsaousidis (2020) conducted a survey, which examined the attitudes of teachers who teach in Refugee Reception and Training Structures (Refugee Education). More specifically, the purpose of the research is to highlight the attitudes of teachers towards refugee education, language teaching, the use of children's mother tongue in the classroom and cooperation with students' families. Conducting in kindergarten teachers, teachers and philologists through semi-structured interviews. According to the results of the research, among other things, the attitudes of teachers towards the mother tongue of refugee children are positive, as they recognize its importance in learning the second language – Greek

– but also for psychosocial reasons. Regarding the development of cooperation with the students' families, they did not seem to cooperate with them. Reasons that hinder this cooperation are attributed to the indifference and lack of a common language code. Research shows that teachers feel unprepared and unprepared for the teaching of children who have different linguistic and cultural characteristics and consider their training necessary. Regarding the challenges faced by the research teachers, they seem to be related to how the children of refugees and immigrants see themselves. In particular, they seem to hold a negative attitude towards the behavior and mentality of students and their families.

Balamanidi and Pozoukidis (2010) seem to reach similar conclusions, who conducted research, where they examined the training needs of teachers in intercultural education. The two researchers used the questionnaire as a tool to collect their data. This research is a case study, which examines 39 teachers of a school in the city of Kozani. The research questions concerned information about the description of the sample, teachers' views on their level of information regarding intercultural education, their sources of information and questions regarding teachers' needs for intercultural readiness and competence. Based on the analysis of the data, it seems that, among other things, the majority of teachers are poorly informed about issues of intercultural education. Teachers also want to be educated on various issues related to intercultural education. Researchers point out that teachers do not seem to be prepared to teach in classes with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Androulakis, Gkaintartzi, Kitsiou and Tsioli (2017) in a recent study examine the school's relationship with the family and the factors that determine this relationship. Immigrant parents and teachers were asked about the relationships that develop between them in the context of family-school cooperation. The research adopted a qualitative type of data collection approach and specifically free and semi-structured interviews, individual and group, focus groups, observation and through written reports of teachers, facilitators and researchers. According to the results of the research, immigrant parents consider that cooperation with the school translates as receiving information from teachers about their child's school progress. Teachers, on the other hand, feel that immigrant parents do not cooperate with the school because of their lack of interest and distance from school. However, research shows that the development of relationships between immigrant parents and teachers is determined by a relationship of power and 'legitimacy' of linguistic and cultural capital. In particular, parents' relationships and communication with teachers are defined and 'controlled' by the school. The school is the one that will determine in what language and what rules are required to develop communication, without taking into account the needs of immigrant parents resulting in limited school family cooperation.

Regarding the general opinion of the kindergarten teachers who apply the Greek Curriculum, we consider it appropriate to refer to the research of Stellakis (2012) who researched the views of kindergarten teachers on initial literacy.

Stellakis (2012) researched the views and practices of nineteen kindergarten teachers in total who worked in various kindergartens in Syros. In particular, he examined the views of kindergarten teachers regarding the emergence of literacy and what knowledge and skills they consider to be most important for acquisition in preschool. Participants were divided into three groups, where they were given a large board to record their ideas on how they perceived the concept of emerging literacy and then to discuss it. This cardboard served as a map to capture ideas about the concept of emerging literacy. Data processing was performed by content analysis. Based on the results of the research, it appears, among other things, that kindergarten teachers associate the concept of literacy with communication, however, they neglect to connect it with the written language. Research also shows that kindergarten teachers consider it very important to acquire decoding skills. Participants do not seem to engage in literacy activities that link them to communication situations or involve children in activities that make sense to them. The researcher concludes that the research educators do not understand literacy as a complex form of language through the use of written language and adopt an autonomous model of teaching (initial) literacy, understanding literacy as technical skills of decoding written symbols, giving written symbols phonemic awareness and in phonological correspondences.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the multidimensional definition of emerging literacy in conjunction with refugee education, we understand that there are many different approaches we can focus on for further research. In addition, regarding the views held by teachers about initial literacy, it appears that teachers have limited knowledge and are understood more as technical skills that the child must acquire (Stellakis, 2012). Thus, teachers approach the teaching of language based on their personal beliefs or how they see students with different multicultural characteristics.

Teachers do not manage to cooperate with their students' families due to language barriers but also by the degree of interest shown by parents in the education of children. In fact, family-school collaboration-communication relationships depend on power-relations and 'legitimization' of linguistic and cultural capital. Some of the good practices for the education of refugees and immigrants are the utilization of the language and culture of the students and the creation of a safe environment.

REFERENCES

Androulakis, G., Gkaintartzi, A., Kitsiou, R. Tsioli, S. (2017). Parents-Schools' Communication and Albanian as a Heritage Language in Greece. Στο P.P. Trifonas T. Aravossitas

- (Επιμ), Handbook of Research and Practice in Heritage Language Education, Springer International Handbooks of Education (1-18). New York: Springer.
- Balabanidi, Z., & Pozoukidis N. (2010). Detection of their training needs of teachers in intercultural education: A case study. In the P. Geogogiannis & Baros V. (Ed.), Intercultural Education – Immigration–Conflict Management and Pedagogy of the Republic. 13ο Alexandroupolis International Conference, 7-9 May 2010 (Volume II, pp. 192-203). Patra.
- Gkaintartzi, A., Kiliari, A., & Tsokalidou, R. (2015). 'Invisible' Bilingualism 'Invisible' Language ideologies: Greek Teachers' Attitudes towards Immigrant Students' Heritage Languages. International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 18(1), 60-72.
- Hasan, R. (2006). Literacy, everyday speech and society. In A. Charalambopoulos (Ed.), Literacy, society and education – Five studies (pp. 134-189). Thessaloniki: Institute of Modern Greek Studies, Manolis Triantaphyllides Foundation.
- Kondyli, M. & Stellakis, N. (2006). Literacy practices in pre-primary education: one program, two approaches. In P. Papoulias – Tzelepis, A. Fterniati & K. Thivaivos (Eds.), Research and Practice of Literacy in Hellenic Society (pp. 159-180). Athens: Greek Letters.
- Maligkoudi, C., & Tsaousidis, A. (2020). Attitudes of teachers who teach in Refugee Reception and Education Structures (Refugee) opposite education of refugee students. Research in Education, 9 (1), 22-34.
- Maligkoudi, C., Tolakidou. P., & Chiona. S. (2018). "It is not bilingualism. There is no communication": Examining Greek teachers' views towards refugee children's bilingualism: A case study. Dialogoi! Theory & Praxis in Education, 4, 95-107.
- Mattheoudakis, M., Chatzidaki, A., & Maligkoudi, C. (2017). Greek teachers' views on linguistic and cultural diversity. Selected Papers on Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, 22, 358-371.
- OECD & European Union (2018). Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration. Brussels: OECD Publishing OECD.
- Stellakis, N., (2012). Greek kindergarten teachers' beliefs and practices in early literacy. Literacy, 46(2), 67-72.
- UNICEF (2019). A world ready to learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education: Global report. New York: UNICEF.

За автора:

Ставрула-Елисавет Καλλιонτζι, докторант
Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ Факултет по науки за образованието
и изкуствата

Научни интереси: предучилищна педагогика, интеркултурно образование

E-mail: staurou.kall@yahoo.gr

About the Author:

Kalliontzi Stauroula, PhD student
Sofia University, Faculty of Educational Studies and Arts

Scientific interests: intercultural education

E-mail: staurou.kall@yahoo.gr