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Language Education for Refugees and Migrants

Postgraduate Dissertation

Teaching Greek as a first or a second language: the case of the Muslim minority  
in Thrace

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Teaching Greek as a first or a second language: the case of the  
Muslim minority in Thrace

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## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the views of teachers working in Minority Schools in Thrace regarding the process of teaching Greek within these educational institutions. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the methods employed in teaching Greek, whether the Greek language is approached as a first or second language. Furthermore, the research examines the language teaching approaches applied to the Greek language course, as well as the way in which students' first language is used to support Greek language learning. Specifically, it examines a) the correspondence of language education policies in students' needs, b) the language teaching methods utilized in the Greek language course, and c) the L1<sup>1</sup> use in L2<sup>2</sup> teaching.

This work is divided into two chapters. The first chapter examines the theoretical framework upon which the dissertation was founded. It focuses on the overall topic of the minority's socio-cultural environment in Thrace and the educational context of Minority Schools. Following that, the concepts bilingualism and multilingualism in the minority sector are discussed, while concurrently language teaching methods are reported. The second chapter discusses the study process's methodological decisions, research analysis, findings, and discussion.

## **Keywords**

Muslim minority, second language teaching, minority schools, bilingualism, multilingualism

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<sup>1</sup> First language

<sup>2</sup> Second language

## Η διδασκαλία της Ελληνικής ως πρώτης ή δεύτερης γλώσσας: η περίπτωση της μουσουλμανικής μειονότητας στη Θράκη

Κρόγια Ελένη

### Περίληψη

Ο κύριος σκοπός της μελέτης είναι να διερευνήσει τις απόψεις των εκπαιδευτικών που εργάζονται σε μειονοτικά σχολεία της Θράκης σχετικά με τη διαδικασία διδασκαλίας της ελληνικής σε αυτά τα εκπαιδευτικά ιδρύματα. Συγκεκριμένα, η μελέτη επιδιώκει να διερευνήσει τις μεθόδους που χρησιμοποιούνται στη διδασκαλία της ελληνικής, είτε αυτή προσεγγίζεται ως πρώτη ή δεύτερη γλώσσα σε μειονοτικά σχολεία. Επιπλέον, η έρευνα εξετάζει τις προσεγγίσεις διδασκαλίας της γλώσσας που εφαρμόζονται στη διδασκαλία της ελληνικής, καθώς και τον τρόπο με τον οποίο χρησιμοποιείται η πρώτη γλώσσα των μαθητών για την υποστήριξη της εκμάθησης της ελληνικής γλώσσας. Συγκεκριμένα, εξετάζει α) την αντιστοιχία της γλωσσικής εκπαιδευτικής πολιτικής στις ανάγκες των μαθητών, β) τις γλωσσικές μεθόδους διδασκαλίας στο μάθημα της ελληνικής γλώσσας και γ) τη χρήση της Γ1<sup>3</sup> για τη διδασκαλία της Γ2<sup>4</sup>.

Η εργασία αυτή διαρθρώνεται σε δύο κεφάλαια. Στο πρώτο κεφάλαιο εξετάζεται το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο πάνω στο οποίο θεμελιώθηκε η εργασία. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, επικεντρώνεται στο κοινωνικό-πολιτιστικό περιβάλλον της μειονότητας στη Θράκη και στο εκπαιδευτικό πλαίσιο των Μειονοτικών Σχολείων. Στη συνέχεια, συζητούνται οι έννοιες της διγλωσσίας και πολυγλωσσίας αναφορικά με τον μειονοτικό τομέα. Ενώ παράλληλα αναφέρονται μέθοδοι διδασκαλίας της δεύτερης γλώσσας. Το δεύτερο κεφάλαιο συζητά τις μεθοδολογικές αποφάσεις της διαδικασίας μελέτης, την ανάλυση της έρευνας, τα ευρήματα της έρευνας και τη συζήτηση.

**Λέξεις-Κλειδιά:** Μουσουλμανική μειονότητα, διδασκαλία δεύτερης γλώσσας, μειονοτικά σχολεία, διγλωσσία, πολυγλωσσία

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<sup>3</sup> Πρώτη γλώσσα

<sup>4</sup> Δεύτερη γλώσσα

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## **Introduction**

The region of Thrace is characterized by intense multiculturalism, as people of different ethnic origins and religions coexist in it. After the signing of the Lausanne Treaty and the exception of the population exchange, the coexistence of Christians and Muslims was institutionalized. The presence of the Muslim element created issues concerning minority's education.

In this study, we will focus on the issues of Minority's Education. With the institutionalization of this group's education, Minority Schools were established in the Greek state, with bilingual curriculum. More specifically, the courses taught in them are divided between those that use Greek and those that use Turkish as the language of instruction. These specific schools are located exclusively in the districts of Evros, Xanthi and Rhodope and are attended by Muslim students who are of Turkish, Pomak or Romani origin.

Several researchers have dealt with the education of the Muslim Minority Children in Thrace in the past. However, research in this field has been restricted. Since the launch of the "Education of Muslim Minority Children in Thrace Program," 1997-2019, research on minority education has been limited, as the researchers' interest has turned to the field of education of immigrants and refugees (Maligkoudi & Mavrommatis, 2025).

More specifically, Dimasi et al. (2014) have tried to register the challenges in the discipline of minority education, in relation to its organization, educational programs, functioning of the bilingual program, the socio-cultural background, and, most importantly, students' rates of dropping out throughout educational levels. Even if the data from their study provides valuable information about the operating framework of minority education, the data may differ today as more than a decade has passed.

Naturally, in all communities, needs vary over time, and so did the needs of the students at these specific schools.

Additionally, the contribution of Dragona and Fragkoudaki (2006) is also considered important, as they have tried to record the efforts that have been made for a change in minority education through the PEM program and the results and the benefits of it until 2006. Specifically, between others they refer to the change in the work of teachers based on the programs instructions, the increase rate of the secondary school attendance. However, even in this case the percentage data compared to today is different, since several years have passed. Despite this, the PEM program, since 2019 came to its end leaving the minority education without guidance, this mean that many aspects of minority education have changed since then and new studies may bring to the surface, new data based on the contribution of the program and the consequences of its ending.

Regarding this research, we will deal with issues that seek to explore the views of teachers working in minority schools in Thrace regarding the process of teaching Greek within these educational institutions. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate the language teaching methods employed in teaching Greek, while it concurrently studies whether the Greek language course is approached as a first or second language in minority schools. Furthermore, the research examines to what extent do the language educational policies of minority schools meet the needs of students. In the setting of increasing linguistic diversity, it is vital to assess whether language educational policies are addressing the actual needs of the students.

For the present work, qualitative research deemed more appropriate, approached through case study, as our interest focuses on the study of specific educational institutions that reside in a certain geographic area. Regarding data collection, we relied on the research tool of semi-structured interviews, while Thematic Analysis was adopted as analysis method.

## CHAPTER A

## 1. Muslim minority of Thrace

### *1.1 Thrace; society and culture*

Thrace is a region with strategically important points that influence world politics. Before 1922, our picture of the composition of the population of Thrace is considered extremely blurred, as the population data that have been collected contradict each other. However, what most studies agree on is the population prevalence of the Muslim element over the Christian. The existence of Muslim population in the region dates to the 14th century and the establishment of the Ottoman Empire (Molla Mustafa, 2020; Vogiatzis, 1998, Trumpeta, 2001).

After the Lausanne Treaty (1923), this prevalence prompted the Greek political leadership to strengthen the Greek element of the region through its settlement with refugees (Trumpeta, 2001). As a counterpoint to this policy, the Treaty sought to define and highlight the identity of the Muslim community of Thrace. According to Mitsiou (2010), the Treaty guaranteed minority members rights such as protection of life, religious freedom, legal equality, preservation of customs, property protection, and the freedom to use their language in education, gatherings, and the press. Full equality applies, as applies to the majority, but also applies to the prohibition of discrimination (Mitsiou, 2010).

After the Asia Minor catastrophe and the mandatory population exchange between Greece and Turkey, Thrace (except of Evros) was exempted from the exchange, allowing its Muslim inhabitants to remain in the region, just as was the case with the non-Muslim inhabitants of Constantinople, Imbros and Tenedos. Regarding the legal status of the minority, the distinction was based on religion, with the result that its formation resembles the system of organization of the millets of the Ottoman Empire.

From 1923 to the present day, the bone of contention between Greece and Turkey is the question of whether all the total of the minority's population is considered by different minority groups, while since the 1960s there has been intense controversy over the religious or ethnic definition of the minority (Muslim or Turkish). Regardless of its political uses, the heterogeneous composition of the minority in terms of language and ethnic origin is a real fact (Trumpeta, 2001). The Muslim minority of Thrace is the only minority recognized by the Greek state (Tsitselikis, Mavrommatis & Morelli, 2003).

The minority is made up of the Turk-origin group who speak the Turkish language, Pomaks who speak a Slavic dialect with Greek and Turkish influences and Roma, who speak Romani. It has been pointed out that the tripartite division of the minority in ethnic terms into Turks, Pomaks and Roma does not apply with absolute correspondence at the linguistic level, since there is a clear shift of the two, initially non-Turkish-speaking groups towards the Turkish language (Askouni, 2006).

In the case of the Muslim minority of Thrace, we are dealing with a three-dimensional linguistic society consisting of a) two indigenous linguistic minorities, whose language is not the official language of any state, namely those who speak Pomak and those who speak Romani and b) an indigenous linguistic minority, whose language is Turkish and is at the same time the official language of a neighboring country. This fact gives an advantage to Turkish speakers over other linguistic groups (Askouni, 2006).

### *1.2 Defining the Muslim Minority*

As mentioned above, the Muslim minority of Thrace, despite its religious cohesion, is formed by people of different origin groups in terms of its composition. This includes the Turks, the Roma and the Pomaks. Regarding the place of distribution, the Muslim population is geographically spread across the districts of Xanthi, Rhodope and Evros (Askouni, 2006). According to official statistics, in 2011, the total number of the minority population is estimated to be 361,208 Muslim, Greek citizens (Tsitselikis, et al., 2019). In terms of percentages, (Dragona & Fragkoudaki, 2007) is stated that 47-68% are of Turkish-origin, Pomaks constitute 20-40% and 10-25% are Roma. The largest representation of the minority is in the district of Rhodope, while the smallest is in the district of Evros (Chatzidaki, 2020). As a result, it is concluded that these three ethnological elements cannot be considered homogeneous (Tsioumis, 1994).

To begin with, as regards the Turk-origin group, these are people of Ottoman origin who have been settled in the region of Thrace since the 14th century, but also people of different ethnic origins who converted to Islam and accepted the identity of the Ottomans (Tsioumis, 2008). The Turks constitute the largest group of the minority population, and they are mainly found in the cities of Xanthi and Komotini (Vakalios et al., 1997).

Today, only some of them live in the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains. In the past, they were mostly engaged in animal husbandry and agriculture, professions that tend to be abandoned as most of them nowadays work as craftsmen or engage in trade. Those who live in the lowland region of Thrace are mainly engaged in trade or have large estates. Their children usually proceed to higher education in universities in Turkey.

Therefore, the Turkish-origin group receives significant support and protection from the state of Turkey, which according to the Treaty of Lausanne was characterized as the national center of the Muslim minority (Troumbeta, 2001). It is worth mentioning that several of them, having completed their academic studies at universities, have become scientists. For this group, the Turkish language is their first language. The language spoken today by the Turkish-speaking inhabitants of the region is a dialectal continuum of the Turkish language used in Turkey today, which contains certain archaisms, variations in verb declension as well as some Greek borrowings (Sella – Mazi, 2006). Furthermore, the socio-economic situation that distinguishes them, the possibility of higher education, as well as the prevalence of their language in the wider society, places them at the top of the Muslim community. They are in a more favorable socio-economic situation in relation to the other linguistic groups of the minority (Kanakidou, 1997).

Regarding the second group, it is that of the Roma, whose stay in Thrace dates to Byzantine times. The Roma are thought to have their roots in northwestern India and specifically, present-day Pujab or Punjab. In addition, their language is the same as Indian with words that have been incorporated from various languages such as Greek, Arabic, Romanian and Hungarian. This intrusion of words from various languages shows the long-term residence of the Roma in various countries (Panagiotidis, 1995). The main characteristic of Roma life that distinguishes them from other minority groups is their way of life and their settlement in marginalized neighborhoods. They usually occupy the most subordinate positions, with intermittent and poorly paid employment. This fact results in their more intense ghettoization and marginalization. For Roma children usually they have not attended school at all or attend school occasionally. (Troumpeta, 2001).

The third and last group is completed by the Pomaks. The history of the Pomaks is complex and includes many stages and influences. The Pomaks have a history and

presence in the region of Thrace for centuries and their origin is two-way. The Pomaks are not a homogeneous group, but a diverse community of people with different social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics. There are various versions of their origin. According to the Bulgarian view, the Pomaks are converted Bulgarians, a fact which they support on the linguistic similarity of the Pomak language with Bulgarian. They even argue that the word Pomak (pomaci) comes from the Bulgarian word “pomagac” which means helper or from “pomochamedanci” with the meaning of converted to Islam, which is considered the reason why Bulgaria has expressed the view that the Pomaks are Bulgarian Muslims who converted to Islam.

On the other hand, according to the Turkish side, the Pomaks are descendants of Turkish tribes, and more specifically the Cumans and the Pechenegs (Troumpeta, 2001). Finally, for Greece the theories about the origin of the Pomaks are many and different, and there is no agreement among historians and researchers.

For some Greek researchers Pomaks originate from the ancient Thracian tribe, as they often call themselves by the toponym “Achrianoi” or “Agrianoi”. There are several international researchers who agree with the Thracian origin of the Pomaks, however, this is difficult to prove (Tsioumis, 1994). The Pomaks of Rhodope seem to have gradually converted to Islam from the late 14th or 16th century until the mid-17th century. From the Codes of the Metropolis of Philippoupolis it appears that in the mid-17th century (1636-72) the prominent Pomaks decided to accept mass conversion to Islam in order to survive (Georgitsis, 2022).

Furthermore, in contrast to the Turk-origin populations, who are settled in the lowland areas -privileged areas-, the Pomaks are settled in the mountainous and barren areas of the Rhodope Mountain range (Georgitsis, 2022). Of the total Pomak population, many are those who are settled in Pomak villages -Pomakochoria- which is a group of villages located in the Rhodope Mountain range. Their main occupation, for the rural residents, is agriculture and mainly tobacco cultivation, while those who live in urban centers are engaged in construction work. Regarding their educational level, it is low, although they have a higher percentage of graduates compared to the Turkish-speaking minority (Sella – Mazi, 2006).

## **2. Educational Language policies for the Muslim Minority of Thrace**

### *2.1 Minority Education*

Minority education, within the Greek state, was initially restricted to the operation of primary private community schools, with the teaching of the Qur'an and the Islamic religion. Its current form was determined by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which is still in force and provides the general obligations between the two states, recognizing the rights of minorities and ensuring the education of Muslim children in Thrace. Minority education is separated from the public education of the Greek state, with compulsory teaching of the Greek language (Government Gazette A' 238/25.08.1923). In particular, the two countries provide distinct education to the respective minorities in their first language, within the framework of primary education (Askouni, 2006; Theodorou, 2012).

In 1951, the two states signed the Educational Agreement, which initially was only valid for five years, which later converted into an indefinite term. In this specific Agreement, there were provisions involving the professional development of young people (Law 2073/1952). Shortly afterwards, in 1957, the timetable and curriculum for minority schools were established, while in 1968, with the signing of the Greek-Turkish Educational Protocol, the school textbooks were demarcated, as well as the type of subjects that would be taught in Greek and Turkish. According to the Treaty of Lausanne and the Greek-Turkish Protocol of 1968, the education of Muslim children, using both their first language and the official language of the state, is an inalienable right (Tsioumis, 2010). However, for historical and political reasons, Turkish was recognized as the only official language of the minority, despite the existence of additional first languages within the minority. Bearing in mind languages used by all the ethnic groups of the minority, there is reasonably raised the question of the absence of languages such as Pomak and Romani from education. (Baltsiotis & Tsitslikis 2001).

With Article 40 of the Treaty of Lausanne, with the contribution of the Educational Agreement of 1951 and the Educational Protocol of 1968, the minority was initially granted considerable autonomy regarding its education. As Verhás (2019) argues, the minority could establish, manage and supervise its schools, at its own expense, but over the years this status changed. Today, their management does not belong to the minority

community, as it used to. Furthermore, while the school committees, elected by parents, were responsible for the administration of the schools, their role has over the years become subsidiary. The responsibilities, from which the minority's community was relieved - were taken over by the Greek state. Now, the central and local authorities finance the infrastructure and operation of the minority schools. Furthermore, the state is responsible for the recruitment and salary of their teaching staff and decides on most educational issues (Verhás, 2019).

Given the relationship between the two countries, as well as the disagreements that prevailed over the years, minority education was repeatedly used to satisfy political interests. However, in the year 2000, with the signing of the Greek-Turkish Agreement, the willingness to change the specific regime concerning minority education was identified, as an attempt was made to resolve any difficult educational points and to facilitate communication between these two states (Law 2929/2001). These changes focused on issues related to improving the quality of education, strengthening cooperation between the two countries, and ensuring minority rights. These specific changes, for example, were visible through the upgrade of the minority education system and the facilitation accessing higher education, providing equal opportunities (Askouni, 2006; Keltsidou 2021).

The changes in minority education, mentioned above, are the result of a set of reforms, which took place from 1920 to the present day, due to political expediency and interstate relations, for the most part, rather than for humanitarian, educational reasons. Therefore, it is understood that minority education went through many fluctuations, as for several years it operated separately from the Greek educational system, resulting in the absence of an integration framework. For a long time, it operated on the margins due to the lack of political will, as it was unable to transfer the Greek reality into practice, isolating this portion of people from the general social and educational whole (Tsioumis, 2006).

## *2.2 Minority Schools*

As our research focuses on the opinions of teachers working in primary minority schools, it is considered important to mention the situation in primary education for

these regions. Minority education, as mentioned above, as a separate educational system is mainly found at the primary level of education. According to the Treaty of Lausanne, minority education was not provided to kindergarten, as in the years of the Treaty pre-school education was optional. However, for Muslim children, there was provision for attendance at Greek-language kindergartens, with children from mountainous areas being excluded. In 2006 compulsory preschool education was established by Law 3518/2006, with the number of students increasing significantly (Kanakidou, 1997).

According to the data of the Panhellenic School Network Unit Map, currently a total of 86 public minority primary schools operates in Thrace. Out of these, 33 are in the district of Xanthi, 44 in the district of Rhodope and 9 in the district of Evros (<https://maps.sch.gr/main.html>). Minority schools are always headed by a teacher from the Turkish-language program, while the position of deputy principal is held by a teacher from the Greek-language program.

The teaching program of minority schools is bilingual and divided between two languages, Greek and Turkish. The lessons taught in the Turkish language are taught by a minority teacher (code PE73), while the Greek-language lessons are taught by a primary school teacher (code PE70), who can also teach in other public primary schools. The Greek-language program includes Greek Language lessons, History lessons, Geography lessons, Environmental Studies and Social and Political Education lessons. On the other hand, the minority program includes Turkish Language lessons, Religious Studies, Mathematics, Physics and Arts.

The Qur'an is written in Arabic, which is why many Muslim teachers prefer to teach it in Arabic, as prescribed by Muslim tradition. The Physical Education class was initially taught by a Turkish-speaking teacher, however, nowadays it is taught by Physical Education teachers. From 2021, with the establishment of the Skills Workshops, the program is undertaken by the teacher of the Greek-language program - with the possibility of collaboration with the Muslim teacher.

Teaching time is divided equally between the Greek and Turkish language lessons. Each program is organized and implemented autonomously, with separate books and different teachers (Askouni, 2006; Featherstone et al., 2011; Serbezi, 2022). According

to Kelesidis (2001, as cited in Kalliga, Palaiologou & Magos, 2022), the curriculum in Thrace's minority schools leads to a divided awareness of the world and is lacking knowledge among students. Teachers' positioning regarding a single direction, without any intercultural structure, contributes to the perpetuation of an ongoing scheme of socially excluded and non-literate students. Minority schools experience "twofold monolingualism", due to the fierce rivalry of Turkish and Greek nationalism, resulting in "parallel monolinguals".

The publication of school textbooks in Greek is under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. Until 1999-2000, minority schools used the same school textbooks as all other Greek schools in the territory, which were completely unsuitable for students whose first language was not Greek. Since the year 2000, they firstly began to be used the textbooks that were proposed by the "Program for the Education of Muslim Children".

Recently, representatives of the minority believe that, based on the principle of equality in education, minority children should have the same textbooks as students in public primary education, as the needs of minority students have changed. The state's decision to leave it to minority school's teachers to choose whether to use these books is considered disappointing by the "School Superintendents of Minority Schools of Western Thrace". At the same time, instructions to teachers of the Greek-language program define public books as "supplementary supporting material" (<https://www.paratiritis-news.gr/news/erotisi-gia-ta-vivlia-ton-meionotikon-scholeion-apo-ton-ilchan-achmet/>). On the contrary, for the Turkish speaking program, in accordance with the provisions of the Educational Protocol there are provided textbooks from Turkey (Askouni, 2006, Keltsidou, 2021; Theodorou, 2012).

Regarding the educational staff of minority schools, this consists of teachers from the Greek-speaking and Turkish-speaking programs. The first ones are graduates of Pedagogical Departments of Primary Education or Pedagogical Academies. These are civil servants without having been trained on issues of bilingualism and intercultural education, even though a trained staff would be necessary for minority students (Matana, 2016).

As for the Turkish-speaking program, most of them are graduates of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki or Turkish nationals who have been transferred. The above information arouses curiosity regarding the placement of these teachers in positions that require specialization on intercultural education issues, which creates questioning in studying the level of training and education possessed by current teachers in Minority Schools.

Regarding secondary education, according to the Treaty of Lausanne, the Greek state committed itself on providing secondary minority education, which concerned exclusively primary school, as primary education was initially the only compulsory level of education of the time. Their curriculum is also bilingual and the distribution of courses between the two languages is approximately equivalent. are the same as those used in the rest of the public Greek Middle schools and High schools. As for the books for the Turkish-language curriculum, these come from Turkey after approval (Askouni, 2006).

Lastly, access to higher education for the Muslim minority began much later. Specifically, due to the very low percentage of students who managed to complete their secondary education, it was not possible for them to succeed in the university's entrance exams (Theodorou, 2012). The major change and milestone in the educational policy of the minority and in the effort to approach the minority population is the special regulation of Law 2341/95 (f.208A/6.10.95, Article 2) of the Ministry of Education, which defines, a separate percentage of places (0.5%) in higher education for the children of Muslims of Thrace who have graduated from secondary education. Despite the shortcomings of this specific measure, its contribution was significant, as it helped students from the upper social tiers of the minority to enter higher education, which will a significant "intellectual" role within this population group. (Karafyllis, Kanakidou & Karakatsanis, 2006).

### *2.3 Minority School's Curriculum*

The minority education system presents multiple problems. The curricula, which are often not adapted to the needs of minority students, are only one aspect of the overall

problematic situation. Nevertheless, the lack of suitability of these curricula is a significant educational issue.

The first and essentially the only Curriculum and Timetable of Minority Schools, which is still formally in force today, was established in 1957 by Ministerial Decision 149251/28.11.1957 (Government Gazette B' 162, 1958), "On the Curriculum and Timetable of Muslim Schools". In 1979, according to the research the Coordinator of Minority Education, the law "On the Determination of the Detailed Curriculum of Minority Muslim Primary Schools (Government Act 4664/20.11.1979)" was passed. However, this program was not implemented (Dimasi, Papastamatis & Stogios, 2014).

#### *Program for the Education of Muslim Children (PEM)*

In 1997, with the implementation of the "Program for the Education of Muslim Children" (PEM), which was subsequently renamed to "The Program for the Education of Minority Children in Thrace 2010-2013", the lessons of the Greek-language program began to be conducted under the terms of the program's scientific team (Ministry of Education and Culture-National University of Athens, 1998), which made an effort to reform and enrich minority education in a way that helps in the selection of appropriate teaching content and in addressing the conditions faced by teachers in minority schools (Androusou, 2020).

Thus, the main objectives of the PEM for minority education and minority students are a) to harmoniously integrate children into the educational system and society b) upgrading the quality of education, through appropriate teacher training, strengthening schools with innovative educational material, c) enhancement of quality Greek language learning d) reducing high school dropout e) supporting families to help improve the school performance of their children and f) completing compulsory education by all children (MUSEDUC, 2025).

According to Dragona (2020), this social and educational intervention achieved a fruitful intersection of formal and informal education through a multidisciplinary approach. Sociologists, psychologists, educators, linguists, historians, philologists, anthropologists, lawyers from almost all universities in the country, along with primary and secondary school teachers, were mobilized in this project. It started from the narrowest level of the classroom with the creation of books and educational material, it

expanded to the training of teachers, and it opened up to society with the creation of KESPEM (from the original Muslim Children's Education Centers) and mobile units - mobile KESPEM. All these actions had elements of innovation.

The books and educational materials were created following the methods of learning Greek as a foreign/second language, while the state textbooks were and are written for children who are already native speakers of Greek to learn to write and read. From the moment they enter school until the end of high school, all texts and tools considered the major differences between Greek and Turkish, especially in syntax. The detailed Guide for Teachers, which accompanies the books, is invaluable (Dragona, 2020).

This material considered the special conditions of teaching Greek in minority schools: bilingual education, foreign-speaking student population with significant cultural peculiarities, limited to non-existent knowledge of Greek, lack of preschool education, teaching of Greek without a support language, e.g. Turkish, different levels of mastery of Greek, i.e. village-city, strong presence of small-number schools.

In order to respond to the above conditions, the language teaching material prepared for minority schools has the following characteristics: a) does not require knowledge of Greek. It systematically teaches its structure, in parallel with teaching its use through various types of texts and in various communication situations, b) takes into account the cultural specificity of the minority, has a friendly, attractive, playful format, with an emphasis on communicative practice, c) is accompanied by rich illustrations, utilizes the presence of Turkish words in the Greek language such as coffee, d) uses texts and images of the surrounding area, e.g. signs, announcements, advertisements, e) it is often interdisciplinary in nature, combining the processing of texts from various subjects such as mathematics, physics, geography, history, f) it is adaptable to different levels of Greek learning, modular, with texts and exercises of varying degrees of difficulty, which makes the teacher's intervention decisive, since he decides on the ways of adapting the material at each time (Iordanidou, 2002).

Regarding teachers' training, it is a permanent need and a permanent request of teachers throughout Greece. Training began with the start of the project in 1997. For the first time, teachers from the majority and minority groups were trained together. Until then, the teachers between the Greek and the Turkish program of minority schools had never

been in collaboration. The training of the teachers through the program has been continuous throughout these years (Dragona, 2020).

Many alternative initiatives were pursued in order to overcome obstacles that make it difficult to approach the majority and minority. They were not always accepted by both sides, nor by the Ministry of Education. For example, Turkish language lessons were held for three years for Greek-speaking teachers. Their familiarization with the second official language of the minority school contributed to the understanding of the students' mistakes, due to the different syntax of Turkish. Despite the large participation of several hundred teachers and their success, the Ministry discontinued them in 2013 (Dragona, 2020).

All in all, the Program highlighted a lot of things about the minority society. The reduction in dropouts, the participation of children in kindergartens, the number of those admitted to higher educational institutions are developments that make us optimistic about the future of education. The Program was a truly humanitarian, humane and scientific approach that yielded very positive results. However, in 2019 the program came to its end, with the teachers training stopped and new educational entries that provide support for the needs of minority students today.

To conclude, it is worth quoting the opinion of a member of the minority on the program, according to Mustafa (2020), education is a dynamic process that requires continuous development and adaptation to the new challenges that life brings. Ongoing programs and projects that support the educational process, accompanied by the necessary research can identify the needs and problems that emerge, so projects similar to PEM must continue in some way. Given the increasing number of students in public high schools, it is necessary to implement special methods, such as remedial teaching and alternative educational methods. The aim is to ensure equality in education and that no social segment is wronged by the school system (Mustafa, 2020).

### *The current curriculum*

Today, the curriculum used in minority schools, as stated in an announcement by the Xanthi Teachers' Association in September 2018, is the same as the first one established

for minority education in 1958, with Ministerial Decision 149251/28-11-1957 (Government Gazette B' 162/42-1958) which has not been reformed since then (<https://indexanthi.gr/didaskalikos-katalipseis-vivlia/>). For its part, the Turkish speaking program also follows the 1957 Curriculum along with instructions for teaching the Turkish language (Dimasi, Papastamatis & Stogios, 2014), this fact gives rise to educational difficulties, which, in order to be overcome, a separate curricula or study programs should be created, appropriate for the particular needs of the minority school.

As long as this situation in minority education remains the same, the Greek language proficiency of Muslim students will not improve, and the problems related to the learning process will not be solved.

### **3. Bilingualism and Multilingualism within the Muslim Minority**

#### *3.1 Bilingualism and Multilingualism*

Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon, for which there is no clear and complete definition. It is a multidimensional concept, with multiple perspectives and often vague or imperfect definitions (Kharkhurin, Koncha & Charkhabi, 2023). This makes it difficult to determine exactly who is considered bilingual. As Chatzidaki (2020) states, a person is considered bilingual if he or she knows and uses more than one language in his/her daily life, in different environments and for different purposes, while proficiency in each of the languages may vary in degree. In previous decades, language research has been focused primarily on monolingual development, particularly in its early stages. This approach had as a result neglecting the study of bilingual or multilingual development, even though more than half of the world's population use more than one language, often as native speakers (Motsiou, 2011). It is noted that the study of bilingualism requires the examination of aspects from at least two scientific fields beyond linguistics, namely sociology and psychology (Baker & Jones, 1998).

Until the 1960s, an outdated theory was dominated, which according to Cummins (1980 in Stamouli & Kantzou, 2014) is called the "Subjective Ability Model". Based on this model, the first and second languages operate independently, without the transfer of

knowledge from one language to the other. In contrast to the above model, Cummins proposed the "Common Underlying Competence" model, according to which there is the possibility of transferring language skills from one language to another. More specifically, the adequate development of each of the two languages depends on the development of the other (Stamouli & Kantzou, 2014).

Multilingualism on the other hand, is the ability of individuals to speak and understand more than one language, a phenomenon that makes monolingualism a rare exception in many modern societies, where different languages are often used (Soler-Carbonell, 2014). Additionally, multilingualism is also described as the ability of a person to use three or more languages, either separately or with language switching combinations. These languages serve different purposes and the knowledge of each depends on the education and practice of the speaker.

Nowadays, the intense population mobility seems to be inextricably linked to multilingualism, which is emerging as an individual asset. Multilingualism has been recognized by numerous Councils of Europe Directives as a fundamental principle for language education policy in Europe (<https://education.ec.europa.eu/el/liga-logia-gia-tin-politiki-polyglossias>). Modern multilingual speakers use different languages they know in different social fields according to their needs, which means that their level of communication skills is generally not evenly developed. The multilingual speaker's choice of language is influenced by the motivations he or she has in each communication context, which are determined by the topic of discussion, the interlocutor, the communication context and the space in which the discussion takes place (Kiliari, 2005.).

In the context of multilingualism, something we must keep in mind is that the prestige of all languages that coexist is mainly unequal. In this way, language and educational policies for foreign language groups are shaped within a framework of competition, where some languages shrink, and others die. This results in different language groups being forced to use the dominant language, leaving their own behind. This fact shows us that the preservation of language is the responsibility of societies and cultures and not so much the natural laws that preserve a language.

Education as an institution of society can contribute either to the assimilation of linguistic diversity or to its preservation as it is a vehicle for the formation of ethnolinguistic identities. Language education policies play an important role in shaping the ways in which a language will be utilized or not, taught or not in the school environment. Furthermore, within this specific framework, education can contribute to the promotion of social changes for the benefit of non-Greek speaking groups that are marginalized within education (Kiliari, 2005).

### *3.2. The case of bilinguals and multilinguals in the Muslim Minority of Thrace*

In the multicultural region of Thrace, the coexistence of various ethnic groups and the coexistence of different languages among them is taken for granted. A fact that results in several members of the minority being forced to alternate between languages to facilitate their communication. More specifically, members of the Muslim minority, Turks, Pomaks and Roma mainly use the Greek language to serve their everyday needs, resulting in them using two or more languages in their everyday lives.

In the case of the members of the Muslim minority who belong to the Pomak and Roma population, no specific language of communication or education of its members has been established by the Treaty of Lausanne. With the agreements of 1951 and 1968 for the subject in the schools of the Muslim minority of Thrace, the Turkish language is intended, which worked to the detriment of the Roma and Pomak members of the minority, in relation to the Romani and Pomak languages (Sella-Mazi, 2006). The development of trilingualism among Roma and Pomak students is a result of Greek educational policy. In addition to the above, the learning of foreign languages is also added.

It is also worth noting that the Turkish language was the language of communication between the members of the minority long before the establishment of compulsory education in Turkish and Greek (Baltsiotis, 1997). The Turkish-speaking community is in a more advantageous position compared to the other two, as Turkish is the only one taught in minority schools, and at the same time because Turkish is the only one recognized by the Treaty of Lausanne as the language of the Muslim minority.

The second language, Pomak, is a Slavic variety and an oral tradition with elements from the Greek and Turkish languages. The future of the Pomak language is based mainly on the will of its speakers to preserve it. Finally, the third language is Romani, which, like Pomak, is an oral tradition language. This language is spoken by the Roma (Muslims or Christians) and contains loans from the Persian, Greek and Armenian languages. Although there are different dialects of Romani from region to region, an effort is being made to establish a common way of writing that will contribute to the teaching of the language and to the common self-definition of their identity worldwide (Mitsiou, 2010).

Regarding the language of the Pomaks, it tends to disappear. This language is an oral language, without a writing system and an acceptable description (Chatzidaki, 2020). According to Panagiotidis (1995), the Pomaks are trilinguals, as upon their introduction to minority schools they are taught the Greek and Turkish languages, while at home they speak Pomak. This sometimes has as a result for students being in a linguistic confusion when for the first time come into contact with two foreign languages, without being taught their first language, which is only spoken, and thus forgetting Pomak. At the same time, they cannot learn Greek or Turkish at a satisfactory grade. The choice of using one of the three languages depends on the level of knowledge of these languages, as well as on the interlocutor (whether he is Greek-speaking, Turkish-speaking or Pomak-speaking). Code switching from Pomak to Turkish and vice versa is usually observed, in combination with the use of Greek words or phrases (Markou 2003, in Georgitsis, 2022).

## **4. Second Language Teaching**

### *4.1 Second Language Teaching Methods*

The research investigation of human ability to acquire languages other than one's first language at the end of childhood, in teenage years and into adulthood after one or more first languages have been acquired is known as second language acquisition (SLA). Research on bilingualism, psycholinguistic theory, anthropological and sociological findings, and theoretical tenets of psycholinguistics have all influenced the study of second language acquisition. Its study includes the investigation of naturalistic and

formal language acquisition and seeks to comprehend the worldwide, individual, and social factors which impact what is learned, how rapidly and how effectively it is learned, by various individuals under different conditions (Ortega, 2009).

As Kim (2017) states, educators that teach bilingual or multilingual students are mainly concerned with grammar, pedagogical issues and the suitable use of the language; nevertheless, recent studies show that students should be additionally supplied with communication skills and most importantly should get in touch with the host country's culture and history. Regarding to Long (2015), language acquisition recently has been on the center of the teaching community because of the rise of the global migration numbers, so many people have the chance to engage with a second language mainly for professional or financial reasons.

Recently, several teaching methods about the language learning process have been proposed. Researchers from all over the world began to focus on various methodologies, and in the current study there is a presentation of the most significant out of them. Contemporary trends in second language teaching, as described by Long (2015), are based on various approaches that draw from behavioral theory of language acquisition, while considering students' level of readiness to learn. One of the main axes is the use of comprehensible linguistic input, which facilitates language learning through communicative situations.

#### *4.2 Synthetic and analytical language teaching approaches*

Long (2015) and other researchers distinguish instructional approaches of second language teaching into two main categories: synthetic and analytical. On the one hand, synthetic method approaches the language by dividing it into separate units, those are vocabulary and grammar rules which are introduced to the students separately in each unit based in different criteria. In this context, students are asked to combine these individual language units in order to understand and use the language in the future. Synthetic methods are based on lexical or grammatical syllabi or even hybrid forms of them, using traditional techniques.

On the other hand, analytical approach examines teaching from the perspective of the learner's needs, which means that students meet authentic forms of the target language

and are encouraged to gradually engage in real communication in that language. Rather than being given ready-made grammatical rules, learners are expected to discover and derive these rules inductively through their contact with the linguistic input. The analytical method is not based on a strict syllabus, but emphasizes the message itself, making communication the main goal. Language is mainly used to achieve communicative purposes and students are actively involved in this process (Long, 2015).

However, the boundaries between synthetic and analytical approaches are not always clear. Particularly, it is more often to notice a combination of the two methods rather than each one of them separately. Such practices offer the instructors the ability to tailor their lessons plans based on their students' needs, making their experiences with the second language more comprehensive and effective.

#### *4.2.1. Synthetic language teaching approaches*

##### *Structural method*

The structural method, which is part of the synthetic teaching approaches, emphasizes the systematic teaching of language structures, focusing mainly on oral speech. According to this approach, language is learned as a series of habits and suggests the inductive teaching of grammar. Learners compare the first language with the second in order to better understand the structures of the new language. Vocabulary is taught selectively so that it supports the learning of structures, while at the same time emphasis is placed on the active participation of students in the learning process (Genc, 2018).

##### *Grammar-Translation method*

The Grammar-Translation method (GTM) focuses mainly on teaching grammar and on texts in the target language. Grammar is taught productively, by presenting the rules first and applying them to examples. The main goal of this method is to develop the ability to understand texts, while less emphasis is placed on listening and speaking, which are developed indirectly through knowledge of grammar (Chang, 2011).

This teaching approach incorporates translated sections into and out of the first language and is based on the grammar of the language being learned. Grammar Translation Method is a highly teacher-centered technique that highlights the acquisition of grammar principles and vocabulary using the method of deductive learning. Reading and writing are the most often taught linguistic abilities, with minimal emphasis on oral and pronunciation. In general, GTM is not a suggested teaching method for second language teaching due to its lack of emphasis on communication and verbal skills in the language being studied (Khalil& Semono-Eke, 2020).

#### *Direct method*

The direct method aims at learning the language in a natural way, focusing on the direct use of the second language, without translation or reference to the first language. Emphasis is placed primarily on accurate language use and communicative proficiency, with systematic exercises focusing on specific language structures. Students are asked to learn thinking and communicating directly in the second language, without relying on their first language. At the same time, their familiarization with the culture and daily habits of the language-speaking community is encouraged, so that they can understand and function effectively in this new cultural environment (Rivers, 2018; Shu & Renandya, 2017).

#### *Audiolingual method*

Additionally, the audiolingual method, which is a very popular method, is based on ideas from constructivism and behaviorism (Richards & Rogers, 2014). It sees learning a second or foreign language as a process of building habits. Language skills are taught more effectively when the new language is firstly introduced through speaking, and then in writing. Instead of explaining grammar directly, this method focuses on learning through examples and patterns (Cook, 2016). It treats language learning as forming habits through a series of stimuli, responses, and rewards with imitation and memorization as the main techniques (Bella, 2011).

#### *4.2.2 Analytical language teaching approaches*

##### *Communicative approach*

The communicative approach, unlike traditional theories, offers a wide variety of flexibility and chances that both instructors and learners can take use of on occasion (Dos Santos, 2020). The key idea of the communicative approach is to learn inside the language and learn how to use it, rather than learning the language itself. In other words, is designed to assist students in developing target language communication abilities.

Typically, second language learning and instruction approaches were based on the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method. The approaches and tactics for instructing and acquiring languages emphasize the delivery of voice, grammar, and vocab with directions to listen, talk, read, and write. However, these educational approaches and tactics do not place a major emphasis on interacting and communicating among learners.

The communicative strategy focuses on students rather than teachers. The teacher's role in class is facilitating successful communication among students through learning tasks. Students are usually permitted to engage with one another, share and trade peer assessments, and contribute to each other. To promote language speaking and sharing, communicative approach advocates often use role-playing activities, group talks, problem-based instruction, technology-assisted tactics, and visual-only video instructional techniques (San-Valero et al, 2019).

The communicative approach emphasizes the interaction between students and the language, while grammar is taught only when it is necessary to understand meaning. Its main tenet is that by using language in authentic communicative contexts, students are taught proper grammar. The approach encourages learning via engagement and interaction rather than rote memorization of rules. One significant benefit of this approach is that it places the student at the center of the learning process and relieves teachers of the responsibility of being the only source of knowledge.

The role of the teacher changes, from an authority and main source of knowledge to a facilitator and partner in the learning process, guiding and encouraging students to learn automatically, actively participating in the process. In this way, communication contributes to the creation of a more participatory and collaborative learning

environment, where students develop language skills through meaningful and creative communication (Richards, 2016).

### *Task-based approach*

Finally, the analytical method is complemented by the task-based approach. Cook (2007) distinguishes the goals of language teaching into two main categories: external and internal. The Task-based approach, which is the most widespread approach, focuses mainly on external goals and immediate, visible successes. However, it neglects the long-term internal goals, which may be more essential to the holistic learning of a language.

As Hegel argues in his theories of language, language education plays two important roles: the education of forms and the achievement of universality. Through the mechanical training of language, the mind is cultivated to achieve deeper understanding. The process of learning a second language is not only limited to communication but also extends to broadening the individual's perception of other cultures, strengthening his cultural awareness. These internal dimensions of language learning are what Cook considers most important for students (Wu, 2016).

Task-based approach has been widely used and impactful in language learning. Some research shows that Task-based learning is a successful method of teaching languages that combines purposeful language learning activities with practical assignments to achieve communicative outcomes. Implementing this can enhance students' motivation to study by providing genuine assignments in the language they want to learn. Researchers have developed methods for implementing task-based learning, including pedagogical and real-world tasks, as well as pre-task phases, task cycles, and language concentration (Mulyadi, Wijayatiningsih, Singh & Prastjkawati, 2021; Richards & Rogers, 2014).

In this approach, the center target is maintaining meaningful communication, while students gain new knowledge through interaction and try to achieve the communicative targets (Bella, 2011, p. 223). As Long (2015) argues, task-based teaching begins with the analysis of the needs of each group of students, for example what they should be

able to do in the new language. Processing activities are inspired by everyday activities and obligations, such as those that people organize in their daily lives. Long (2015) suggests that these activities form the core of the task-based curriculum, with activities of progressively increasing difficulty.

#### *4.3 Drama-based teaching method*

Each child, according to his/her abilities, interests, needs, should feel comfortable in the classroom with his classmates and teachers. This is determined, among other things, by the following factors: time for recreation, for conversations and games in a relaxed atmosphere. This, along with the rules and rituals, makes it easier for children to work with each other, be given the freedom for exploratory learning. Teachers should keep curiosity and fun as much as possible.

This means that each child, with all his personal advantages and disadvantages, should have the opportunity for differentiated learning in the classroom, when the learning opportunities offered to him with drama-based teaching are activated. Children learn in their own way and for this reason, differentiation of teaching is necessary. On a pedagogical level, one can see that understanding a school text becomes easier when it is dramatized by the students themselves in the classroom (Gargalianos, 2010: 49).

The drama-based teaching method is essentially a process of active research that, through play and the various techniques it uses, helps children express themselves to talk about their experiences and feelings. It also develops thinking by helping them think critically. Thus, through Theater Pedagogy, they can combine their own worlds with the worlds of the language books of the teaching program. Therefore, we can say that it is an appropriate means of teaching, a means of approaching language that combines imaginary and real worlds, carrying within it a network of relationships, actions, and feelings that require mutual understanding and empathy (Katsaridou, 2014).

With the playful form it uses, it manages to keep the children's interest undiminished, which leads to a better and deeper understanding of themselves and the world and consequently to a better acquisition of the language. The theater-pedagogical method helps students to identify with the experiences and vicissitudes of the heroes of literary

books. Also, through theater-pedagogical methods, children can connect written words of the texts with their personal experiences (Katsaridou, 2014).

## CHAPTER B

### **5. The research**

#### *5.1 Research aims*

The present research aims to explore teachers' views who work in minority schools in Thrace regarding the process of teaching Greek within these educational institutions. Specifically, the study seeks to investigate the methods employed in teaching Greek, whether it is approached as a first or second language in minority schools. In the setting of increasing linguistic diversity, it is vital to assess whether language educational policies are addressing the actual needs of students and teachers. Furthermore, the research examines the language teaching approaches applied to the teaching of Greek,

as well as the way in which students' first language is used to support language learning.

To accomplish this, the following research questions are formulated:

- 1) How do current educational language policies, according to teachers, respond to the needs of minority students?
- 2) What language teaching approaches do teachers employ when instructing the Greek language course? Is it taught as a first or second language?
- 3) How is the students' first language utilized in the teaching of Greek language course?

### *5.2 Identity of the research*

The present work focuses on teachers' views who have experience in minority schools in Thrace. Minority schools are found exclusively in the districts of Xanthi, Rhodope and Evros. The students who attend these schools belong to the Muslim Minority of Thrace, however, this specific population is heterogeneous. It must be considered that the minority consists of three ethnic groups: those of Turkish speakers, Pomak speakers and Romani speakers. As a result, the first language of students attending minority schools differs from school to school, from village to village or from region to region. Furthermore, the social background of the students often differs in many cases, while their exposure to the Greek language also differs, since the contact of students living in cities or villages with a majority population is different from that of those living in villages with a pure minority population.

In minority schools, as we have mentioned in the literature review, the curriculum is bilingual, and the subjects are divided between those taught in Greek language and those taught in Turkish language. These results in bilingual and trilingual students, depending on the first language they adopt. Some of the students are trilingual with Pomak, Turkish, and Greek or Romani, Turkish, and Greek and some others are bilingual with Turkish and Greek.

The teachers who took part in our research have worked in schools of the three districts. All of them have worked in schools in villages with a pure minority population but also in villages with a mixed population, while some of them have also worked in city

schools. This means that each of the teachers has different teaching experiences as the student population in these schools is clearly heterogeneous.

### *5.3. The participants of the research*

In the research contributed with their participation six (6) teachers who have experience in minority schools of the districts of Xanthi, Rhodope and Evros. More specifically, they are teachers of primary education and graduates from Primary Education Departments of Greece while two (2) out of them have Masters in Intercultural Education and one (1) completed a seminar in Second Language Teaching. Out of the participants total, four (4) are women and two (2) are men. Their years of experience in Minority Schools range from two (2) to fifteen (15) years.

*Table 1 Research Participants*

|           | <b>Gender</b> | <b>Education</b>  | <b>Years of Experience in minority schools</b> |
|-----------|---------------|---|--|
| <b>P1</b> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Pedagogical Department of Primary Education</i>  | <i>2</i>                                       |
| <b>P2</b> | <i>Male</i>   | <i>Pedagogical Department of Elementary Education<br/>-<br/>Master in Intercultural Education</i>     | <i>4</i>                                       |
| <b>P3</b> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Pedagogical Department of Elementary Education<br/>-<br/>Seminars in Second Language Education</i> | <i>8</i>                                       |
|           | <i>Female</i> | <i>Pedagogical Department of</i>  | <i>5</i>                                       |

|           |               |  |           |
|-----------|---------------|--|-----------|
| <b>P4</b> |               | <i>Elementary Education</i><br>-<br><i>Master in Intercultural Education</i> |           |
| <b>P5</b> | <i>Female</i> | <i>Pedagogical Department of Elementary Education</i>                        | <i>12</i> |
| <b>P6</b> | <i>Male</i>   | <i>Pedagogical Department of Elementary Education</i>                        | <i>15</i> |

## 6. Methodology

The present study adopts the qualitative research method as it is deemed the most appropriate. This specific choice was made based on the nature of the research questions of the study, that aim to capture the unique experiences and views of teachers drawn from their professional daily lives (Pourkos & Dafermos, 2010). Qualitative research examines how people and communities interpret social or human problems. Research entails developing questions and processes, collecting data in the setting of the participant, analyzing it deductively, and interpreting the findings. The final written summary follows an open framework.

This type of research values an inductive approach to study, emphasizing personal interpretation and recognizing the multifaceted nature of an instance (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative approach emphasizes words rather than numbers (Bryman, 2017), allowing a natural flow in the respondents' answers, without the researcher directing the discussion. In this way, the possibility is open to examine issues that were not planned, offering participants more freedom of expression and space for critical thinking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In our case, the choice of the qualitative approach allows the study of the needs of minority students and the methods utilized for the Greek language teaching, based on the interpretations of the teachers working there.

Within the framework of qualitative research, the case study is adopted, as our interest is focused on the study of specific geographical areas where the Muslim Minority

members reside. Case studies have specific temporal and spatial contexts, functional parts, as well as their own distinct identity (Maggopoulos, 2014). In our case it will be focused on a specific spatial context – Thrace. Additionally, case studies obtain a strategy of investigation in which the researcher delves deeply into a scheme, occurrence, procedure, on one or more persons. Cases are defined by duration and activity, and researchers gather extensive information throughout time using a range of data gathering techniques (Creswell, 2016).

The case study method is a qualitative research approach used to explore in depth a specific phenomenon, within a real-world setting. This method is particularly useful for analyzing complex issues, allowing researchers to gain a detailed understanding of the dynamics and conditions that affect the subject of the study (Cohen et al., 2008). For this research, the case study was chosen because it provides detailed research of the area, allowing for a more in-depth knowledge rather than a cursory review. Overall, the case study method is a valuable tool for in-depth understanding of the implementation of local social policy, offering valuable evidence and recommendations for improvements and restructuring (Bryman, 2017).

### *6.1 Research tools*

This study relies on the research tool of semi-structured interviews in order to collect research data. This tool was addressed to six (6) teachers who have experience in Minority Schools in the districts of Xanthi, Evros and Rhodope. The semi-structured interviews are characterized by a satisfactory degree of initiative in the formulation of the subject's answers, since the researchers operate in a minimally intrusive manner, however, they take care to direct the process of conducting the interview in relation to the subject under investigation, which deals with in their questions. In addition, the researchers have the possibility of varying the questions, both in terms of order and content. Therefore, the researchers are those who will determine the time and depth of each question (Tsiolis, 2015).

The semi-structured interview followed a framework of open-ended questions based on an interview guide comprising three axes of topics. The first axis focuses on the teachers and the educational context, the second on their views on language educational policies

in minority schools and finally the third axis on second language teaching methods and the use of the first language in the classroom.

## 6.2 Data analysis

Regarding the analysis of the data of this research, thematic analysis was considered the most appropriate method to analyze teachers' interviews. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis consists of the systematic identification, organization and understanding of recurring patterns of meaning within a set of data. Through this specific method, the researcher aims to search for patterns regarding the topic under study and patterns that contribute to answering its research questions. This means that the research questions act as a guide, i.e. they are an important factor during thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is used to analyze data recorded in written form by researchers and, more specifically, to analyze data that emerges from the most common data collection methods in qualitative research, which are interviews, focus groups, and observations. The purpose of thematic analysis is to create an analytical and systematic record of the codes and themes that emerge from the interviews or observations of the participants (Galanis, 2018).

The steps we followed for the analysis of our research data were based on those proposed by Tsiolis (2018).

The first step we took, after the interview's completion, was that of transcribing the interviews. For this step, we had to take each of the participants' audiotaped interviews and transcribe it into a text.

| Example  |
|--|
| <p>Researcher: <i>Do you use the students' first language to teach Greek?</i></p> <p>P3: <i>I tried not to use the students' first language, but because in some schools, as well as classes there where some children that did not know Greek at all, so necessarily I used it, I looked it up on my own how I communicate with them.</i></p> |

As for the second step, it initially concerned familiarization with the data and then identifying and collecting the excerpts related to each research question. In other words, for this step we had to read each of the interviews' texts and try to connect the research questions with parts of the interviews that could give us some related answers.

| Example  |
|--|
| <p>Second Research Question: <i>What pedagogical approaches do teachers employ when instructing Greek? Is it taught as a first or second language?</i></p> <p>P4: <i>We mainly relied on oral speech. We basically tried to create the need for communication. There had to be a need... for example, we would play a game, "the shop", so the students would have to read the price list. Or the labels, the small ones in the class. We had to send a letter, for example to our neighbor, to our cousin who lived in another country, but you had to create the need for communication...</i></p> |

In the third step we moved on to the coding, during which an attempt was made to give the data a conceptual definition. In this step we tried to interpret our data, understand their meaning and attribute it with a definition. This process is called coding. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), codes are used to attempt to attribute a characteristic to part of the data by the researcher. In some codes we summarized and described the content of a unit of data. In others, codes arise from the interpretation of the meaning or latent meaning that we read into our data. Lastly, some of the codes produced draw from the conceptual and theoretical framework adopted by the research. In many of the passages we assigned multiple codes, since they can contain more than one meaning unit, while concurrently, in the same code we assigned to multiple passages, as the same meaning content is recognized in them.

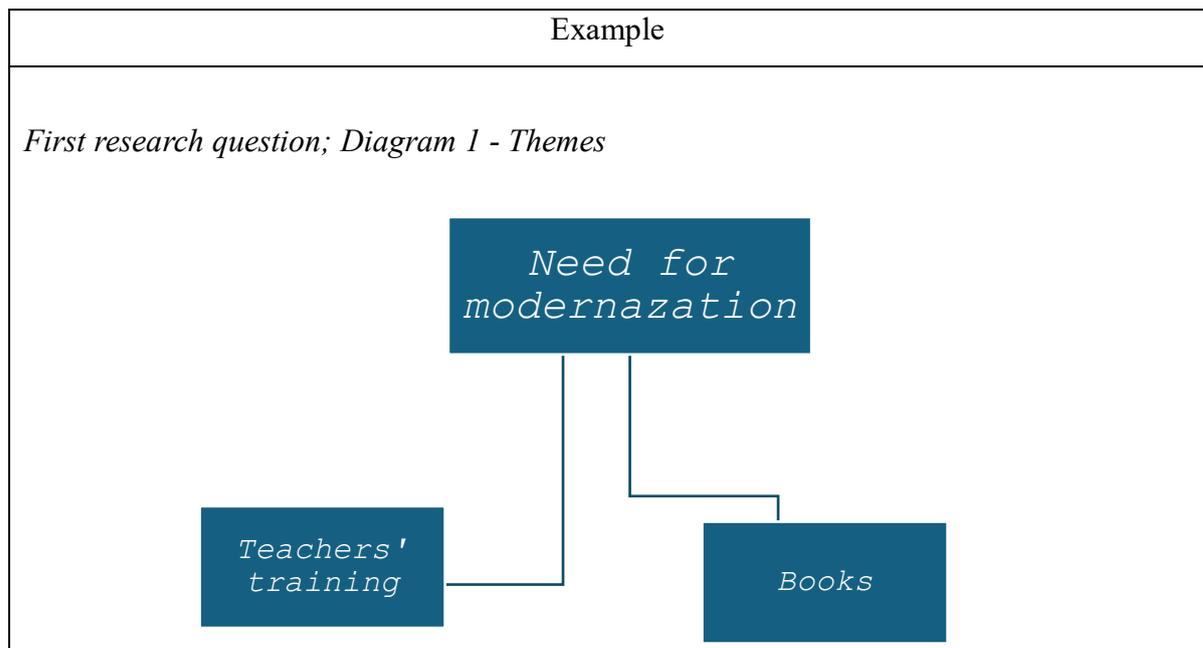
| Example            |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| <b><i>TEXT</i></b> | <b><i>CODES</i></b> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Educational policies do not follow modern scientific data, not the most modern ones. Maybe when the books were written, they followed those times scientific data. But now, they are 20 years old. So, today, I think they need some kind of modernization...</i></p> <p><i>I believe that we should be looking to apply as many modern methods as possible.</i></p> | <p><i>Lack of modern scientific data</i></p> <p><i>Need to modernize minority education based on the current needs of students.</i></p> |
|--|---|

In the fourth step, the transition from codes to themes was made. As all the coded excerpts were collected with their codes, themes were created after the processing comparison and merging of the codes that correspond to a recurring pattern of meaning. Themes are conceptual constructs that are more abstract and general than codes. In this fourth phase, the themes are defined, and their content is determined by highlighting their properties and connecting the properties between them. For the organization of the codes, the highlighting of the themes and the possible relationships between them, the concepts and schemes of theoretical awareness play an important role (Tsiolis, 2018).

More specifically, to move from codes to themes, we followed a process of gradual organization. Initially, we gathered all the codes that had emerged from the coding of the data and classified the excerpts under each one. Then, we compared the codes with each other, merging those that expressed similar meanings, in order to create more comprehensive and general categories. After this contrast and synthesis procedure, the themes emerged that are more abstract and theoretically defined notions that address our study issue. Then we thoroughly examined each theme, finding its specific qualities, some of that came from original codes and others revealed by a more detailed inspection of the excerpts. Finally, to better highlight the links among the themes and their

attributes, we employed diagrams to help in the comprehension of our findings, which we finally composed to a thematic map of all the collected themes.



### *6.3 Research Ethical Issues and Research Limitations*

Analyzing the issue of ethics, reference is made to a set of rules that must govern the relationship between researcher and participant. Typically, the former, throughout the research process, must inspire respect and operate with courtesy and discretion. In this research process, informed consent to the research was respected, informing the participants of its purpose, as well as its non-mandatory nature, while at the same time anonymity and confidentiality were respected, ensuring the protection of their identity (Cohen et al, 2007).

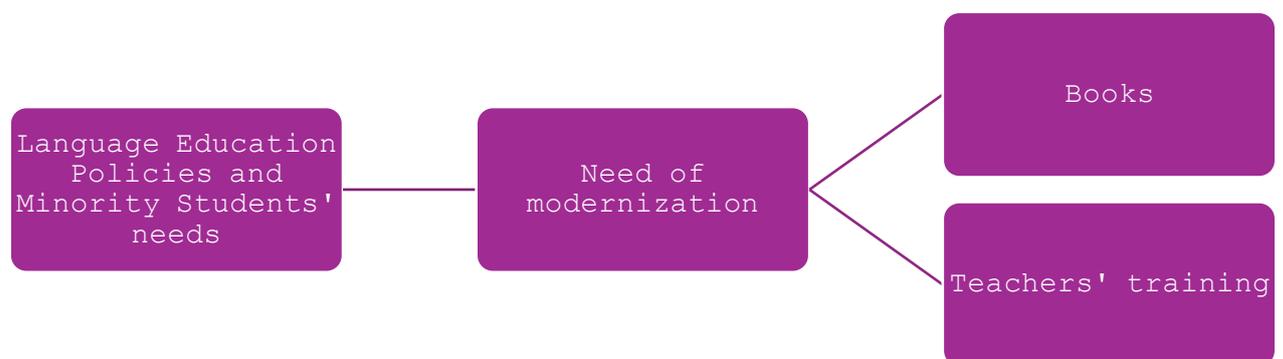
Regarding the conduct of the research, we faced some limitations, due to the researcher's long distance from the Thrace region during the dissertation's contact. For this reason, the research was mainly limited to remote data collection through online interviews.

## 7. Research Results

*1<sup>st</sup> Axis: Language Education Policies and Minority Students' Needs*

*Research question; How do current educational language policies, according to teachers, respond to the needs of minority students?*

The first thematic axis is formed by one thematic category and two subcategories. Specifically, in the thematic category the need for modernization for the minority's education is discussed, while at the two subcategories there is reported the need for new books in minority schools and the need for specialization for teachers that work in those schools.



On the one hand regarding the first thematic category, the study program is characterized by the need of modernization. Based on all of the six teachers' views the program is designed to meet the needs of students of a previous era. According to them, the state has remained on older data, while modern scientific data is not considered for the language education policy formation of the minority's education. The most recent data that were utilized date back to 1997, with the start of the PEM program, that was implemented to the minority education. Therefore, there should be new designs based

on the current scientific data on teaching bilingual students and based on the needs of students in minority schools today.

*“I think that the state may have stuck to older standards based on minority’s education and has not seen them with a new perspective that it should see them. Because, they have changed a lot” (P3)*

*“Educational policies dot not take into consideration recent scientific data, not the most modern ones. Maybe when the books were written, yes, they were (taken into account). But now, they're 20 years old. So, today, I think they won't follow the current data. They should be a modernization...” (P4)*

On the other hand, based on the view of four teachers, the books that are utilized are designed based on the PEM program for students of different needs than the current students’ at minority schools. According to their answers, there are used scientific data that date to the start of the PEM program, so they are designed based on data from another era, which should be updated in order to collide with the needs of the students nowadays. PEM was based on scientific data on teaching bilingual students, it was a targeted and modern program, based on the needs of students in minority schools and it was pioneering for its time, but only at the time it was introduced.

Teachers point out that nowadays books seem to be at a very low cognitive level compared to those used in typical schools. For example, they argue that the level of sixth grade of minority schools is closer to the level of second grade of typical schools. As a result, this reveals the need for a change in the books of minority schools adapted to the needs of students. Concurrently, two teachers stated that the books utilized for minority students are still considered suitable for the students’ needs, as they are written based on the needs of minority and bilingual students.

*“If someone observes the books of minority education, regarding the Greek program, they lack far behind in relation to the public-school books. For example, the 6th grade books in minority schools’ level are closer to the level of the 2nd grade of public schools than the 6th grade books...” (P2) “At that time (at the start of the PEM program), the books that were introduced were something pioneering.” (P6)*

Lastly, three teachers argue that teachers in minority schools seem to have no or a little training based on the needs of minority students, or even in the teaching of bilingual-multilingual students. More specifically, the recruitment of teachers is done without any specialization in the education of bilingual-multilingual students, as there is a common recruitment table for teachers of majority and minority schools. As a result, some of the teachers who work in these schools had no idea even of the existence of these specific schools and the way that they operate, before starting working in those. In their opinion, this event brings to the surface the need for training of teachers in the education of bilingual - multilingual students, using mentors and training with practical application and practice.

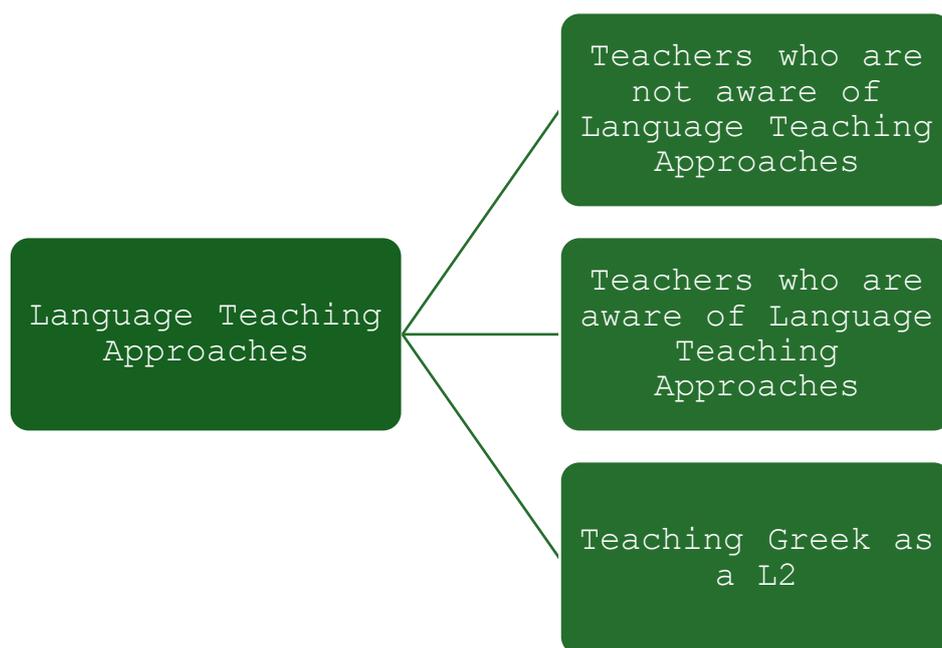
*“... Let’s say, practical training, its more necessary. For example, it is important for a teacher to have a consultant come into the classroom and show these methods...Some training which will last longer. This has to be done somehow, because with few hours of training, you gain nothing” (P2)*

*“I mean, when I first came here to Xanthi, I had no idea what a minority school was... So, I think it is wrong. Maybe there should be a specialization from the state. Maybe those who want to go to minority schools should first undergo training so that they can cope. And so that they can do their job properly...” (P3).*

## *2<sup>nd</sup> Axis: Language Teaching Approaches utilized in Greek Language Instruction*

*Research Question; What language teaching approaches do teachers employ when instructing the Greek language course? Is it taught as a first or second language?*

The second thematic axis is formed by three thematic categories. The two first categories refer to the teachers and they divide them into those that are not aware of the language teaching approaches and to those who are aware of the language teaching approaches, while the last one, refers to the teaching of the Greek language as a second language.



Taking into consideration the first category there are three teachers who conflate the pedagogical teaching methods with the language teaching methods, so their replies did not answer the question of what language teaching methods they use, rather than the pedagogical ones. Their answers were about the way they work in their classes, such as the student-centered model, cooperative learning, the Montessori model and the supervisory material they use for their lessons. Even if they use some of the language learning methods, they are not aware of their use.

*“I use the student-centered model. I base it on the student. I take the knowledge that the students know, or we recall it from their memory” (P2)*

*“We use a lot of supervisory media. We don’t have frontal teaching. We prefer the children to be in small groups. A little Montessori... Because the conditions are special” (P6).*

On the other hand, in the second thematic category there are the rest three teachers who are aware of the language teaching methods, and they use them. Three of those teachers have a specialization in multicultural education or they follow the recent trends on bilinguals’ education based on their own investigation. More specifically, all the teachers agree that the methods they use differ based on the background of the students, their level of exposure to the Greek language based on where they live, the support they

have from their families and their unique needs, so in most cases they use a mix of different methods to meet their students' needs.

*“Each time we have to reconsider the needs of the students. Depending on the needs of the student and the needs of the lesson. You had to use a lot of visual material.” (P6)*

*“So, I don't use just one (method), depending on what I want to teach and to whom. And depending on if it is a small class, a large class... I told you the Roma are different, the Pomaks are different, the families differ from one another. The population and the needs are very heterogeneous... It changed from village to village. For example, neighboring villages, the regime and the environment that the teacher had to adapt to have been completely different, ... And in the city, there is no relation to the villages, in the city they had other problems” (P5).*

Some of the techniques that were mentioned to be used from the three teachers for the Greek language course tend to be more traditional and most of them are more modern approached. Those are; a) Grammar-Translation Method, focusing on grammar rules and translation between the target language and the first language of the students, lacking real-world abilities in communication, b) the Communicative Approach, teaching based on creating a need for communication, c) Task-based approach, creating activities based on everyday communication, on basic everyday communication needs, d) the Drama-based approach, using the theater to motivate students to speak Greek.

*“Certainly, for them to learn to read, I used syllables, they basically learned them by heart...and that's how they learned to read, because they learned them by heart... Then many times we had write what a word or phrase is called in their language, to say it in Greek and help the beginners on this to write it in both languages” (P1).*

*“You basically try to create the need for communication. And it was all based on that. There must be a need. We play a game, “the shop”, so the students have to read the price list... We have to send a letter...to our neighbor, to our cousin, to someone who lives in another country, but you had to create the need for communication in the Greek language which the students don't*

*have... They don't use Greek for their communication except from school. So, it has to be an activity in the middle, to be activity-centered, so that there would be a means of communication in Greek” (P4)*

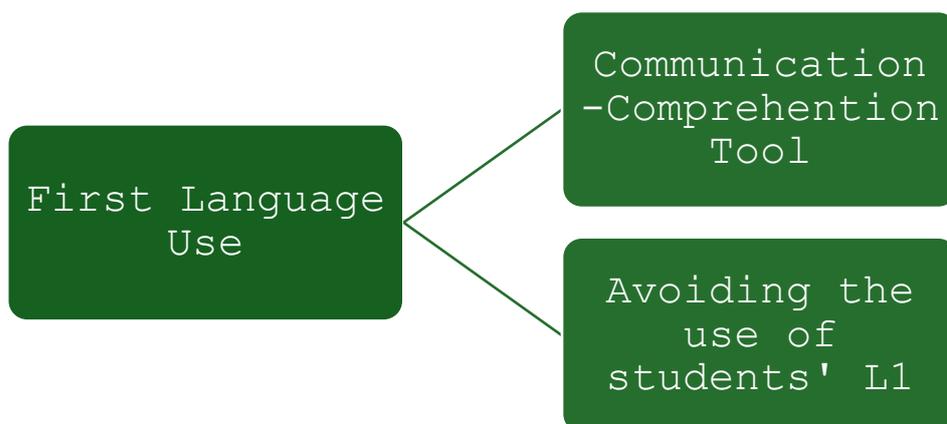
Lastly, based on the third thematic category, the Greek language course was taught as a second language from all the teachers. This is based on the fact that in every school the teachers use the PEM programs' books that are focused on teaching Greek as the second language of the students. Concurrently, the participants in their teaching seem to adapt to the language and comprehension needs of the students as bilinguals being taught a second language.

*“We approach Greek in a way that would be the second language. That we would start from scratch. And we started from scratch, learning first how to get around, necessities. How to go to the toilet to what the door is called so that they understand. It was not an easy thing to do... ”. (P6)*

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Axis: First Language Use in Greek language course*

*Research Question; How is the students' first language utilized in the teaching of Greek language course?*

The third thematic axis includes two thematic categories. The first thematic category is adverted to the use of the students first language as a tool of communication and comprehension, while the second category reports the avoidance of the teachers using the students' first language.



The research revealed that the first language is used by all teachers mainly as communication and comprehension tool between them and their students. The use of the students' first language is considered an instrument for basic communication, so the teachers are aware of the basic vocabulary on the students' L1. The teachers seem to use the L1 of the students' especially in the first grades of primary school, in order to get familiar with them, make them feel more closure and concurrently to make sure that the students understand what they ask and say. The application of students' L1 is mainly using basic vocabulary, through Google Translate and through the use of students that have higher proficiency in the Greek language as interpreters during the lesson.

*“I use the students' language as a tool, for convenience and for me to know that they certainly understood what I say. Some teachers have attended Turkish language classes to communicate more properly”. (P5)*

*“Then many times I asked, older children, when we were all together, to translate words and phrases in their language and help the beginners to write it in both languages” (P1)*

Considering the second thematic category, there is a trend in which five out of the teachers, even if they use in some level the students' L1, they mention that they try to avoid the first language of the students, or at least to use it for the first grades of primary school until the students gain the basic communication skills in the Greek language. After they gain those skills in Greek, they avoid using the students' L1 as their target is to have more opportunities speaking in the Greek language. The teachers seem to base

this preference on the fact that in some villages the only opportunity for contact in the Greek language is at school. In villages with exclusively minority population, the opportunity of speaking Greek is limited to the school environment, or in the limited chances that they have in visiting their district's cities.

*“As a tool at the early stages, but after this stage we should learn Greek, so the students should start speaking Greek” (P6).*

*“My colleagues and I, together, know five words in Turkish, and we used them. At first, we tried to avoid it, but inevitably some words, let's say, remained in the vocabulary. Even the smallest ones.” (P4)*

## **8. Discussion**

The main purpose of this research is to explore the views of teachers at minority schools on the methods employed in teaching the Greek language course whether it is approached as a first or second language in minority schools.

In this chapter we seek to discuss the most important conclusions of the research in the light of the theoretical paths that shaped our thinking regarding the questions under investigation.

### *Language education policies and minority students' needs*

From the interviews of the teachers, it is evident the trend of the need for an update in the educational policies of minority schools. One of the most prominent issues that emerged, based on the teachers' views, is that the program of minority schools is based on data and needs of students from previous eras, which do not comply with the needs of the students today. This need seems reasonable since the first and essentially the only Curriculum and Timetable of Minority Schools, was established in 1957 "On the Curriculum and Timetable of Muslim Schools" which is still formally in force today (Dimasi, Papastamatis & Stogios, 2014). Additionally, the last try of an upgrade in minority education was based on the “Education of the Muslim Minority Children in Thrace Program” that no longer continues.

Similarly, Maligkoudi & Mavrommatis (2025), agree on the fact that studies in the topic of minority education have been restricted since the adoption of the "Education of Muslim Minority Children in Thrace Program". In contrast, their study highlights the need to identify and improve dynamic bilingualism in minority schools that should be at the center of policy review procedures, bilingual education research, and goals set by stakeholders. As a result, according to the participants, the need for a change in the educational policies of minority schools is now imperative, as the current program is outdated and does not meet the modern demands of students. A curriculum that is not renewed remains disconnected from the real needs of students, depriving them of the opportunity to develop their skills.

Concurrently, regarding to our findings there is a tendency that shows that the books that are utilized for the Greek language course, do not meet the needs of the students in minority schools. To be more precise, the books used in those schools were designed within the framework of the PEM program that was in charge for the minority education from 1997-2019, which take into account the fact that Greek is not the student's L1, and they were established in the minority schools in 2000-1 as official books of the Greek language program of the OEDB, which are used till our days. Consequently, the needs of the students have changed since the day that these books were introduced, as they have passed 25 years. Those books were written far before the time that the establishment of mandatory preschool attendance and as a result the students with their import in the primary school have much different needs than when they did not have to attend to preschool education. As a result, there is a need for new books, designed based on today students' needs and based on the recent scientific data of bilinguals' and multilinguals' education (Tsitselikis et. al., 2019).

However, two of the teachers stated that the books utilized for minority students are still considered suitable for the students' needs, as they are written based on the needs of minority and bilingual students. This finding may result from the fact that these teachers have worked mainly in schools with a homogeneous population that has limited contact with other groups, and therefore limited use of the Greek language.

At the same time, the findings show the issue of the teachers' qualifications in minority schools. According to the participants, the recruitment of teachers is done without any

specialization in the education of bilingual-multilingual students, as there are no special requirements for recruitment in minority schools (Georgiadis, 2021). In their opinion, this fact brings to the surface the need for training of teachers in the education of bilingual - multilingual students.

Out of the participants, only two have Masters in Intercultural Education and one completed a seminar in Second Language Education. The choice of those teachers' specialization is due to their personal desire and investigation and not due to any mandatory requirements. This fact seems to affect our results, as the participants that have some specialization on this topic were able to answer to the questions concerning the language teaching methods used in their teaching, while those who did not have some specializations were not able to answer to basic second language teaching methods, knowledge that seems crucial for teaching in minority institutions. In other words, we conclude that the level of specialization in teaching bilingual students seems at a low level, if we include the fact that the recruitment of teachers is done without any specialization in the education of bilingual-multilingual students, as there is a common recruitment table for teachers of majority and minority schools (Georgiadis, 2021).

Within the framework of the PEM program, there has been an attempt for teachers training, which began with the start of the project in 1997. However, this program's operation ended in 2019, leaving those training sessions in the past. This raises the concern whether the introduction of a new series of training courses should be implemented or whether the implementation of a mandatory specialization on the minority schools' needs should be applied (Dragona, 2020).

From the above we understand that between the teachers there is the trend of view that the minority school is not able to meet the needs of minority students, as the overall program, as well as the utilized books, are considered outdated. Therefore, we agree that a change based on new scientific data, as well as the current needs of students in minority schools, and the teachers' training on bilinguals' teaching is considered necessary.

*Language teaching methods utilized in the Greek language course*

The research findings show the language teaching methods that are utilized by the teachers for the Greek language course. More specifically, all the participants seem to use a mix of different methods based on the students' profile and their unique needs. Even if some of the methods used are described to be traditional methods, most of the teachers' choices show a shift to more contemporary teaching methods. More specifically, only three of the teachers were able to answer about the language teaching methods that they utilize to their lesson. This finding may show that the fact which these teachers could answer the question or the fact that they use recent trends in bilingual education is based on their specialization on intercultural education or second language teaching.

One of the traditional methods described to be used by one of the teachers is that of the Grammar-Translation method, which is part of the structural teaching approaches. The teacher that uses this particular method, has described using translation in the students' first language as a way of better comprehension for the students. In this method grammar is taught productively, by presenting the rules first and applying them to examples. The main goal of this method is to develop the ability to understand texts, while less emphasis is placed on listening and speaking. (Khalil& Semono-Eke, 2020).

Even if studies seem to show that L1 can be a significant bridging tool to assist students accomplish tasks and build their interlanguage, GTM by some researchers as Omar (2019) is considered an outdated method, as it does not help students to successfully communicate in their L2. According to Akramy et al. (2022), an effective way of using this method is combining it with the Communicative approach, as the first targets in accuracy and the second aims in fluency (Akramy et al. 2022). As a result, teaching through GTM seems very useful for grammar teaching, however it seems to lack effective communication skills to the students, so a combination of methods seems appropriate.

On the other hand, based on the most contemporary methods, teachers referred to the Communicative Method, which is considered one of the Analytical teaching approaches. It is designed to assist students in developing target language communication abilities. The two participants that use it, have mentioned that they use this method to create the need for communication in order for the students to speak

using the Greek language during the lesson. As a result, the students are in a way obliged to use and practice in using the Greek language. Teachers create role-play games such as “shop-game,” “flea market-game” for the students to have and learn through real life scenario.

As Valero et al. (2019) similarly argue, the communicative approach emphasizes the interaction between students and the language, while grammar is taught only when it is necessary to understand meaning. Communicative approach promotes language speaking and sharing and often advocates use role-playing activities, group talks, problem-based instruction, technology-assisted tactics, and visual-only video instructional techniques.

In this way, communication contributes to the creation of a more participatory and collaborative learning environment, where students develop language skills through meaningful and creative communication. In our case, Communicative approach seems to be reasonably used as it focuses in speaking in real-life scenarios, in which our target group of students lacks, as they use the Greek language in limited every-day situations, while it emphasizes in teaching grammar in occasions that meaning is necessary to understand the concept, something that seems important for the low proficiency students.

Another approach referred to by two of the participants is that of the Task-Based Method, which also belongs to the Analytical approaches. This method is based on activities, which focus on external goals and immediate, visible successes (Wu, 2016). Some research shows that Task-based learning is a successful method of teaching languages that combines purposeful language learning activities with practical assignments to achieve communicative outcomes. Implementing this can enhance students' motivation to study by providing genuine assignments in the language they want to learn (Mulyadi, Wijayatiningsih, Singh & Prastjkawati, 2021).

The research participants who use this method referred to creating task-based activities on the students' needs and real-life activities that have some purpose, as it is focused on relying on oral communication skills that can be useful in students' real interactions in their L2. The choice of this method seems reasonable, as the Task-based method is

one of the most preferable methods in second language teaching, based on the recent scientific data, and as it seems to motivate students using their L2.

Lastly, one of the approaches used by the teachers is that of the Drama-Based method. The participant who used this approach, supported that this method activates and prompts the students in order to use the Greek language, while getting familiar in real-life scenarios. Indeed, drama-based approaches may be employed as effective learning aid in second language teaching provided, they are well-structured and developed. Drama contextualizes language, it provides learners with real-life experiences and gives them the ability to interact with society outside of their learning environment. In minority schools and specifically in cases of villages where the use of L2 is restricted to the environment of school, the use of Drama-based method provides the chance for communication based on experiences outside of school (Bessadet, 2022).

Another important element that emerges from this research's results is the way that the Greek language is taught in minority schools. The teaching of Greek in minority schools follows an approach that treats it as a second language for students. This is due to the fact that the PEM program books, that are utilized till today in minority schools, have been specifically designed for the teaching of Greek as a second language. According to the official website of the PEM program (2025), the language material used takes into account the particular circumstances of minority schools, the students who are bilingual, with different cultural backgrounds, that many of them have little or no knowledge of Greek when they start school and education is based on bilingual teaching, in order to facilitate the learning of Greek.

Concurrently, teachers in this research seem to recognize this reality and adapt their teaching to the needs of students, in order to facilitate the learning of Greek as a second language. The teaching of Greek in minority schools follows an approach that takes into account the linguistic and cultural needs of the students.

Based on the above, in minority schools the Greek language seems to be taught as a second language, while it is evident that there is a tendency for the teachers to use a mix of methods based on their students' needs, as all of them answered to use a mix of them. Concurrently, while more traditional methods are still visible in minority schools,

one of the teachers seems to use it, while the shift toward more modern methods is evident, as two of the teachers use them on a regular basis.

### *L1 use in L2 teaching*

The interviews of the teachers who participated in the research also reveal the tendency of the use of the students' first language that serves as tool during the Greek language lessons. More specifically, the first language use is based to provide higher comprehension and a media of communication between the teacher and the students. According to Cummins and his "Common Underlying Competence" model, there is the possibility of transferring language skills from one language to another. More specifically, the adequate development of each of the two languages depends on the development of the other. The outdated theory of "Subjective Ability Model", in which the first and second languages operate independently, without the transfer of knowledge from one language to the other, belongs to the past (Nefaa, Boutora & Gala, 2022).

Concurrently, according to Zulfikar (2019), bilingual learners, particularly those with poor ability, can express themselves more clearly and effectively in their L1, while the L1 use breaks communication barriers. In classrooms, stringent L2-only policies can lead to misunderstanding and communication breakdowns. Integrating L1 into L2 classrooms improves classroom dynamics by providing a sense of security and validating learners' living experiences, giving them the opportunity to express themselves. As a result, the use of the minority students' L1 in L2 learning can provide a useful tool, with which the students can comprehend the lesson and participate in it without misunderstanding obstacles.

However, even if the students' L1 is considered a useful tool for communication, the research reveals a critical issue in the teaching of the Greek language, five out of six teachers do not take into account the L1 of their students. This is a practice that ignores the linguistic and cultural identity of the students and creates serious obstacles to the learning process. The teachers seem to avoid the L1 of the students, or at least to only use it for the first grades of primary school, until the students gain the basic communication skills in the Greek language. The base of this belief is their opinion

that for some students the only opportunity for contact in the Greek language is at school.

Similarly, in the study of Kalliga, Palaiologou & Magos, K. (2022), although teachers' current views on bilingual education are known, the data revealed the paradox that while instructors claimed to respect minority students' cultural identities and they recognized the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, they were hesitant employing the students' first language as a teaching tool. In that study it was clear that the teachers seemed to prioritize the learning of the Greek language, considering it the most important goal for the integration of students into modern Greek society.

Scientific research has shown that the first language is the foundation for effective second language learning. When students do not have the opportunity to utilize their existing language knowledge, learning Greek becomes more difficult and less effective. Instead of utilizing bilingualism as a cognitive advantage, a monolingual approach is applied that ignores the linguistic realities of students (Nefaa, Boutora & Gala, 2022).

The above makes clear that the use of the students' first language by the teachers is visible in minority schools, as a tool that can support their Greek language lessons. Nevertheless, there is still hesitation on its use, as it is supported that the use of the Greek language by the students is only visible in the school environment.

Conclusively, we end up with the results which show the tendency that the education provided in minority schools does not cover the needs of students, as it needs an update based on the current scientific data and the current needs of the students. Even if the Greek language is taught as a second language, the scientific data used for the design of the schoolbooks also need an update. Concurrently, referring to the level of qualification of the teachers there is a division among teachers regarding their training in teaching bilingual students. This is based on the fact that educators are hired without any specialization in the field, while those who are specialized in the field are because of their own choice. Additionally, there is a visible inclination in which the language teaching methods used for the Greek language course, highlight a shift toward more innovative approaches. Lastly, teachers at minority schools seem to utilize pupils' first language as a tool to complement their Greek language teaching. Nonetheless, there is some skepticism about its usage.

### *8.1 Recommendations for further research*

The present research proposes an effort to imprint the teachers' views who work in minority schools in Thrace regarding the process of teaching Greek within these educational institutions. However, because of its limited extent, it lacks room for generalizations to a wider population. Consequently, a proposal for future study would be to investigate teachers' opinions and practices on a broader sample of teachers from all levels of education. All these perspectives would provide for a more comprehensive understanding of the reality that existed at the time inside minority schools.

Moreover, another important aspect to be examined, would be the comparison of views of teachers who have participated in training programs regarding the education of bilingual students with those who have not participated in corresponding programs, regarding second language teaching in minority schools. The results of this investigation could underline the importance of specialized training in creating teaching techniques that promote bilingual students' language development and learning advancement.

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## **Appendix**

### *Interview Guide*

#### *1<sup>st</sup> AXIS - EDUCATORS AND THE EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT*

1. Tell me about your profession, your experience as a teacher and the school you work at.
2. Describe the profile of your students.
3. What languages do your students use in the school context?

*2<sup>nd</sup> AXIS – OPINIONS ON LANGUAGE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES*

1. What do you think of the minority school's curriculum?
2. Does it meet the language needs of the students?
3. How do you judge the decisions taken by the state regarding the education of minority students?
4. Are you aware of the recent scientific data on second language education? For example, the use of the student's first language for second language instruction?
5. Do you believe that the existing language education policies in minority schools consider recent scientific second language teaching data?

*3<sup>rd</sup> AXIS – STUDENTS FIRST LANGUAGE IN TEACHING*

1. Which methods do you use in teaching Greek to minority students?
2. Which language(s) do you use during the courses?
3. If you use the students first language in your teaching, which methods do you use?

Author's Statement:

I hereby expressly declare that, according to the article 8 of Law 1559/1986, this dissertation is solely the product of my personal work, does not infringe any intellectual property, personality and personal data rights of third parties, does not contain works/contributions from third parties for which the permission of the authors/beneficiaries is required, is not the product of partial or total plagiarism, and that the sources used are limited to the literature references alone and meet the rules of scientific citations.