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# DEVELOPMENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

*Inspiring Teachers, Transforming Learners*

*Edited by Stella Kourieos*

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# Developments in Foreign Language Teaching



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Stella Kourieos

**Cambridge  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Abbreviations.....	ix
Acknowledgements .....	x
Introduction .....	xi

## **Part I: Pedagogical Approaches to Foreign Language Teaching**

Chapter One.....	2
Assisting the Acquisition of Technical Vocabulary through Explicit Instruction of Vocabulary Learning Strategies <i>Stella Kourieos</i>	
Chapter Two .....	26
Metacognitive Modelling and the Think-Aloud Strategy: Verbalisations Visualising Textual Worlds to Shape Expert Readers <i>Evangelia Vassilakou</i>	
Chapter Three .....	54
A Placebo-Controlled Word-Recognition Testing in English as L2 and Attitudes among Adolescent Dyslexic Learners in Greece <i>Vasileios Ioannis Koutroumpas</i>	

## **Part II: Intercultural Awareness in Primary Schools**

Chapter Four.....	78
The Role of Technology in Language Teaching Concerning the Educational Integration of Children with Migrant Biography <i>Maria Diakou</i>	

Chapter Five .....	95
Interculturalism in the FL Classes: Towards an Understanding of Teachers' Perspectives and Practices within the Young Language Learners' Classrooms	
<i>Isaak Papadopoulos</i>	
<b>Part III: Language Teacher Education</b>	
Chapter Six .....	118
Using Literature for Language Skills Development and Increase of the Students' Intercultural Awareness	
<i>Neophytos Mitsigkas</i>	
Chapter Seven.....	137
The Role of Reflection in Teachers' Educational and Professional Development	
<i>Sviatlana Karpava</i>	
List of Contributors .....	156

## LIST OF TABLES

- Table 1-1 Description of vocabulary knowledge (Adapted from Nation 2001)
- Table 2-1 Student's checklist template with think aloud language for strategy training
- Table 2-2 Think aloud rubric for students' assessment
- Table 2-3 Class Performance Report
- Table 3-1 Mean scores and Standard Deviation on the Reaction Times (RT).
- Table 3-2 T-test, Degrees of Freedom, P-value, and Standard Error Difference.
- Table 5-1 Teaching Methods/Activities used by teachers
- Table 5-2 Educational materials used in the multicultural classroom
- Table 5-3 Communication Strategies employed by students
- Table 5-4 Teachers' behaviour in terms of promoting learners' communication strategies
- Table 5-5 Teachers' awareness of intercultural communication strategies
- Table 6-1 Teachers' demographic information
- Table 7-1 Framework on Descriptive and Reflective Entries



## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1-1 Example of a word entry taken from  
<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>
- Figure 1-2 Screenshot of student's entry in the online dictionary
- Figure 2-1 Descriptive statistics and students' reading improvement
- Figure 2-2 The average score for each reading level
- Figure 3-1 Adapted from: Elements of Treatment Context (Wager and Atlas 2015)
- Figure 5-1 Distribution based on the gender.
- Figure 5-2 Years of Teaching Experience/Employment
- Figure 5-3 Participants' educational background
- Figure 5-4 Teachers' behaviour in multicultural classrooms
- Figure 5-5 Thematic Unit "Learning about Cyprus": The Statue of Liberty, Nicosia (Cyprus)
- Figure 5-6 Thematic Unit "Learning about Serbia": Playing with Montessori Materials
- Figure 5-7 Thematic Unit "Learning about Albania": Spot the differences and circle the similarities
- Figure 5-8 Thematic Unit "Learning about the United Kingdom": British Bus in our classroom
- Figure 7-1 Frequency of occurrence of traits of critical reflectivity in each category
- Figure 7-2 The degree of development in critical reflectivity: Journal entries

## ABBREVIATIONS

APA	American Psychological Association
BSc	Bachelor of Science
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference
CELTA	Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults
CONSTRADE	Content and Communication Strategies Development
DV	Dependent Variable
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESAP	English for Specific Academic Purposes
FL	Foreign Language
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
IRE	Initiation-Response-Evaluation
IV	Independent Variable
L1	First language
L2	Second Language
LDT	Lexical Decision Task
MA	Master of Arts
MOEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MOECYS	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth
RT	Reaction/Response times
SEAs4ALL	Successful Educational Actions for All
SEN	Special Educational Needs
TA	Thematic Analysis
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
VLS	Vocabulary Learning Strategies

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# INTRODUCTION

The field of teaching English as a foreign language to speakers of other languages (TESOL) is a rapidly evolving field constantly undergoing reassessment with new ideas emerging and old ones revisited and questioned. As such, it merits continuous investigation aiming at inspiring teachers to use pedagogical instructional practices which promote improved student learning. Advanced technology, changes in demographic nature of students in educational contexts worldwide due to globalisation, the inclusion of students with special learning difficulties in mainstream education and the emergence of English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) are some phenomena, amongst others, that have influenced our understanding of the nature of foreign language teaching and learning in the last few decades. This has not only brought about a number of changes in the way foreign languages are taught and learnt, but it also has significant implications for the curriculum of teacher education programmes.

This volume is a collection of adapted papers which were presented at the annual CyTEA conference in Cyprus, in November, 2019. It provides a source of readings based on research and non-research informed practices which aim at sensitising teachers, researchers, and teacher educators, to a diversity of important aspects of foreign language teaching following the aforementioned changes while at the same time it offers practical implications for the training of language teachers. The papers which appear in this volume have been selected on the basis of their content as they address a diversity of topics pertaining to the general theme of the book. More specifically, they feature a range of topics related to different aspects of language teaching and teacher education, as these have been explored and implemented by practitioners and researchers in various educational contexts and levels following the current trends in education.

The edited volume includes seven chapters which fall into three thematic categories and are presented in the following three sections: (a) Pedagogical approaches to foreign language teaching, (b) Intercultural awareness in primary schools, and (c) Language teacher education. This book provides practitioners, researchers, and teacher educators with guidance, recommendations, and suggestions, supported by evidence-based research or long experience, which they can use to prepare learners, be it student learners or teacher learners, for the on-going changes that take place

in today's globalised world and more specifically in the field of TESOL. The paragraphs which follow provide a summary of the chapters in the book.

The first category which comprises three chapters focuses on pedagogical approaches to language teaching. The first chapter authored by **Stella Kourieos** reports on a study which examines the effectiveness of explicit instruction of vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) in assisting the acquisition of technical vocabulary in an ESAP psychology course. Specifically, this study, aims at raising students' awareness of important aspects of word knowledge found in monolingual dictionaries and encouraging autonomous learning by actively engaging students in the joint creation of an online dictionary which incorporates the use of various VLSs. The chapter concludes with suggestions for dealing with the limitations identified. In the second chapter, **Evangelia Vassilakou** addresses the usefulness of think-aloud strategy as an instruction approach and its effectiveness in developing foreign language learners' reading literacy as opposed to traditional reading instruction. This paper contributes to the EFL field by offering more practical suggestions on the development of the ability to use think alouds to improve reading performance and provides recommendations for future research. The third chapter authored by **Vasileios Koutroumpas** seeks to expound the importance of motivation and peripheral difficulties within English as a foreign language teaching and learning in conjunction with Dyslexia. The author suggests that the 'placebo effect' (i.e. a deceptive, yet cogent 'treatment') appears to be conducive towards learners' performance and attitudes, hence, he calls for the reconceptualisation of teaching methods and diagnostic tools used with dyslexic foreign language learners.

The next category shifts our attention to the issue of multiculturalism in state primary schools in Cyprus and Greece and teachers' efforts to respond to the challenges of migration and multiculturalism through appropriate teaching that will shape a school environment of mutual understanding and respect for all cultures and ethnicities. In chapter 4, **Maria Diakou** shares her experience of implementing technology in the context of multicultural Cypriot Primary Schools in an attempt to create a stimulating language learning environment which will help students develop a positive attitude towards different cultures. Informed by the aims of the European Project SEAs4ALL (Successful Educational Actions for All) of which she was an active member, the author proposes a number of activities/materials supported by technology which can be utilised by teachers in their effort to promote inclusion in the classroom and raise students' awareness of cultural differences. In the next chapter, **Isaak**

**Papadopoulos** examines Greek primary FL teachers' perspectives and practices in relation to developing interculturally competent students in an attempt to facilitate their smooth integration within the social context of the classroom, and encourage multicultural friendships and exchanges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Based on the findings drawn from this study, the author highlights the need for professional development on theoretical and pedagogical issues and practices related to the promotion of interculturalism in the primary classrooms.

The third category included in this volume comprises two chapters which make recommendations about the content and instructional practices used in teacher education programmes. Specifically, **Neophytos Mitsigkas** reports on a study which looks at the role of literature in English language teaching and learning. The author advocates the use of novels in particular, as an invaluable source of motivating and stimulating activities that can contribute to the increase of students' language and intercultural awareness. He concludes with significant pedagogical implications concerning the use of literature as an authentic teaching material in teacher education curricula. In the final chapter of this volume, **Sviatlana Karpava** investigates the effect of reflective practice and highlights the importance of integrating reflective journal writing in the training of both, pre-service and in-service teachers, as it contributes to teachers' growth and professional development.

The book offers valuable information to teachers and researchers working in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) which can be used for learning about the latest developments in the field and for getting some practical ideas that can help them further develop their teaching skills, optimise their students' learning and revisit their practices.

**Dr Stella Kourieos**  
**Editor**



**PART I:**

**PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE TEACHING**



# CHAPTER ONE

## ASSISTING THE ACQUISITION OF TECHNICAL VOCABULARY THROUGH EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION OF VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES

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### Abstract

Functional language proficiency, which is a requirement in ESAP courses, requires mastery of a considerably large number of technical words which must be learnt in a relatively short period of time. Additionally, the acquisition of L2 vocabulary is a difficult process, as simply recognising the meaning of a word when found in a text does not ensure its solid retention in the mental lexicon and thus it does not become part of a learner's productive ability. Cognitive psychologists have suggested that learners' active involvement with the word's meaning leads to deeper word processing and aids retention, therefore, foreign language learners need to be introduced to a number of Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) which will encourage them to work with the words in this way. This chapter describes the process of engaging two groups of psychology students in the development of an online ESAP dictionary which incorporates some of these strategies, and reports on students' perceived benefits and challenges of using these strategies for learning technical vocabulary. Based on the findings of this study, some suggestions for the improvement and more successful implementation of such vocabulary tasks in ESAP contexts are offered.

**Key words:** Vocabulary Learning Strategies, ESAP, dictionary skills, technology

## 1. Introduction

Changes which have been brought about by various aspects of globalisation, accelerated by technological advances, particularly the internet, have given English a prominent role in various fields, including science and academia. This spread of English as a dominant language of communication and means of instruction in many institutions of higher education has been particularly influential in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), especially in contexts where the English modules seem to serve a different purpose across disciplines. This has led to the emergence of ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes) courses which focus on the development of language skills specific for academic study in a particular discipline (i.e. psychology, computer science, nursing, to name a few). More specifically, these courses aim at facilitating students to cope with input texts (i.e. listening & reading) and developing skills which will enable them to get the most out of lectures and written texts, and to produce academic pieces of writing on discipline-related topics while avoiding plagiarism.

Functional language proficiency, which is a requirement in ESAP courses, requires mastery of a considerably large number of technical words which must be learnt in a relatively short period of time. However, while a number of high frequency words can be learnt incidentally in an incremental way, this process is impossible to simulate with technical words, which are less intensive and varied (Groot 2000). Research has shown that the relationship between vocabulary knowledge, and more specifically, reading comprehension and fluency is symbiotic, which means that, as students' vocabulary is broadened, their reading, writing and listening ability, essential for academic success, is enhanced and vice versa (Laufer and Ravenhorst-Kalovski 2010; Willis and Ohashi 2012). In ESAP courses, students are exposed to discipline-related texts which can be both authentic or simplified for language learners, but whatever the case, they still include a large amount of technical words; these words, while uncommon in general use of the language, are critical to the comprehension of the text (oral or written) in which they occur, and therefore necessary to learn (Nation 2001). This poses an even greater challenge for students enrolled in such courses for a number of reasons, the most important being their relatively low frequency, which in turn, impedes their acquisition and solid embedding in the mental lexicon, as it is the case with L1 acquisition (Groot 2000). Inferencing of the meaning of technical words from context can also be problematic considering that less proficient learners have limited vocabulary because of lower language competence which makes it

impossible for them to understand the context itself in the first place. Another difficulty encountered when learning technical vocabulary relates to the fact that, the general meanings of certain everyday words are already established in the learners' lexicon, hence, the specific meanings and usage of these words in a particular discipline are difficult to learn (Coxhead 2013). Finally, some of the technical words may need specialist knowledge of the field (Nation 2001), which neither the students nor the language instructor may have, at least to the extent required (Chung and Nation 2003).

Apart from the challenges foreign language learners may have to deal with when learning technical vocabulary, the acquisition of L2 vocabulary is generally a difficult process as simply recognising the meaning of a word when found in a text does not ensure its solid retention in the mental lexicon and thus, it does not become part of a learner's productive ability. However, for the latter to happen, it is essential for the language instructor to equip learners with independent vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), which will allow continuous learning once the course is finished.

The purpose of the current research was to engage psychology students in the development of an online ESAP dictionary which incorporated some of these strategies, in an attempt to gain insights into their [students'] perceived benefits, and challenges encountered when using them for learning technical vocabulary. Therefore, measuring the vocabulary gains made by the students was beyond the scope of this research study.

The chapter begins with a review of the relevant literature concerning different types of vocabulary knowledge and the importance of exposing students to explicit vocabulary learning strategies essential for effective dictionary use which have proved to assist the acquisition of technical vocabulary. It then discusses the methodology and findings of the study followed by a discussion of the major issues involved. The chapter ends with conclusions and pedagogical implications.

## 2. Literature Review

Considering the time constraints and vocabulary complexities discussed in the introduction, it follows that efficient acquisition of technical vocabulary requires explicit instruction of vocabulary learning strategies and a conscious effort from the learner. This requires a careful analysis of *what* types of word knowledge should be learned and *how* they should be learned, these being the issues addressed in the subsections which follow.

## 2.1 Vocabulary Knowledge

In connection with word knowledge, a distinction is commonly made between *receptive* and *productive* vocabulary, each type focusing on specific aspects of language proficiency. Hedge (2014) for example, defines receptive (or passive) vocabulary as the learner's ability to recall and recognise multiple aspects of word knowledge when encountered in reading and listening, but which the learner cannot easily produce in speech or writing. On the other hand, he refers to productive (or active) vocabulary as the learner's ability to retrieve a word from memory and use it automatically in writing and speaking. In other words, the first dimension is related to the comprehension of a word's meaning essential for receptive skills while the second dimension is associated with the ability to access and use the appropriate spoken or written form of a word in the target language to express a meaning by speaking or writing (Nation 1990).

When discussing vocabulary, a distinction is also made between *breadth* of vocabulary, that is the number of words that a language learner knows (Nation 2001) and *depth* of vocabulary which is knowledge of various aspects of word knowledge (Read 2000), or knowledge of how these aspects interact with each other (Meara 2009), with the former generally considered much easier to acquire than the latter. It is therefore possible to assume that while vocabulary size is central to students' success in comprehending input texts, attention to different aspects of word knowledge plays a significant role in productive skills (Laufer 2013), especially writing, since "lexical items carry the basic information load of the meanings L2 writers wish to comprehend and express" (Read 2004, 146). According to Nassaji (2004, 112), researchers have indicated "the complexity and multi-dimensionality of word knowledge and have suggested that knowing a word well should mean more than knowing its individual meanings in particular contexts."

Nation (1990) perceives the construct of word knowledge as consisting of a comprehensive list of aspects, which need to be mastered by L2 learners in order to fully understand a word and its usage, and be able to use it effectively and productively in context. An awareness of the different aspects of vocabulary knowledge may help teachers to plan activities which focus on the development of students' receptive or/and productive vocabulary considering the time available and the goals of the course. Table 1-1 shows what is involved in gaining depth of word knowledge and which aspects are essential for developing receptive or productive vocabulary respectively.

**Table 1-1 Description of vocabulary knowledge (Adapted from Nation 2001)**

Form & Meaning(s)	R What does the word mean? Are there multiple meanings? P What word form can be used to express this meaning?
Written form	R What does the word look like? P How is the word spelled?
Spoken form	R What does the word sound like? P How is the word pronounced?
Grammatical functions	R In what patterns does this word occur? P In what patterns must we use this word?
Collocations	R What words or types of words occur with this one? P What words or types of words must we use with this one?
Associations	R What other words does this make us think of? P What other words could we use instead of this one?

Note. R = receptive knowledge, P = productive knowledge

Considering that all types of knowledge are essential for effectively understanding and using new vocabulary, it would be unreasonable to expect the teacher to explicitly teach all facets of vocabulary and an entire list of words to learners. If students are to reach an advanced level of lexical development, they need to learn most words outside the classroom instead, and should therefore raise their awareness of the knowledge involved in knowing the multifaceted nature of a lexical item and the process of learning it. As Webb and Nation (2013) advocate, teachers need to help students learn and use strategies to deal with low-frequency words effectively so that the potential for vocabulary learning outside of the classroom will be increased.



## 2.2 Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In recent years, in line with a more learner-focused view of education, the focus has shifted from a more teacher-oriented view of learning to language learners themselves and the way in which they approach the learning task with the aim of equipping them with the skills to work independently, both in and outside the classroom, allowing them more control over what is learnt, when and where that learning takes place (Moir and Nation 2002). To this end, there has been extensive research that supports the instruction of vocabulary learning strategies highlighting their importance in explicitly activating vocabulary (Grabe 2009), in encouraging autonomous and more self-directed learning (Akbari 2015), and in raising learner awareness of particular items which will facilitate subsequent learning and recall (Oxford 2003). In a similar vein, Schmitt (1997, 221) asserts that “learners can see value in strategies which they do not currently use and may be willing to try new strategies if they are introduced to and instructed in them”, an assertion which further supports the explicit instruction of VLSs.

The incorporation of new technologies into everyday life has also had an impact on the way vocabulary is taught and learnt and language teaching/learning is one of the many areas that has witnessed the positive effects afforded by technology. Dictionaries have long been recognised as a learning tool and a primary source of lexical information for most students, especially at tertiary level, to fulfill a variety of academic functions (Akbari 2015). With the widespread use of the internet, more and more online dictionaries, which can be accessed free of charge, continue to appear and evolve through the web, bringing new perspectives on the development of dictionary skills. These innovative and specialised dictionaries, which are easily accessible and readily available, provide learners with information such as easy-to-understand definitions, pronunciation, example sentences, collocations and important grammar tips, essential aspects for deeper word processing. An example taken from Macmillan online dictionary is provided in figure 1-1 below:

## motivation - definition and synonyms ★★




NOUN  Pronunciation /,məʊtɪ'veɪʃ(ə)n/  Word Forms

 Synonyms


 Contribute to our Open Dictionary

- 1 [UNCOUNTABLE] a feeling of enthusiasm or interest that makes you determined to do something  
*You can do anything if you've got the motivation.*  
**improve/increase/strengthen someone's motivation:** *These methods can help to increase students' motivation and interest.*  
**lack/lose motivation:** *She said she had lost her motivation.*

 Synonyms and related words

**Feelings of interest:** *interest, motivation, involvement...*

[Explore Thesaurus](#)

 Synonyms and related words

**Determination and ambition:** *determination, ambition, will...*

Figure 1-1 Example of a word entry taken from <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>

However, lexicographical research shows that regardless of how good a dictionary is, many learners fail to fully exploit the full range of information in dictionaries because of lack of familiarity with formats and codes, and tend to overuse them for comprehension purposes (Ranalli 2003), showing preference to bilingual dictionaries, which they use mostly for referencing L1–L2 translation equivalents (Frankenberg Garcia 2005). As Scholfield (1982) interestingly postulated more than two decades ago, looking up a word in a dictionary is “far from performing a purely mechanical operation” (185), arguing that locating the unknown word in the alphabetic list seems to be the skill most dealt with in respect of training dictionary use, while other important facets involving effective dictionary use receive little attention. It is true that most students, when they encounter an unfamiliar word, are inclined to look for its translation in L1 and ignore other aspects related to understanding the new word (see Table 1-1) which will enable them to use it productively and effectively in a given context. Allied to this premise, Hall (cited in Akbari 2015, 3) maintains that students need to be encouraged and trained to record various aspects of information about a word, not just its meaning as these can be seen to feature prominently in today’s pedagogical dictionaries.

Given the importance of understanding the different aspects involved in word knowledge and mastery of the target language discussed in the introduction, the inclusion and explicit instruction of VLSs in educational programmes and syllabi have been given particular attention in recent years, with researchers in the field highlighting the usefulness of dictionaries as an educational and life-long learning tool which promotes independent vocabulary learning (Akbari 2015; Carduner 2003 ;Frankenberg-Garcia 2011; Ranalli 2013, Wingate 2004).

Schmitt (1997) makes the distinction between discovery strategies which are concerned with the discovery of a new word's meaning, and consolidation strategies which encompass four strategy types (metacognitive, social, cognitive and memory strategies) that facilitate the acquisition of a word after it has been introduced. This chapter will focus on memory strategies, commonly found in monolingual dictionaries, which allow for deeper processing, facilitating in this way long-term retention. According to Schmitt (1997), memory strategies entail the use of imagery, that is learning new words with pictures, word associations that link the new item with related words using a semantic network (i.e. collocations) or sense relationships such as synonymy or antonymy, and the use of aspects of word knowledge such as a word's part of speech as well as its phonological and orthographical form.

### **3. The Study**

#### **3.1 Aims of the Study and Research Questions**

This study aims to raise students' awareness of important aspects of word knowledge found in dictionaries and encourage autonomous learning by actively engaging them in the joint creation of an online dictionary which incorporates the use of various VLSs. In line with this aim, the following research questions were formulated:

- To what extent do students feel they have benefitted from actively engaging in the development of an ESAP dictionary?
- Were there any factors which may have inhibited students to fully engage in the task?



## 3.2 Contextual Background

This study was carried out with two groups of psychology students enrolled in a BSc in Psychology programme of study in a private university in Cyprus where the language of instruction is Greek. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of their studies, students are enrolled in a compulsory credit-bearing ESAP course whose main aim is to help them enhance their technical vocabulary in order to understand articles recommended by their lecturers and to enable them to attend international conferences. Therefore, there is more emphasis on their receptive rather than their productive skills. To manage this situation, a component of explicit instruction on vocabulary learning strategies was added to the syllabus to enable the students to expand their vocabulary in an individualised way.

## 3.3 Participants

Two groups of psychology ESAP students participated in this study. All students were Greek native speakers. Both groups were involved in the same vocabulary task in two consecutive years. Out of seven students who completed the task during the spring semester in 2018 (Group 1), six (2 male and 4 female) agreed to take part in the study. Out of fifteen students who completed the task during the spring semester in 2019, nine (4 male and 5 female) agreed to take part in the study. Students were of varying levels of language proficiency ranging from A2+ to C1+ of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

## 3.4 Vocabulary Task

The task required them to work jointly on Google Docs to create an online psychology dictionary while using a number of vocabulary learning strategies assigned by the teacher. This would lead to their active and autonomous engagement in the development of their technical vocabulary and would also help them develop dictionary skills, an area that was also covered in the coursebook. The use of Google docs seemed suitable for the aims of this task for a number of reasons. This word processing application allows instant feedback and collaboration on student-generated text (Boyes 2016), it is user-friendly and provides a control edit setting which enables teachers to view, edit, and easily place comments in the comments box and in the margins, giving students the opportunity for immediate feedback on their writing. Additionally, changes are saved automatically and all versions of saved documents can be easily retrieved, allowing the teacher to monitor

each student's level of contribution. Finally, the online environment is always up-to-date, it is fast, and provides countless contexts for technical words, correlations, explanations, as well as links to more resources through a number of tools afforded by this app. It is also favoured by the learners because of the independence it offers.

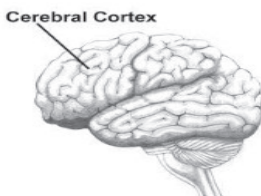
The students were first instructed to create Gmail accounts. A document on Google Docs was created by the instructor and the link was then sent to the students' Gmail with clear guidelines which they had to follow in order to develop an online dictionary based on the topics they studied in class that were taken from an ESAP textbook on Psychology. The link was also sent to two of their lecturers who taught psychology subjects and to a professional psychoanalyst who were asked to contribute with videos, articles or word information when/if they wished. Students were assigned 4 to 5 words weekly which they had to add alphabetically under each unit. They were required to use a number of Memory VLS like the grammatical features of each word, a definition as it is used in psychology, an example, the pronunciation of the word, the L1 translation, derivatives and synonyms where applicable, also stating the part of speech. They were also encouraged to provide possible collocations using semantic mapping, a link to an article or a video related to a topic relevant to a particular word, a picture and/or the meaning of the word as it is used in general English, though the use of these strategies was optional. The students were given feedback each week for their new entries in the dictionary which focused on incorrect definitions or word information, on the simplification of certain examples or synonyms, and/or on additional information not provided by the students. On the first page of the dictionary, students were given useful links they could use like a psychology glossary, a pdf APA psychology dictionary, and two links for collocations. Of course, they were encouraged to also use other sources if they wished. An example of a student's entry is presented in figure 1-2 below.

**Cortex** /n/ [C, pl. Cortices -believe it or not] (φλοιός)

**Definition:** the outer layer (or layers) of a structure, as distinguished from the central core. Usually refers to the anatomy of the brain, where it describes the outer layer of the cerebrum (the cerebral cortex), composed of folded grey matter and plays an important role in consciousness.

**Example:** A therapeutic intervention used for epilepsy in the past was the separation of the brain's two hemispheres by cutting the cerebral cortex in the middle.

**Related words:** cortical /adj./, cerebral cortex (the layer of gray matter that covers the outside of the brain and is associated with higher cognitive functions).

**Hippocampus** /n/ [C, pl. Hippocampi -again, believe it or not] (ιππόκαμπος)

**Definition:** a part of the forebrain, in the basal medial region of the temporal lobe, that is important for declarative memory and learning.

**Example:** Damage to the hippocampus can cause amnesia.

**Related words:** hippocampal /adj./, hippocampal formation (part of the brain related to long-term memory)

Figure 1-2 Screenshot of a student's entry in the online dictionary

### 3.5 Data Collection & Analysis

Semi-structured interviews, which aimed at capturing students' varying perceptions of their involvement in this vocabulary task, were employed for the aims of this study. Additionally, considering the small number of participants, it was felt that interviews would yield richer responses than a questionnaire for example. Participants were asked open-ended questions which aimed at investigating the extent to which they were engaged in the development of this dictionary, and more specifically, their perceived benefits of the various vocabulary learning strategies they were required to use as well as any limitations and/or difficulties encountered. The interviews were recorded after seeking the participants' permission. This allowed for the inclusion of actual quotes from the interviewees and provided credibility and reliability to the collected data (Kvale 2007). Relevant ethical issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and permission to withdraw from the study were fully considered during the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation.

Following guidelines in Dörnyei (2007), the data were transcribed, analysed thematically, and organised under two major categories pertaining to the research questions. The two major categories were further subdivided into more focused thematic groups based on the participants' overlapping

responses/comments. The following section presents the findings under the two thematic areas and the emerging thematic groups.

## 4. Findings & Discussion

In the interviews, students were asked to reflect upon their experiences of jointly developing an online psychology dictionary while using a number of vocabulary learning strategies assigned to them, for the completion of the task and on the factors, which they felt, may have inhibited their full engagement in the task. Findings in relation to both research questions are presented in sections 4.1 and 4.2 respectively.

### 4.1 Students' Perceived Benefits of Engaging in the Development of the Dictionary

The responses that students gave in connection with the first research question are presented in this section which is further sub-divided in two categories. These categories relate to the development of their dictionary skills and the improvement of receptive vocabulary.

#### 4.1.1 Development of Dictionary Skills

Students' comments regarding this area were unanimous. They all agreed on the effectiveness of using particular VLSs in raising their awareness of aspects of word knowledge they had not previously been familiar with and had therefore ignored when looking up the meaning of a word in a dictionary. As one student commented:

The truth is that I had never paid attention to any information found in a dictionary before, except the meaning of the word in L1 [first language]. However, I am now aware of other important aspects of a word, like its grammatical features, which I used to see as symbols and I couldn't understand their usefulness. [S3]

Specifically, a number of students indicated that they had learnt what conventional abbreviations which provide grammatical information about a word, stood for; this, was perceived particularly useful by eleven students for reasons such as improved ability to guess the meaning of a word from the context, more accurate use of words in writing, and better comprehension of the meaning of specific words whose spelling and pronunciation are the same in more than one part of speech. An example given by a student [S10] was the word "*conscious*" which can be both an adjective, mostly used in

general English, and a noun, which has a more specific meaning in psychology. What was interesting, however, was the fact that when students were asked whether they would pay attention to word aspects in the future when looking up unfamiliar words, five students felt that they would look for the meaning of these words in L1 and probably synonyms and examples but they would still ignore information about its grammatical behaviour. This finding is in line with previous research in the field which is indicative of students' tendency to ignore explicit usage information provided via symbols or codes, relying instead on dictionary examples for guidance (Chan 2012; Dziemianko 2006).

Eight students reported to have developed look-up strategies essential for researching an unfamiliar word from a more critical perspective. More specifically, they argued that during the process of dictionary development, they were required to provide different meanings for a word, where applicable, and examples of its usage. This, as they asserted, urged them to use different sources before deciding on the correct meaning of the word and on a suitable example that would help them understand how the word is used in a specific context. As one participant maintained:

When I started working on the dictionary, I would just choose one of the sources recommended by the teacher to find the information requested for the task, which I often added to the dictionary without really understanding it because of the complicated language used. I soon realised though, that, if I were to benefit from this task, I should cross-check and consult multiple sources in order to find a definition or an example that would be easier and clearer for me to understand. It's a lot of work but it really pays off at the end! [S1]

This finding is supported by Nation (2001) who asserts that higher proficiency in a language is needed when using a monolingual dictionary than a bilingual one, partly because definitions of words may sometimes contain infrequent words that less advanced students are likely to be unfamiliar with, as well as explanations of word usage which may require fairly sophisticated grammar skills.

#### **4.1.2 Development of Receptive Vocabulary**

Another common theme which stood out among the participants' comments in the interviews was the development of students' receptive vocabulary, which, as ten students asserted, was the result of their having worked with the words' meanings actively. They argued that the fact that they had to look for word information themselves and add it to the dictionary helped them

understand and remember the word better when they encountered it again in a related article as indicated in the following quotes:

The truth is that I felt I could only remember the words that had been assigned to me as I had to look for the information required myself before adding them to the dictionary. [S14]

Even though I revised the words added by my peers to the dictionary, I think I was more able to understand the ones I had added. [S9]

Despite the fact that the majority of the students reported a connection between this vocabulary task and a perceived increase in receptive vocabulary, their comments when they were asked which strategies they found more beneficial during the process of dictionary development varied, depending on factors such as personal interest and perceived language proficiency. For example, only eight out of fifteen students interviewed reported to have benefited from the articles which were added to the dictionary. Specifically, they argued that reading articles was a very useful strategy as it enabled them to see how certain words were used in context, which in turn, helped them gain a better understanding of these words and their usage. It is important to note, however, that different reasons were given by students regarding their willingness or reluctance to read some of these articles. For example, five of these students, claimed to have been interested in pursuing post-graduate studies in the field of Psychology in English-speaking universities, presenting in international conferences, and even publishing scientific articles so reading foreign literature, was an activity they had always engaged in because they found it personally rewarding. Therefore, for these students, personal interest in the topics of these articles seemed to have been the main reason for reading an article as shown in the following quotes:

If I found the topic of the article interesting, I would definitely read it, but if not, I did not bother reading it. There were also cases when I had already read other articles on a specific topic so I considered it a waste of time to read any of these articles simply because they had been added to the dictionary. [S14]

It was very useful that articles were added by peers, subject specialists, and a professional psychoanalyst as this gave me the option to choose and read the ones which were closer to my interests. [S8]

Two other students maintained that, while they found reading articles particularly beneficial for better understanding of the passages read in class,

their choice of articles depended on their familiarity with the topic, the length of the article as well as the complexity of the language used. They admitted that they had often been reluctant to read an article despite being interested in the topic, as the language used seemed too advanced for their language proficiency, which in turn, discouraged them from making an effort to read it.

A number of students (N: 9) also showed preference for learning the target lexical items through the use of images added by them or their peers to watching a video for example, as they found them helpful in terms of understanding and remembering words better. A similar finding was also reported in the study of Alamri and Rogers (2018) who found that by using visual cartoons to present target vocabulary, learners were able to use both the verbal and imagery codes in order to acquire the target item. According to the researchers, the use of images proved to have been particularly effective as it was combined with explicit vocabulary instruction. Yanguas (2009) also confirmed the positive effects for combined glosses (text and picture) with respect to vocabulary recognition and its positive effect on reading comprehension.

The use of synonyms was another strategy favoured by eight students who agreed that it had contributed to the enhancement of their reading comprehension skills. As indicated in their comments, they all felt that having to find synonyms for some of the words assigned to them, helped them to a great extent broaden their technical vocabulary, and consequently enhanced their understanding of discipline-related articles. As one student remarked:

Having worked with synonyms helped me deal with the passages we analysed in class. Even though reading specialised texts made me uneasy at first, I feel that I gradually became much more motivated and confident in my ability to understand and cope with such texts effectively. [S3]

Three students also said that learning synonyms helped them to engage in productive classroom tasks with more ease. For instance, they were often asked to identify the main ideas of a text or summarise it using their own words. This often urged them to refer to the dictionary and make use of synonyms that had been added there, giving them the opportunity for further practice and consolidation.

Interestingly, regardless of language proficiency or personal interest, there seemed to have been a consensus among all students that an L1 translation of the words to be learned was one of the most valued strategies they had used, as it was perceived sufficient in enabling them to understand the meaning of the target words better and to use them effectively in context

when needed. The main reason given for this assertion was the semantic complexity of concepts, which Pearson (1998) considers of particular importance in the case of technical words, as these words serve to denote concepts with accuracy and precision. An indicative comment made by a student:

Some specialised concepts, especially those referring to abstract nouns, were really difficult to understand even in Greek so in English, that was harder. Even though I always included a definition for the target word as requested by the teacher, it was often impossible to understand it because of the number of unfamiliar words it consisted of. I felt that L1 translation was clearer, less time-consuming, and more accessible as it enabled me to make the connection with the Greek meaning I had, in many cases, already been familiar with. [S1]

Preference for the use of L1 translation was reported in previous research on explicit L2 vocabulary learning research that has explored this area. For example, in Moir and Nation's study (2002), almost all participants showed a preoccupation with meaning, favouring a first language translation of the items to be learned, at the expense of other crucial aspects of word knowledge. Similar findings were also drawn from a study conducted by Joyce (2018) who found that the students' recognition of the L2 vocabulary was significantly higher when asked to match the target vocabulary to L1 translations than L2 definitions. In a similar vein, Karp (2002) reported that L2 students preferred accessing simple definitions in their L1 to spending time making sense of hints, multimedia glosses, or other deep processing strategies.

## **4.2 Factors which Contributed to Students' Reluctance to Fully Engage in the Task**

The second research question aimed at investigating whether there were any factors which participants felt, may have hindered their full engagement in the task. The emerging subcategories relate to factors such as students' personal interest in the topics which were added to the dictionary, the time required for the completion of the task, and students' perceived importance of and resistance to the use of new strategies.

### **4.2.1 Relevance of Topics**

A factor which was prominent among the comments of nine students was relevance of and interest in the topics they were exposed to in class and



which subsequently appeared in the dictionary. They attributed their lack of interest and motivation in working on the vocabulary which appeared in some of the topics included in their ESAP coursebook, to the fact that they [topics] were rather introductory and too theoretical, and irrelevant to what they were studying at the time in other field-related modules. Some also commented on the usefulness of the contributions made by their lecturers and by the professional psychoanalyst, arguing, however, that there should be a better selection of topics as illustrated in a student's comment:

Because psychology is a wide discipline with different branches, each one of us [students] is probably interested in a different one; I think, it would be more useful if professionals or lecturers with a specialisation in different areas of psychology contributed with articles and/or videos which we could use selectively based on our interests. [S7]

Students also admitted having difficulty fully engaging with the words added to the dictionary, either by them or their peers, for the same reasons mentioned above. Specifically, they asserted that they would only pay attention to the words they found relevant to their own interests, in which case, they were motivated to look for more information for the words assigned to them or go through and even add to their peers' entries.

If the word was relevant to my interest, I would look at it more carefully and I'd probably consider other information given, not just the L1 meaning. Otherwise, I didn't bother. [S11]

Dörnyei (1994) views relevance as a prerequisite for sustained motivation and refers to it as the extent to which students feel the instruction and course content are connected to their personal needs and goals, be it academic, professional or both. Cohen and Dörnyei (2002) contend that motivation is the key learner variable and nothing much happens without it as it determines the degree of effort learners put into foreign or second language learning. This area was also highlighted in Clarke's study (2018) who found that some students were more motivated and engaged in the task when they focused on words they had chosen from their main courses rather than on words from a given word list, as they [chosen words] were perceived more relevant and hence, more useful to their language learning goals relating to their main course of study. In a similar vein, some of the participants in Moir and Nations' study (2002) attributed their low retention of some of the vocabulary they had studied to the fact that it was not useful or relevant to their own lives.

#### 4.2.2 Time-Consuming Task

Another source of difficulty mentioned by five students was the amount of time required for this task. These participants admitted that they hardly ever read any of the articles/videos added to the dictionary or revised their peers' entries, arguing that they already had a lot to do for this course, which left no time for putting more effort than they already did on this task. As two students remarked:

Considering the workload, we had as 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, the truth is that, in most cases, we passively did what we were required to do in the dictionary simply because we would be assessed and we had to do it. [S4]

I had so many things to do for other subjects which I considered more important so I always ended up spending little time on this task after having finished everything else; however, I was already feeling too tired to do the task as the teacher had expected us to. I didn't really revise any words ... I added mine, had a quick look at other words which may have interested me and that was it. I really had no time! [S5]

A number of these students argued that this task could have been more beneficial if there had been more exposure to the target words in class. Five students maintained that they could have been asked to read at home a specific article or watch a video added to the dictionary, so that they could discuss it in class; this, as they argued, would have urged them to notice the vocabulary used and possibly to recycle other technical vocabulary related to the topic of the article. Another useful remark made by a student was that time should have been given at the beginning of each lesson during which all the new entries would have been revised and checked for accuracy, and students' queries would have been resolved. The lesson could have also started with a video or an article added to the dictionary as this would have ensured coverage and further practice of all the new entries. Two students also said that this should not have been a homework task, arguing that time should have been devoted in class weekly, during which students would have worked on their assigned words and received immediate feedback from the teacher.

Students' comments in relation to time highlighted the need for more in-class work through practice activities for revision, consolidation and reinforcement. In a similar study, Moir and Nation (2002), found that none of the participants regularly revised words learned in previous weeks, attributing this to lack of time, considering they were busy with other aspects of the programme, and vocabulary learning was less of a priority.

More class time was needed for vocabulary revision and development. Findings from Nyikos and Fan's study (2007) also revealed that giving the learners ample opportunities to practise and receive feedback in class, and encouraging them to consciously internalise and adopt the strategies can ensure the VLS instruction is more successful.

### **4.2.3 Students' Perceived Importance of and Resistance to the Use of New Strategies**

It was apparent from the transcripts of the interviews that a small number of students (N: 3) were neither motivated nor engaged in the task as they were reluctant to use strategies other than the ones they had previously used in their learning as shown in the following two quotes:

Personally, I use other strategies for understanding the meaning of a word or a term so I don't feel that working on this dictionary has helped me in this respect. I just did what I was supposed to do with minimum effort just to get the percentage allocated to the task. [S2]

I believe every student has his own way of understanding and remembering new words, so when you are forced to use specific strategies that you are completely unfamiliar with, you end up being trapped in a vicious circle. You just do what you are expected to do without really benefiting from the task. [S10]

The above quotes indicate that the particular students felt obliged rather than motivated to adopt the strategies instructed by the teacher which appeared to have influenced the depth of their engagement in the task. In effect, the task became something that was done to meet the teacher's expectations and the course requirements, rather than to contribute to personal learning.

The phonetic script given within parentheses, which provides information regarding the pronunciation of a word following the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), was only commented on by 5 students who admitted that, despite now being aware of its use, they still find it useless as they cannot read the transcription. Two of them [S3 & S6] added that the use of the audio feature in most online dictionaries is much easier to use, and more effective for learning the pronunciation of a word.

Several students also appeared to have placed little value on the use of collocations arguing that they were mainly interested in broadening their receptive vocabulary essential for comprehending disciplinary texts, so knowing which words were more appropriate before or after a particular word, was not helpful in this respect. They asserted that they rarely included

word collocations in their entries, and when they did, it was only to fulfil the course requirements, a finding supported by Moir and Nation's study (2002). This was probably due to the fact that aspects like these are more important in productive skills like writing and speaking whereas the students felt that what they needed more was to comprehend articles. This was an indication that students' primary goal was vocabulary expansion, a goal that seemed to have been fulfilled, rather than vocabulary production; therefore, knowledge of how words can be combined to produce more accurate written texts did not seem to adhere to their perceived needs.

## 5. Conclusions & Implications

This study sought to examine the effectiveness of explicit instruction of a number of vocabulary strategies in assisting the acquisition of technical vocabulary while at the same time promoting autonomous, self-directed study, through the development of a monolingual ESAP dictionary. Findings drawn from this study provided positive evidence in relation to the first aim as students reported to have benefitted from specific strategies. Apart from the L1 translation which is the most commonly used strategy among the majority of foreign language learners, raising awareness of polysemy and abbreviations found in dictionaries, consulting multiple sources when looking up a new word while paying particular attention to synonyms and examples of the word as used in specific contexts were the most frequently mentioned strategies. Such strategies were perceived particularly useful by students as they provided them with dictionary skills essential for their academic studies, and helped them enhance their receptive technical vocabulary, at least to some extent.

Findings have also indicated that the burden of word-focused instruction cannot be shouldered by teachers alone. Some, if not most, of the responsibility for vocabulary learning must fall to learners themselves. While word-focused instruction seems to be a great way of familiarising students with aspects of word knowledge essential for fully understanding a word and its usage, it seems to be of little value if the strategies assigned to them do not align with their perceived needs, goals and interests. The results from this study suggest that merely exposing students to tasks where they are urged to use specific VLSs assigned to them does not ensure the acquisition of technical vocabulary or the adoption of these strategies in subsequent vocabulary learning. To attain this, a number of factors which appeared to have inhibited students' engagement in the task in this study, need to be taken into consideration if any learning is likely to occur. If teachers are to help students develop strategies for independent word

learning through a similar task, they need to support them in becoming aware of *when* and *how* to implement these strategies in self-selected situations.

Based on the data presented above, several recommendations can be made for facilitating the acquisition of technical vocabulary through the development of an ESAP dictionary. Most importantly, vocabulary learning should not be ad hoc. Rather, it should be tied to specific course objectives and fully integrated with other course content while being tailored to students' needs. With respect to the task being described in this study, greater variety of articles should therefore be provided by professionals and lecturers in terms of topics in order to cater for the diverse interests and needs of individual students considering the different branches of psychology and the topics being studied in their main subjects. The students should also be given full autonomy in what vocabulary they would like to learn since the ultimate aim of this task is to promote independent learning outside the language classroom rather than help students to learn a specific set of words related to the unit/topic of the day. More exposure to productive vocabulary through discussions on selected videos/articles added to the dictionary, writing essays or short paragraphs on the topics studied as well as more focused tasks on paraphrasing should be introduced in the classroom; this would urge students to use some word aspects found in dictionaries (i.e. synonyms, parts of speech, collocations etc.) and consequently raise awareness of their usefulness. Finally, more time should be devoted in class during which all the new entries would be discussed in order to ensure coverage of all words added by all students.

Findings from this study are based on students' reflections of their experiences and their perceptions of the effectiveness of certain vocabulary strategies. While there is evidence that the majority of the students interviewed benefitted from using certain strategies, there is no indication that they would use any of these for self-directed study once the course is completed, thus, it does not claim to trace any changes in behaviour over a period of time. This is an aspect which yields further research which will provide useful insight into the actual learning outcomes, if any, resulting from the specific task, and will subsequently aid ESAP instructors in refining their instructional approaches and the learning opportunities in which they engage students.

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## CHAPTER TWO

# METACOGNITIVE MODELLING AND THE THINK-ALOUND STRATEGY: VERBALISATIONS VIZUALISING TEXTUAL WORLDS TO SHAPE EXPERT READERS

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### **Abstract**

The present paper addresses the usefulness of the think-aloud strategy as an instruction approach and its effectiveness on non-native speakers of English in reading classrooms. It particularly reviews the influence of metacognitive modelling on improving the reading comprehension skills of second language readers by providing a theoretical framework of how the think-aloud strategy can be implemented in reading literacy. This paper gives an overview of a relevant body of literature in support of the think-alouds along with the limitations encountered in previous research and provides support to pre-service language teachers by expanding the notion of modelling and disseminating constructive suggestions for improvements in the application of the strategy. More specifically, it draws attention to the importance of a more holistic and practical demonstration of the strategy training to complement the existing body of literature which is based on observational research and a performance report of a class of ten students of intermediate level preparing for upper intermediate level exams. It attempts to inspire novice educators by proposing a teacher-generated think-aloud transcript of a whole text of intermediate difficulty from an authentic EFL course book drawing upon a varied repertoire of comprehension strategies logically aligned with predetermined stopping points of the verbalised mental processes. The selected text is supplemented with a student checklist of the applied strategies during active reading and a rubric for assessment of the

learning objectives. The paper concludes with pedagogical implications and recommendations for future research.

**Key words:** Think-aloud strategy, metacognitive modelling, think-aloud transcript, strategy training

## 1. Introduction

For English learners, reading literacy is regarded as one of the most intellectually difficult tasks. Research has shown that utilising reading strategies can help learners to enhance their reading proficiency and that the think-aloud strategy is significant in reading pedagogy (Alaraj 2015; Alqahtani 2015; Cárdenas and Montes 2009; Ness 2014; Schutz and Rainey 2020; Yang, 2016).

The think-aloud strategy can be defined as “one promising approach for activating metacognition-the practice of readers *thinking about their thinking* - and thereby improving reading comprehension” (McKeown and Gentilucci 2007, 136). According to Jahandar et al. (2012, 1) “it is one way to verify whether the child is just reading, or actually comprehending the text”. This view is supported by other scholars as well. For example, Alaraj (2015, 13) maintains that using the think-aloud strategy entails “asking questions about what is happening in the text” which allows the student to “develop metacognitive awareness” and “understand what it means to be a good reader.”

In this chapter the teacher-researcher tries to illuminate the thought processes of an expert reader and provide novice educators with depth of information about modelling literacy, that is, “the instructional practice in which readers represent the invisible work involved in reading, writing, and reasoning with texts” (Schutz and Rainey 2020, 444), in order to design high quality think-aloud lessons. In other words, modelling can reveal to students the strategies that are not a part of the reader’s conscious experience by naming them and making them “verbally visible”. It is the view of this paper that the think-aloud strategy needs to be incorporated into English reading classes and become a vehicle to the development of reading skills as it is one of the most popular and well-researched strategies.

The chapter will initially provide a literature review that is centred on the Vygotskian theory, empirical studies and the think-aloud strategy. It will also present and analyse the results of this observational study and conclude with a discussion of the pedagogical implications of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

This section covers major areas of interest which are directly related to both early and current research on think-alouds and is developed in two parts. The first part outlines Vygotsky's main views on the process of verbal thinking in cognitive science. The second part presents empirical studies on the effectiveness of the think-alouds.

### 2.1 Vygotskian Theory and the Think-Aloud Strategy

Vygotsky (1962) in his work *Thought and Language* claims that it is difficult to see into the minds of people and debates the effectiveness of the think-aloud method of illuminating thought processes. He notes that "thought has its own structure, and the transition from it to speech is no easy matter". He viewed "direct communication between minds" impracticable and feasible only in a "roundabout way" since "thought must first pass through meanings and only then through words" (Vygotsky 1962, 250-252). In other words, there is inaccessibility to the direct transition from thoughts to words. Vygotsky (1962) states that:

Thought, unlike speech, does not consist of separate units. When I wish to communicate the thought that today I saw a barefoot boy in a blue shirt running down the street, I do not see every item separately: the boy, the shirt, its blue color, his running, the absence of shoes. I conceive of all this in one thought, but I put it into separate words. A speaker often takes several minutes to disclose one thought. In his mind the whole thought is present at once but in speech it has to be developed successively (250).

Undeniably, Vygotsky's analysis of the nature of verbal thought marks a significant and influential contribution to cognitive science. However, a closer examination of the alternative possibility of designing and practising the think-aloud strategy judiciously to overcome most cognitive barriers provides serious grounds for skepticism.

Charters (2003) in her paper *The Use of Think-aloud Methods in Qualitative Research: An Introduction to Think-aloud Methods* describes the roots of the think-aloud technique in cognitive and psycholinguistic theory and discusses its strengths and weaknesses, which enable her to give suggestions on how some of the limitations encountered by researchers in the past can be avoided.

Drawing upon Ericsson and Simon's (1980) seminal study, *Verbal Reports as Data*, she highlights that this lack of expressibility of thought is attributed to the fact that there are many thought processes that are not

verbalised in working memory, which has limited capacity, either because they are automatic or because their processing is so rapid that there is insufficient time to verbalise them which, in turn, may cause distortion. Therefore, “researchers who want to use think-aloud techniques to reflect natural thought processes” referring to the exclusion of non-verbal processes like visual images, “have to design their methodologies with great care to avoid over-influencing their participants” (Charters 2003, 71).

Additionally, Charters (2003) emphasises that “researchers need to be aware that even thinking aloud which makes inner speech external cannot reveal deeper thought processes in their true complexity [and] they have to be simplified into words” (70). Thus, choosing tasks of intermediate level of difficulty to practise think aloud can prevent overload of working memory. According to Charters (2003), researchers need to choose suitable tasks for think-alouds on the grounds that only verbal statements that immediately follow a train of thought could be assumed to adequately depict conscious thinking. In other words, slow explanations should be avoided and instant attention of the participants should be favoured.

Lastly, another significant parameter in the effectiveness of a think-aloud task is the addition of periodic stops since “a task which can be broken into shorter units so that it can be worked on one unit at a time” may act as a deterrent to cognitive overwhelming (Charters 2003, 72). Hence, it would be reasonable to assume that Charter’s suggestions constituted a serious challenge to the Vygotskian criticism of the think-aloud method and its actualisation.

## 2.2 Empirical Studies and the Think-Aloud Strategy

The pendulum in recent years has swung towards an emphasis on the implementation of think- alouds in reading classes (Alaraj 2015; Alqahtani 2015; Charters 2003; Jahandar et al. 2012; Kershen 2018; McKeown and Gentilluci 2007; Moreno, Cardenas and Montes 2009; Ness 2014; Pritchard and O’Hara 2006; Schutz and Rainey 2019; Sonmez and Sulak 2018; Yang 2016).

Alaraj (2015) maintains that think-alouds can help teachers have a clearer idea of the students’ reading competence in comparison with evaluation alone and if usage of the strategy is accurate, they can become self-directed learners with an improved retention level of textual information. Furthermore, as researched by Alqahtani (2015, 16-17), “the importance of the think-aloud strategy does not end in the classroom setting, but goes beyond and helps students become well-rounded individuals, who are

capable of handling their situations with reasoning in their lives, on their own.”

According to Lopez and Kershen (2018, 3), a think-aloud strategy training can have a positive impact not only on students but also on pre-service teachers. In particular, it can help them “develop empathy for the reading experiences” of learners and design more successful think-aloud lessons as being highly capable readers themselves they may “forget what it feels like to struggle in reading.”

Pritchard and O’Hara (2006, 151) also examined the effects of think-alouds and their results indicated that “think-alouds were an effective means of identifying reading strategies and may be a useful technique for helping non-native speakers of English learn and apply reading strategies.” Yet, the study focused only on brief portions from scripts rather than on a whole text in order to achieve an all-inclusive perspective of the strategy rationale and modeling.

Lastly, Schutz and Rainey (2019) highlight the importance of naming the components of modeling in a think aloud lesson claiming that “we cannot teach what we cannot name.” (444) They named the first component *showing* that gives learners a “glimpse into the inner monologue of their minds” (445) while using a preselected text, the second component *situating* that puts the process to be learnt into a familiar context for students and the third component *abstracting* that makes the strategies transferable using a specific language to narrate the process (447).

Building on the existing literature the present paper attempts to accentuate the usefulness of think-aloud strategy as an instruction approach and its effectiveness on non-native speakers of English in reading classrooms by providing a theoretical framework of how the think-aloud strategy can be implemented in reading literacy.

### 3. The Study

This study employed a qualitative approach to data collection. Due to the absence of control and experimental groups, it is a non-experimental observational study which aims at examining the impact of the think-aloud technique on the improvement of Greek EFL learners’ reading skills. In line with this aim, the following research question was formulated:

- What are the effects of the think-aloud technique on the enhancement of reading competence of Greek EFL learners of upper intermediate level?

This paper contributes to the EFL field by offering more practical suggestions on the development of the ability to use think-alouds to improve reading performance as opposed to traditional reading instruction. It gives a more holistic view of a modelled authentic text along with its fourteen teacher-generated thinking aloud example scripts rather than extracts from a text. It also states where exactly the stopping points should be inserted to be advantageous and is geared towards a repertoire of varied comprehension strategies; such strategies include interpreting a title, predicting, verifying predictions, identifying the main purpose of the text, key points and stylistic preferences of the writer, questioning, searching for specific details, reference questions, prior knowledge, visualising, making connections or personal response, clarifying, identifying difficulties, making inferences, synthesising info, summarising, and reflecting. It is also worth mentioning that these strategies need to be rightly associated with the stopping points to avoid sameness of strategy implementation. Lastly, this study does not only focus on note-taking for verbalised communication but also informal note-taking for students' non-verbal behaviour.

### 3.1 Participants

The study was conducted at the private language school, *The English Academy*, situated in Athens, Greece. The participants were a group of 10 students and their age ranged from 14 to 15. They were all English as foreign language (EFL) learners, in a mixed ability class with a weak, average and strong reading level proficiency preparing for upper intermediate level exams.

### 3.2 Modelling Stage

Prior to exposing students to the think-aloud training, the teacher-researcher modelled the think-aloud technique during a two-hour reading comprehension class in order to help them conceptualise how a strategic reader thinks while reading and enable them to apply comprehension strategies in subsequent reading classes accurately. During the modelling stage no data were analysed in relation to teacher modelling since the fourteen (14) teacher-generated think-aloud scripts of the modelled text were provided to the students as a preparation stage for the think-aloud technique training stage. More specifically, four (4) tools were used in this stage and were given to each of the 10 students under investigation. The first tool was a short text (250 words) taken from an authentic upper intermediate level general course book in its original form (see Appendix A). The second tool was a sample

of the same but modelled text divided in fourteen (14) teacher-generated think-aloud scripts (see Appendix B). Each think-aloud script also showed the stopping point where the researcher inserted the selected comprehension strategy and related think-aloud phraseology. The researcher decided on the advantageousness of the stopping points by examining which part of the text—focusing on the main ideas—could promote students' high order thinking skills such as analysing (i.e. comparing and contrasting), evaluating (i.e. hypothesising) or synthesising (making inferences) and activate their prior knowledge.

The third tool was a checklist of comprehension strategies and the recommended think-aloud language of I-statements - the phraseology included in the 14 teacher-generated think-aloud scripts- as shown in Table 2.1.

**Table 2-1 Student's checklist template with think-aloud language for strategy training**

<b>TEXTUAL COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES (cognitive processes)</b>	<b>THINK-ALoud LANGUAGE SIGNALLING THE COGNITIVE PROCESS</b>	<b>PUT A TICK EACH TIME YOU HEAR THE TEACHER SAY ONE OF THESE</b>
<b>Interpreting title</b>	This is a title about/What do I already know about the title?	
<b>Predicting</b>	I predict that.../I'd better reread the word in its context and predict the meaning	
<b>Verifying predictions</b>	I was right because.../I'd better continue reading to see if my prediction is true	

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<b>Identifying the main purpose of the text</b>	This means that the main idea of the article is to give me information about.../What is the purpose of reading this text?
<b>Identifying key points</b>	I think this is one of the most important pieces of information That is interesting because...
<b>Identifying stylistic preferences of the writer</b>	I should pay attention to the stylistic preferences of the author in this sentence/This change in the fonts, which is a typographic feature, signals emphatic usage to consider this sentence more important than others
<b>Questioning Searching for specific details reference questions /prior knowledge</b>	Why does the writer mention this? /What do I already know about the topic?
<b>Visualising</b>	The mental picture that I can form is...
<b>Making connections / Personal response</b>	This allows me to make a personal connection because it is similar to my feelings when.../It reminds me of.../My favourite part is.../What I like the least is...

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<b>Clarifying / identifying difficulties</b>	I got confused with.../I didn't expect to.../I identified a difficulty of mine. I don't know this word, but I know the root/I'd better go back and reread to clarify/This pronoun refers to the previous sentence. It is an instance of <i>anaphora</i> . I'd better read it again/This is an instance of <i>cataphora</i> . I'd better read the next sentence/I should look for context clues/I need to rephrase/ paraphrase
<b>Making inferences</b>	The author may suggest/imply here that...
<b>Making connections / Synthesising info</b>	This is similar to.../ I should synthesise now as this piece of information can be linked to the previous.../New information is given here. I should establish a link
<b>Summarising</b>	The key points were.../I need to summarise
<b>Reflecting</b>	I realised that.../I need to reflect on what I have learnt so far/Maybe I will need to focus more on next time.

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The last tool was a think-aloud rubric for students' assessment. The think-aloud rubric criteria were explained to students in a whole class discussion; therefore, students were made aware of what was expected of them for the production of effective student-generated think-alouds in the

subsequent training stage. The rubric criteria were developed with both descriptive (e.g. “the user names all the comprehension strategies” or “the user wisely stops”) and evaluative language (e.g. “weak” “average” and “strong” user) to help students have a better insight into the requirements of a successful think-aloud strategy and facilitate the learning process of the strategy as shown in Table 2.2.

**Table 2-2 Think-aloud rubric for students’ assessment**

CRITERIA	WEAK USER	AVERAGE USER	STRONG USER
<b>VERBAL BEHAVIOUR</b>			
Introducing the text	Only refers to the title	Refers to the title and effectively activates prior knowledge	Refers to the title and fully activates prior knowledge
Usage of recommended think-aloud language	Basic use of think-aloud language	Adequate use of think-aloud language	Excellent use of think-aloud language
Usage of varied comprehension strategies	Names some comprehension strategies	Names almost all comprehension strategies	Names all the comprehension strategies accurately
Closure/summary	Summarises some parts	Summarises effectively	Fully summarises
Reflection	No reflection	Briefly reflects	Reflects effectively
<b>NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOUR</b>			
Body language (eye movement, facial expressions, hand movements)	No body language	Minimal use of body language	Wise use of body language
Pauses	Many pauses	A few pauses	No pauses kept talking
Periodic stops	Rarely stops	Frequently stops	Wisely stops

### 3.3 Think-Aloud Strategy Training Stage

After the modelling stage, a three-month think-aloud training period followed, during which two (2) tools were used. The first tool was 24 passages taken from an authentic reading practice test book of upper intermediate level. In total, 6 reading practice tests were used, each consisting of 4 texts. Each test was covered in a two-week period of time. Another instrument used in this stage was a class performance table with a section for the comments of the teacher-researcher. The comments were based on the criteria stated on a think-aloud rubric for evaluation of the outcomes of the learning objectives as shown in Table 2-2.

Although the text for modelling was taken from a general course book and the reading texts for the think-aloud training from a practice test book, they were of the same level of difficulty and exam format. The students were expected to apply the comprehension strategies they had learned from the modelling stage to the reading tests done as reading mock exams in class. Upon completion of the reading test, the students were asked to justify the cognitive processes involved in the process of active reading to answer the comprehension questions by recalling and using the information given in the modelling stage. In other words, students were not provided with any teacher-generated think-aloud scripts, checklist, and rubric at this stage. The rationale was to help learners become more autonomous and successful candidates focusing on the natural flow of their verbalisations when asked to produce similar but less guided verbal thinking in terms of selection of comprehension strategies and choice of the recommended think-aloud phraseology. The data of the performance table, that is, reading scores, improvement percentages and teacher's comments were collected during the three-month period from September 2019 to December 2019.

## 4. Findings

In this section the results of this observational study are presented and analysed. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis follows to provide a solid illustration of the results.

## 4.1 Qualitative Analysis & Think-Aloud Comments

Interpretation of think-aloud comments on students' reading performance can help the teacher-researcher to understand if the learning objectives were fulfilled in relation to the expectations of the study. The most remarkable result to have emerged from the performance table data was that the weak students received positive think-aloud comments, which led to a marked improvement in their reading skills. Some comments for weak students were "excellent use of the think-aloud language and wisely stops", "summarises effectively with a few pauses", "activates prior knowledge with a few pauses" and "names almost all comprehension strategies with a few pauses". The average students and the strong students also received positive think-aloud comments such as "briefly reflects & frequently stops", "names all comprehension strategies with no pauses", "refers to the title & frequently stops", "fully summarises with no pauses", which suggests that they also benefited from the think-aloud training. Considering all these comments, the value of the effective implementation of the think-aloud technique to the development of students' strategic reading skills needs to be stressed.

Table 2-3 below shows the class performance report including the detailed score of each student per test, their improvement percentage ratio and the researcher's comments for each student based on the rubric criteria.

Table 2-3 Class Performance Report

TESTS	YEAR	MONTH &	READER A	READER B	READER C	READER D	READER E	READER F	READER G	READER H	READER I	READER J
TEST 1	SEP. 2020		12/30	19/30	19/30	26/30	20/30	20/30	18/30	24/30	15/30	23/30
TEST 2	OCT. 2020		17/30	26/30	18/30	26/30	24/30	19/30	19/30	24/30	21/30	25/30
TEST 3	OCT. 2020		21/30	24/30	18/30	26/30	23/30	21/30	18/30	24/30	26/30	24/30
TEST 4	NOV. 2020		22/30	24/30	22/30	30/30	20/30	26/30	16/30	26/30	27/30	25/30
TEST 5	NOV. 2020		23/30	25/30	20/30	22/30	23/30	20/30	22/30	22/30	23/30	24/30
TEST 6	DEC. 2020		23/30	28/30	23/30	27/30	24/30	26/30	21/30	20/30	25/30	25/30
INITIAL ESTIMATED STUDENT READING LEVEL			WEAK	WEAK	WEAK	STRONG	AVERAGE	AVERAGE	WEAK	AVERAGE	WEAK	AVERAGE
FIRST TEST SCORE			12	19	19	26	20	20	18	24	15	23
LAST TEST SCORE			23	28	23	27	24	26	21	20	25	25
IMPROVEMENT PERCENTAGE			37%	30%	13%	3%	13%	20%	10%	-13%	33%	7%

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**NOTE TAKING SECTION**  
**TEACHERS' POST-THINK ALOUD COMMENTS BASED ON RUBRIC CRITERIA**

**Reader A:** adequate use of the think-aloud language & minimal use of body language

**Reader B:** excellent use of the think-aloud language & wisely stops

**Reader C:** summarises effectively with a few pauses

**Reader D:** fully summarises with no pauses

**Reader E:** briefly reflects & frequently stops

**Reader F:** names all comprehension strategies with no pauses

**Reader G:** activates prior knowledge with a few pauses

**Reader H:** refers to the title & frequently stops

**Reader I:** names almost all comprehension strategies with a few pauses

**Reader J:** briefly reflects with minimal use of body language

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## 4.2 Quantitative Analysis & Descriptive Statistics

Synoptically, all data were entered and computed into Microsoft Office Excel 2010. Data from table 2-3 are visualised diagrammatically in Figures 2-1 and 2-2. Figure 2-1 below presents selected data of the initial and the final reading scores and displays the students' improvement percentage ratio which was formed by calculating the average score per reader level for each test in the three-month training period.

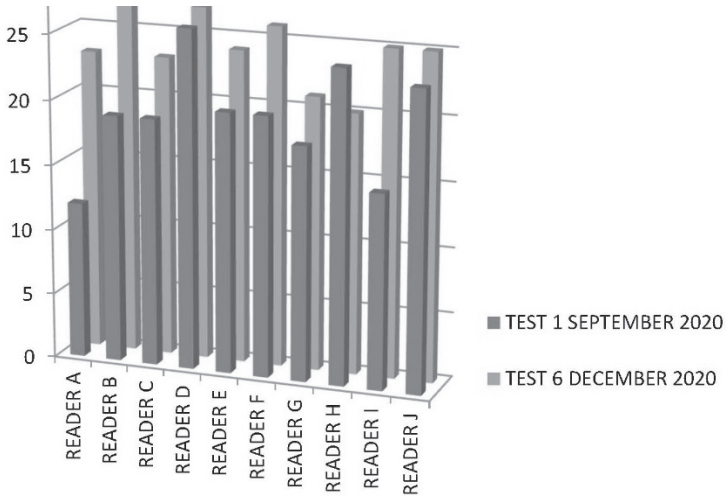


Figure 2-1 Descriptive statistics and students' reading improvement

Figure 2-2 clearly illustrates the improvement of the vast majority of students considering the initial and final reading scores of the three-month think-aloud training period. This diagram also shows the average score for each level per test (test 1 to 6) that was calculated. The levels were as follows: 26-30 points for the strong level, 20-25 points for the average and 0-19 points for the weak. It also demonstrates that the performance discrepancy of the students was normalised which means that at the end of the training period there was no weak level in comparison with the initial class profile. This suggests that the strategy under investigation increased the performance level of the students with systematic practice and assisted in the achievement of higher scores on tests of reading comprehension.

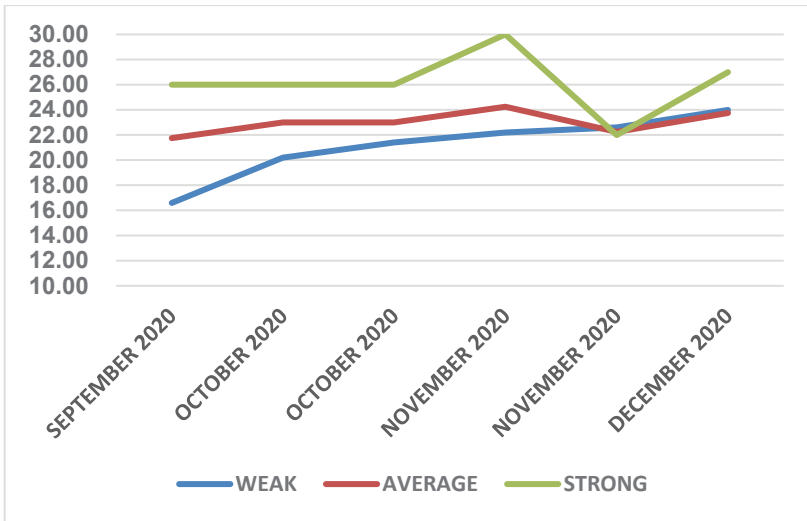


Figure 2-2 The average score for each reading level

Therefore, certain recommendations for institutional courses of action could also be given for planning effective reading instruction based on the successful reading results of the EFL learners under discussion.

## 5. Discussion & Pedagogical Implications

Based on the modelling, the training of the think-aloud technique, the checklist usage, and the positive results of the performance table of students of the observational research, numerous recommendations can be offered.

It can be concluded that think-alouds are a useful tool that can facilitate reading mastery. The overriding goal of teachers in reading classes would be to instill meaningful reading instruction practice in the form of think-alouds. It is vital that the learners receive systematic think-aloud practice rather than reading only via comprehension questions. In this way, especially novice reading teachers, can improve their current methodological practices to become more eclectic teachers.

From a pedagogical perspective, students need to observe their teacher's thought process and be part of the modelling process. The usage of a checklist can help learners recognise the difference between just reading the words and comprehending the text. According to Yang (2016, 3), "in a regular reading class, students simply read what a teacher gives" and a possible explanation for this would be that "few students are aware of their



own reading process, and know about their own reading behaviour, or reading strategy use, not to mention reflecting on their own performance.” Notwithstanding, via teacher’s modelling, learners realise an expert’s cognitive processes to comprehend a text. Ideally, the usage of think-alouds needs to be done judiciously with a synthesis of assessment criteria, performance tables, and modelling of an authentic and complete text to achieve the desirable cognitive reading level of students.

Gentilluci and McKeown’s study (2007, 145) investigated whether the think-aloud strategy was more successful with intermediate English learners (Level 3) who already had some degree of linguistic competence, advanced learners (Level 4), or beginners (Level 2) who had a basic level of language proficiency. Their findings showed heterogeneous results about the learners. For beginners the strategy did not help them improve their comprehension of the English texts due to vocabulary difficulties. Similarly, although the early advanced students focused on prior knowledge and inferencing, and were proficient readers, the think-aloud strategy was like “an interruption” and “these readers already possess metacognitive skills”. Remarkably, intermediate students increased their post-test score because “their linguistic threshold is high enough to allow them to become top-down readers.”

The findings of the above study corroborate the purpose of this study to explore the efficacy of the think-aloud strategy on English learners of intermediate level. However, the results also contradict Gentilluci and McKeown’s study on the grounds that not only intermediate students with an average reading level benefited from the think-aloud strategy but also the advanced students with a strong reading level and weak students with a poor reading level. Thus, the bottom line of Gentilluci and McKeown’s study (2007, 136) that “teachers should not make the mistake of considering all strategies as good teaching and applying them equally to all levels of English learners” can be treated with reasonable scepticism when referring to multileveled mixed-ability classes.

## **6. Conclusions & Recommendations for Institutional Courses of Action**

The following key aspects of think-alouds can be concluded in this paper:

- a. Think-alouds are an important tool for developing reading skills that should be embraced and added to the teachers’ repertoire of reading instruction methods.
- b. The quality of metacognitive modelling is a critical factor in the implementation of the think-aloud strategy and needs to be used

systematically to benefit learners. Students need to be given opportunities to practise and develop a similar thinking process. Coached practice can be done in groups or pairs or individually.

- c. Concise and economical use of language is important while modelling think-alouds and rehearsal should precede a prepared modelled text.

Based on observational research, this paper could be beneficial not only for a teacher-led research but also for language schools since it could ignite changing patterns of thinking and action. In addition, schools of language can gain insights into how reading classes bear fruit when they incorporate think- alouds in the school curriculum.

Another insight gained is the influence of think-alouds on reading performance in a simulated test environment in a formal setting. In other words, in a real reading exam, students may achieve better results displaying their awareness of the think-aloud training regarding the comprehension processes prior to the reading exams. Therefore, think-alouds can be a powerful diagnostic tool for students' inner thoughts helping them to achieve a better reading performance but also autonomy in their reading instruction journey becoming "self-regulated comprehenders" (Ness 2014, 3)

## 7. Study Limitations

To conclude, there are certain limitations that should not be ignored. Although the study was strong due to its ecological validity, it was weak in terms of external validity. This means that the data were collected in a naturally occurring environment, an EFL classroom rather than an artificial one such as a laboratory. This can result in lack of generalisability or representation of a wider student population.

Another limitation was time since the data of this study were collected during three months. What could stimulate further research would be a longitudinal study following a longer period of time to yield more robust and crystallised results. It would be unrealistic to anticipate striking differences in reading levels of the target language in a short period of time as it may take months to successfully master a higher reading performance.

However, irrespective of duration of think-aloud training periods, "there is no magic formula to make this strategy effective" but just to remember that success lies in how it is used, "which means choosing appropriate texts, listening carefully to students, determining students' abilities, and adapting the method to your students' needs and abilities" (Jahandar et al. 2012, 2).

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## Appendix A

## Selected sample text (original)

(Alasdair 2016, 110)

**Reading**

Read this article from a magazine for teenagers.

**Education Corner**

In the *Education Corner* column each month, we cover an issue related to learning or education. This month we'll be looking at the brain in depth because understanding how this amazing organ functions can actually make it easier for us to learn.

**The Two Areas of the Brain**

The brain is incredibly complicated. In fact, the best scientists in the world don't fully understand how it works. However, put simply, we can think of the brain as having two main areas. The first of these is the 'prefrontal cortex' (or thinking brain) which is responsible for processing and reflecting on information. The other is the reactive brain which reacts to information instinctively. If we accidentally put our hand on something hot, we want the information from our senses to go to the reactive brain. We need our brain to tell our body to move our hand as soon as possible without spending a lot of time thinking about the situation.

On the other hand, when we are studying, we want the information to go to the thinking area of the brain. In this way, we can process and analyse it. When everything is going well and we are focused on what we are doing, we have a lot of control over what information goes to our prefrontal cortex. When we are stressed, sad or bored, however, our brain goes into 'survival mode' and most information is routed to the reactive brain, making learning much more difficult.

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HOW YOUR BRAIN WORKS**

**What learners need to know:**  
Your brain works best when you are physically healthy, well rested and in a positive emotional state. Before you start studying, think about your emotions. If you're in a good mood, take a moment to appreciate it, and then get down to work. If things aren't going so well, think about times you've felt a similar negative emotion (anxiety or loneliness) in the past and what you did to get over it. It might help to take a short break and do something you enjoy before hitting the books.

**Making Memories and Feeling Good**

OK, so now you've got the information you want to learn into the thinking part of your brain. This is the part which is responsible for judgement, creativity, problem solving and so on. To accomplish these complex tasks, long-term memories and connections are formed in the brain when nerve cells, called neurons pass information to one another. When you revise or practise something, the connections in this network of neurons are made stronger. There are chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters which help carry information between neurons. One of the most important neurotransmitters is dopamine. When we experience positive emotions, there is a rise in the amount of dopamine in our brain and this enhances our alertness, memory and thinking skills.

**What learners need to know:**  
There is a lot of truth in the old saying 'practice makes perfect'. Regularly reviewing what you have learnt and putting this knowledge to good use actually improves the 'wiring' of your brain and ensures that it's easy for you to access important information when you need it. Moreover, being in a positive frame of mind makes this whole process work more efficiently. Sharing a joke with friends, exercising and even doing somebody a favour will increase your dopamine levels. And doing these things on a school day will give your ability to learn an important boost.

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110

## Appendix B

### Think-aloud scripts

#### Think-aloud script (1)

<p style="text-align: center;">TEXT (Pre-reading stage)</p> <p>Title What you need to know about how your brain works</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STOP TO THINK ALOUD (1)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">INTERPRETING THE TITLE AND ACTIVATING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE</p> <p><i>[What an interesting title! This is a title about the human brain and its functions. What do I already know about the brain? Well, I know that it works like a big computer. It processes information that it receives from the senses and body, and sends messages back to the body. I also know that the brain can do much more than a machine can because humans use their brain to think and experience emotions. So it is the root of human intelligence. But what impresses me the most is the phrase “what <u>you</u> need to know”, which suggests that the selected topic in this column of the magazine may be related to education and learning of teenagers. I’d better continue reading to see if my prediction is true.]</i></p>
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#### Think-aloud script (2)

<p style="text-align: center;">TEXT (While-reading stage)</p> <p>Education Corner In the <i>Education Corner</i> column each month, we cover an issue related to learning or education.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STOP TO THINK ALOUD (2)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">VERIFYING PREDICTIONS</p> <p><i>[I was right since this column of the teenage magazine specializes in education issues.]</i></p>
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**Think-aloud script (3)**

<p style="text-align: center;">TEXT</p> <p>This month we will be looking at the brain in depth because understanding how this amazing organ functions can actually make it easier for us to learn.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STOP TO THINK ALOUD (3) IDENTIFYING THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE TEXT</p> <p><i>[This means that the main purpose of the article is to give students information which will help them to make studying and learning easier. The evaluative adjective “amazing” also shows the positive attitude of the writer towards understanding the brain function and its contribution to effective learning.]</i></p>
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**Think-aloud script (4)**

<p style="text-align: center;">TEXT</p> <p><u>The Two Areas of the Brain</u> The brain is incredibly complicated. In fact, the best scientists in the world don't fully understand how it works. However, put simply, we can think of the brain as having two main areas. The first of these is the “prefrontal cortex” (or thinking brain) which is responsible for processing and reflecting on information. The other is the reactive brain which reacts to information instinctively.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STOP TO THINK ALOUD (4) IDENTIFYING READER'S DIFFICULTIES/PREDICTING THE MEANING OF WORDS</p> <p><i>[I identified a difficulty of mine here. What does the word “instinctively” mean? I have to take steps and understand so I'd better reread this word in its context and try to predict its meaning using the co-text. In the previous sentence it is stated that the brain has two main areas. It says the first area is the thinking brain which thinks and reflects on information. Then it continues with the other area of the brain which reacts to information. Given that the first area thinks, this leads me to think that the other area has an opposite role. So, I can draw the conclusion that the brain can also react without thinking which is what the unfamiliar word “instinctively” probably means.]</i></p>
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**Think-aloud script (5)**

TEXT	STOP TO THINK-ALoud (5) QUESTIONING/FOCUS ON EXEMPLIFICATION
<p>If we accidentally put our hand on something hot, we want the information from our senses to go to the reactive brain.</p>	<p><i>[Why does the writer mention this hypothetical clause here? This must be an example of a situation where we react to information instinctively, and rely on our reactive brain.]</i></p>

**Think-aloud script (6)**

TEXT	STOP TO THINK ALoud (6) QUESTIONING/PRACTICING ON REFERENCE QUESTIONS AND ANAPHORA
<p>We need our brain to tell our body to move our hand as soon as possible without spending a lot of time thinking about the situation. On the other hand, when we are studying, we want the information to go to the thinking area of the brain. In this way, we can process and analyse it.</p>	<p><i>[What does the pronoun "it" refer to? This is an instance of anaphora. I'd better read back to clarify. So it says "we want <u>the information</u> to go to <u>the thinking area of the brain</u>". It may either refer to the noun information or the brain. We can analyse information, so it refers to the word information.]</i></p>



**Think-aloud script (7)**

TEXT	STOP TO THINK ALOUD (7) IDENTIFY STYLISTIC PREFERENCES OF THE WRITER
<p>When everything is going well and we are focused on what we are doing, we have a lot of control over what information goes to our prefrontal cortex. When we are stressed, sad or bored, however, our brain goes into “survival mode” and most information is routed to the reactive brain, making learning much more difficult.</p>	<p><i>[I should pay attention to the structure of this sentence and consider the stylistic preferences of the author. This phrase must have a metaphorical meaning because I observe that there are quotation marks. This typographic feature signals the reader that a word or phrase is being used somehow <u>peculiarly</u>. So, the writer may wish to indicate here that stress may actually change our brain in ways that affect our memory because it's in survival mode rather than memory mode. This is why we might be more forgetful when we are under stress.]</i></p>

**Think-aloud script (8)**

TEXT	STOP TO THINKALOUND (8) IDENTIFYING KEY POINTS
<p>What learners need to know Your brain works best when you are physically healthy, well rested and in a positive emotional state. Before you start studying, think about your emotions. If you are in a good mood, take a moment to appreciate it, and then get down to work.</p>	<p><i>[I think this is one of the most important pieces of information because the writer tells students to appreciate happy moments of their daily schedule helping the brain to optimize their learning.]</i></p>

**Think-aloud script (9)**

TEXT	STOP TO THINK ALOUD (9) SYNTHESIZING TO MAKE CONNECTIONS
<p>If things aren't going so well, think about times you've felt a similar negative emotion (anxiety or loneliness) in the past and what you did to get over it. It might help to make a short break and do something you enjoy before hitting the books. <u>Making Memories and Feeling Good</u></p> <p>OK, so now you have got the information you want to learn into the thinking part of your brain. This is the part which is responsible for judgment, creativity, problem solving and so on. To accomplish these complex tasks, long-term memories and connections are formed in the brain when nerve cells called neurons pass information to one another. When you revise or practice something, the connections in this network of neurons are made stronger. There are chemicals in the brain called neurotransmitters which help carry information between neurons. One of the most important neurotransmitters is dopamine. When we experience positive emotions, there is a rise in the amount of dopamine in our brain and this enhances our alertness, memory and thinking skills.</p>	<p><i>[I need to synthesise now. This piece of information can be linked to the previous paragraph about the relation between a positive emotional state and deeper learning and add another useful information - the increase in dopamine levels. In other words, to consider the importance of this brain chemical that influences human feelings.]</i></p>

**Think-aloud script (10)**

TEXT	STOP TO THINK ALOUD (10) QUESTIONING
<p>What learners need to know</p>	<p><i>[Why is this heading stated twice? Exact repetition signals the significance of a piece of information and its value that needs to be emphasised.]</i></p>

**Think-aloud script (11)**

<p style="text-align: center;">TEXT</p> <p>There is a lot of truth in the old saying “practice makes perfect”.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STOP TO THINK ALOUD (11) UNDERSTANDING CONTEXT VIA PARAPHRASING</p> <p><i>[I need to understand the context of this saying and I will try to paraphrase it and express its meaning using different words. So, the more we practise, the better our skills become.]</i></p>
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**Think-aloud script (12)**

<p style="text-align: center;">TEXT</p> <p>Regularly reviewing what you have learnt and putting this knowledge to good use actually improves the “wiring” of your brain and ensures that is easy for you to access important information when you need it. Moreover, being in a positive frame of mind makes this whole process work more efficiently. Sharing a joke with friends, exercising and even doing somebody a favor will increase your dopamine levels.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STOP TO THINK ALOUD (12) MAKING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS</p> <p><i>[This allows me to make a personal connection because it is similar to my feelings whenever I exercised before an examination period and helped me to have a higher performance at school.]</i></p>
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**Think-aloud script (13)**

<p style="text-align: center;">TEXT</p> <p>And doing these things on a school day will give your ability to learn an important boost.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">STOP TO THINK ALOUD (13) SUMMARISING</p> <p><i>[Since this is the last sentence of the text I need to summarise. The key point is that the way the brain works can affect how the students learn and making the human brain work optimally involves keeping one's self physically healthy, well rested and having some control over emotions. It is wise to approach learning calmly and with positive emotions. If it's a good feeling, learners should take time to enjoy it and consider how a good emotional state can affect thinking.]</i></p>
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**Think-aloud script (14)**

<p>NO TEXT-Post reading stage</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THINK ALOUD (14) REFLECTING</p> <p><i>[I need to reflect on what I have learnt so far. Well, I realised that this text gave me useful information which will help me as a student to learn more efficiently.]</i></p>
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## CHAPTER THREE

# A PLACEBO-CONTROLLED<sup>1</sup> WORD- RECOGNITION TESTING IN ENGLISH AS L2<sup>2</sup> AND ATTITUDES AMONG ADOLESCENT DYSLEXIC LEARNERS IN GREECE

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### Abstract

Dyslexia in the foreign language classroom has long been a thorny issue of research in applied linguistics and didactics. Dyslexics are oftentimes laden with chagrin and disgruntlement when being called to learn an additional language such as English, and, regrettably, contemporary pedagogy can only offer multisensory methods to help them compensate for their difficulties rather than eradicate them. Besides, this assumption has been ruled out because dyslexia is not a disease to be cured. However, this reading difficulty has been mistakenly viewed as such, especially in Greece. On top of this, this chapter explores the quantitative and qualitative venture to approach dyslexia as though it were a real disease. This “reverse manipulation”

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to what is customary in Medical Psychology, this term does not involve any comparison between two different drugs, but is intended to semantically convey the meaning of fake treatment, being reliant on one’s expectations towards improving his/her performance in cognitive trials (e.g. word recognition). An alternative could be “Deception-based”. In this chapter, the terms L2/ESL and EFL are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> This study embarks on cognitive psychology to cast light on TESOL. The overall rationale is in league with Davies’ suggestions (2007, 18) that “it may be that we shall gain a clearer picture of the nature of applied linguistics if we turn our attention away from the source (what applied linguistics draws on) to its target (what applied linguistics equips you to do)”.

of dyslexia has revealed that placebo/fake treatment did improve the dyslexics' reading performance by suggesting that, even though dyslexia is a real condition, the way teachers approach it can possibly blur the data, that is, their real performance. Therefore, this chapter highlights the dire need to take on board the dyslexics' overwhelmed, fragile learning identity in an L2/ESL and EFL context, so that their real performance can be discerned and elucidated.

**Key words:** Contextual, confounding variables, dyslexia and EFL, motivation.

## 1. Introduction

Dyslexia is considered to be the most frequent learning disability, occurring all over the global learning community. In relation to English language learning (as L2/ESL or EFL), regardless of the dyslexics' overall intelligence, their learning and, particularly, reading skills appear to be highly influenced. Thus, this has led to the emergence of a multitude of teaching methods, which aim at compensating for their multifaceted difficulties (Nijakowska 2010). Despite the growing research, though, within the Greek, cultural, and educational context, learners of all ages and, specifically, adolescents have emphasised their emotional problems, stemming from an array of variables such as the teachers' and parents' expectations, testing procedure, recursive failure, ineluctably resulting in the absence of determination and motivation (Pavlidis 1990). Hence, it can be inferred that the diagnostic tools availed, and by extension the teaching methods followed, may inadvertently sideline the "real" performance of learners. Towards putting this conundrum in context, the "placebo" reinforcement could be investigated. The question on whether a deceptive treatment can be conducive towards dyslexic learners' performance and attitudes in an EFL context seems to have never been posed before. Such an experimental query, therefore, not exhausted within this chapter, could pave the way for an open commentary upon the contemporary teaching methods addressing dyslexia and the way this learning difficulty is dealt with at both an experimental/cognitive and educational level.

The next pages present the theoretical underpinnings of this study, that is to say some major concepts, the operational definitions, prior experimental evidence, and the germane literature lacuna, which needs to be investigated. Following this, the methodology section is provided. This section is divided in two parts: the quantitative study and the qualitative one (ancillary), leading to a descriptive and inferential statistical account, with a detailed

discussion section, and a textual thematic analysis, respectively. At the end of this chapter, some final remarks are made, calling for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Specific Learning Difficulties: Dyslexia and Word Recognition

It is a truism that during the past thirty years or so, a voluminous, and still burgeoning body of research has borne upon the disputatious area of specific learning difficulties. In particular, Dyslexia, a fundamental exemplar of them, appears to have been steeply investigated since its prevalence, especially in adolescents, seems to be alarming (Shaywitz and Shaywitz 2005). It is also true that this learning difficulty, whether it be developmental or acquired, resonates with a rather wide array of difficulties where “its imprint on behaviour varies across individuals.” (Nijakowska 2010, 85). Dyslexia is chiefly manifested on a phonological, orthographic and morphosyntactic level and, thus, learners appear to contend with a major difficulty in reading tasks, despite their having a typical intelligence quotient (Siegel 2006). In the field of reading skills, it seems that learners’ unsuccessful or delayed word-recognition attempts constitute a good-standing example of dyslexia (e.g. Oliveira et al. 2014), despite the fact that a multi-factorial approach is usually needed for a complete assessment (American Psychiatric Association 2000). These trials mainly aim at individuals’ recognition skills upon written lexical items (e.g. lexemes) where the more effortless their decoding venture is, the less likely they are to have dyslexia (e.g. Bruck 1988).

For typically developed learners, word recognition is majorly reliant on automaticity and instant perception as top-down, schematic knowledge (i.e. concept to phonemes/graphemes) is effectively activated. On the other hand, though, dyslexic learners, regardless of their overall intelligence, seem to manifest several inabilities in recognising lexical items promptly and successfully. Dyslexic learners’ strategies are frequently consonant with bottom-up, systemic reading strategies (i.e. phonemes/graphemes to concept) since they cannot effectively retrieve prior, background knowledge (e.g. Helland, Tjus, Hovden, Ofte, Heimann 2011).

Moreover, the dual-route hypothesis, among others, could further charter the cognitive procedure(s) followed throughout such trials, within a controlled (i.e. laboratory-informed) or everyday context. In particular, this seminal hypothesis suggests that the majority of typical learners seem to select a lexical approach to recognising word stimuli, by means of retrieving

information from the orthographic input lexicon, where the memory of words' morphology is encompassed. In this direction, they later proceed to accessing the phonological output lexicon, whereby the memory of pronunciation and prosody (i.e. appropriate stress, pitch, and intonation) is comprised. On the other hand, dyslexic learners have a tendency to select the sub-lexical approach by adhering to each and every grapheme presented. In other words, dyslexic learners appear to deviate, that is, bypass the lexical system by resultantly decoding words in a laborious way. Even though both approaches are evidently needed for speakers' linguistic fluency, dyslexic learners appear to narrow down on their sub-lexical strategies and, thus, their recognition abilities tend to be retarded and ineffective (Behrmann 1992, Snowling and Hulme 2011).

## 2.2 The Case of English versus Other Languages

On another note, it is true that only little do we know about dyslexic individuals' word-recognition performance when viewed under the perspective of learning a second or a foreign language (i.e. L2/ESL or EFL). However, it is maintained that reading skills, in general, can vary across languages (Brunswick, McDougall, and Davies 2010). To instantiate, French is a linguistic code having a non-transparent, phonemic dimension since there is no one-to-one correspondence between phonemes and graphemes (e.g. "Les yeux" is transcribed as /'lez 'jø/). By the same token, English has got similar intricacies (e.g. "Sewage" is transcribed as /'sju:ɪdʒ/). On the contrary, though, Greek dissents from such orthographic conventions and draws on alphabetic orthography (e.g. "Δυνατός" in Greek is transcribed as /dina'tos/). The same holds true for Spanish. (Dickinson and Neuman 2007). On top of this, it has been suggested that dyslexic individuals seem to have a more efficient performance when dealing with a transparent language, whilst, in relation to the non-transparent ones, they appear to have a major difficulty in processing. (Brunswick, McDougall, and Davies 2010). As a sort of addendum, this difficulty highly escalates in logographic linguistic systems. In Chinese, for example, a word for an animal is represented with a character resembling this animal (e.g. DeFrancis 1984). Hence, such symbols are unlikely to be assimilated or, presumably, recognised as easily as the ones found in the above-mentioned languages. The case of English has been the impetus for this chapter.



### **2.3 Curability and Pedagogical Interventions in TESOL**

The impulses of dyslexia tend to constitute a debated area of research as a number of causes can be adduced to substantiate dyslexia (Kormos and Kontra 2008). However, in any case, there is a consensus on the fact that dyslexia, is a life-long condition which does not appear to be medically curable, at least at the present time. Additionally, the field is usually presented as a plagued area with arbitrary treatments, which are nothing to do with psychologically-informed evidence (Lof 2012). Thankfully, though, literature does comprise methods predominantly aiming at providing an early, supportive intervention, which is expected to help dyslexic individuals compensate for what they seem to be incapable of doing effectively, always in comparison to non-dyslexic individuals. However, the appellation of the “successful intervention” can only be earned as long as there is a systematic, well-configured, multisensory and frequent recapitulation of language inputs (Nijakowska 2010). In this direction, there seems to be a burgeoning development of interventions for dyslexic individuals in childhood and puberty (Kormos 2017). To adduce some, the “Orton-Gillingham Approach”, the “Lindamood-Bell”, or “Wilson Reading Approach” (see Nijakowska 2010) could be possibly leveraged in such a case, all of which draw on a multi-sensory rationale, which is in an inextricable league with the “multiple intelligence model” of Gardner (1996).

### **2.4 Conventional Interventions’ Spin-offs on the Dyslexics**

It seems to be beyond questioning, however, that in the course of any kind of intervention, the vast majority of all dyslexic learners seem to be getting more and more agitated and distraught. These under-achieving learners appear to be glaringly vulnerable to emotional repercussions and their stress levels seem to be exacerbated due to the vague nature of dyslexia. Special mention has to be made to their numerous attempts and failure to meet their own aspirations or even others’ expectations (e.g. parents, guardians, teachers) (Carroll and Iles 2006). As a result, it could be reasonably advocated that the less these aspects are taken on board, the more unlikely teachers will be to fairly map possible difficulties. Concomitantly, dyslexic individuals’ school performance appears to be coupled with their educational motivation (Kim and Pekrun 2013). In other words, “the study of learning, emotion and motivation is profoundly intertwined and it is hard to imagine one without the presence of the others.” (Olsson 2019, 1).

## **2.5 The Role of Motivational Reinforcement: The Placebo Effect**

The optimisation of learners' emotional states and the entire reframing of their motivational reinforcement should become feasible, as this attempt is highly likely to be conducive to their performance (Kim and Pekrun 2013). At the same time, their self-appraisal is a vital factor in education, but is vehemently challenged in the recent, stress-provoking, educational context (Burden and Burdett 2005). As a corollary of this, more and more reinforcing attempts are taking hold. However, literature shows that the "placebo treatment", that is, the administration of a deceptive/fake/inert substance, commonly tested in the field of health/medical psychology, has virtually never been tested before, in relation to TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) and dyslexia.

It seems that dyslexics are besieged with lots of emotional problems and, although dyslexia occurs independently of one's emotional state, it may cause negative emotions and, thus, contribute to dyslexics' difficulty in contending with their learning hindrances. Drawing on Barlett, Moody and Kindersley (2010), dyslexics seem to have a major difficulty in coming to terms with the emotional burden imposed as "there seems to be a puzzling muddle of strengths and weaknesses...when attempting higher-level study...they feel more like a fool whilst constantly making errors, forgetting things and failing..." (53). In this respect, it could be reasonably advocated that a seeming yet overall cogent treatment could possibly assuage the dyslexics' overall uneasiness and, then, reveal their final performance in any education-based task, being unaffected by their emotional state which might blur the data solicited (Flaten, Aslaksen, Lyby and Bjorkedal 2011).

The placebo treatment has been widely viewed as a major contribution of prime importance to education (e.g. Hoffman and Spatariu 2008, Weger and Loughnan 2013). Placebo, as a drug being chemically inert, has been found to have had a significant effect on subjects who really need it. Specifically, such interventions involving the use of Placebo cannot have any direct effect on an individual as there is not any active chemical substance to affect. Instead, all of the "physical and social cues" emanated along with the germane "verbal suggestions" may considerably influence and, therefore, help the respective cohort of subjects, who are determined to solve the problem they have been facing (Wager and Atlas 2015). In particular, as it is shown in the following figure, at least within the medical purview, both the emic and the etic context of an individual tend to be highly impactful, if not the absolute sources that potentiate the treatment. On the one hand, the expert's language (i.e. recommendations, prosody, etc.),

paralanguage (i.e. body language, gaze, etc.), and relevant props/tools found in his/her venue and, on the other hand, the individual's prior knowledge, memories, expectations, and emotions seem to be the factors that will determine the placebo effect.

#### EXTERNAL CONTEXT

##### Verbal Suggestions

- "This is going to make you feel better"

##### Place cues

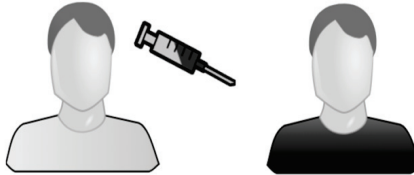
- Doctor's office

##### Social cues

- Eye gaze
- Body language
- Voice cues
- White coat

##### Treatment cues

- Syringe
- Needle puncture



#### INTERNAL CONTEXT

##### Outcome Expectancies

- "My pain will go away"

##### Emotions

- "I am less anxious"

##### Meaning schema

- "I am being cared for"

##### Explicit memories

##### Pre-cognitive associations

Figure 3-1. Adapted from: Elements of Treatment Context (Wager and Atlas 2015).

Among the theories purporting to explain the behaviour activated towards achieving a goal, that is to say motivation, the "motivational concordance model" could possibly serve as a fundamental theoretical framework to embark on in order to define dyslexic learners' demotivation (Hyland 2011). In particular, the "motivational concordance model" draws on humans' ever longed satisfaction of goals and, specifically, those ones which tend to define individuals' identity. Based on Hyland, Geraghty and Whalley (2007) "engaging in health-promoting rituals that enhance self-defining or self-actualising goals provides better outcomes" (332). In other words, the placebo effect or response appears to be the upshot of concordance between the placebo-based ritual (i.e. context) and significant, intrinsic motives (i.e. personally rewarding).

To hark back to dyslexic students, a placebo-controlled testing process, abiding by the aforementioned motivational model, could presumably indicate the pure or "real" reading performance of a dyslexic learner, without the influence of the highly-probable, detrimental emotional repercussions of any painstaking trial. Nevertheless, we should not, for any reason, sideline the fact that, in the present study, the term "placebo" does not involve the juxtaposition between two different medicines, but is only intended to linguistically convey the notion of fake treatment, which aims at bolstering some subjects' performance.

Notwithstanding the research gap in education-related literature, framing scholarship can provide adequate evidence, that is, solid guidelines towards exploring the effect of the “placebo variable” within an educational purview.

A study conducted by Wilsher et al. (1987), which was singularly aimed at measuring the effect of Piracetam, a drug marketed as a cognitive booster upon dyslexic learners, has suggested a number of improvements in reading skills, including, among others verbal memory and conceptual skills. However, a second reading can probably manifest that the double-blind placebo group involved, in order to offset the experimental group, did show some improvement. This seemingly non-significant finding may be better disciplined and likely labeled as a significant one if attention is paid on similar studies such as the ones pursued by Helfgott, Rudel and Kairam (1986), Curie et al. (2015), and Turi et al. (2018). Despite the fact that their objectives were consistent with examining the physiological effects of Piracetam towards dyslexia and/or other learning difficulties, in an educational framework, they do overlap on the observation that the placebo-controlled groups did demonstrate some improvement, although this was not the primary and intended case to be tested. So, it is assumed that placebo itself is highly likely to be mistakenly put out of contention. Of course, across the said studies, this betterment seems to manifest major vicissitudes, but a radical contribution could be reasonably expected, if re-tested. As far as their educational value is concerned, it is true that a number of seminal tests were utilised, such as the “Gray Oral Reading Test”, the “Gilmore Oral Reading Test”, the “Neirkmark Test”, or the “Wide Range Achievement Test”. Finally, it must also be taken into consideration that all learners had had typical educational opportunities and demonstrated typical intellectual abilities while evidently abstaining from any psychotropic medication. Additionally, it could also be reasonably suggested that even Piracetam itself resembles a placebo on the grounds that its effect is pharmacologically questioned as being inert (e.g. Winblad 2006). In other words, Piracetam does not appear to be conducive to one’s cognitive capacities, especially when it comes to dyslexia.

## **2.6 The Existent Research Gap in TESOL and Suggestopedia**

On the one hand, this educational lacuna has yet to be explored because the effect of placebo upon dyslexia in an EFL context does not fall into a single discipline of science. Thence, no particular interest has been observed (Cutright 2003). On the other hand, a more systematic view can likely reveal that “suggestopedia” (Lozanov, 1981, Lozanov and Gateva 1989) manifests

pedagogic trajectories that could support the present study's assumption. "Suggestopedia" is a foreign language -teaching method which singularly draws upon student choice, student confidence, and positive suggestion. For Lozanov and Grill (2013), learning is achieved as long as classroom atmosphere is suitable and allows for learners' comfort and relaxation. In this respect, physical surroundings seem to play an important role, encompassing appropriate realia (e.g. representing items of everyday life), art (e.g. baroque music) and the teacher, during language production, acting as a consultant as his/her authoritative role considerably diminishes.

In response to criticism, which labels "suggestopedia" as pseudoscience (e.g. Richards and Rogers 2001), Lozanov chooses to emphasise the notion of trust and rapport formed between teachers and learners. For Lozanov (2005) "communication in the spirit of love" and "respect for man as a human being" is the most significant pillar of suggestopedia (8). In relation to the present study's rationale, Lozanov associates, to a certain extent, suggestopedia with the placebo effect. Particularly, Lozanov supports that a deceptive treatment, under certain conditions, can be effective and, like placebo, "suggestopedia is a method of the hidden reserves of the human mind" (8). Towards assessing this effect, Lozanov narrows down the "Pygmalion-in-the-classroom-effect" which resembles the placebo effect. In that case, this effect is upon teachers. Teachers' expectations that "they have been given a class of gifted and clever pupils to work with", bring about "better results because of a number of effects on the behaviour of the teachers who have raised positive expectations" (49).

In addition, Lozanov appears to side with Saphiro (1960) by stating the following:

...these effects [of placebo]...of the aesthetics in the clinic and the entire behaviour of the medical staff in the therapeutic process are present and are equally influential in the process of training. Teachers may not be aware of the fact but all stimuli during training have an impact on its effectiveness...[So] the high level of aesthetics from the first till the last moment of the course is a permanent methodological requirement in Suggestopaedia. Most frequently, these signals are incorporated unconsciously through the peripheral perceptions and the paraconsciousness, but their elimination is impossible. This is to a great extent, the content of our practical classes in teacher training. (49)

As is already intimated, this study is contingent upon an assumption never particularly tested before. In this respect, this chapter has been vetted to cast light on this assumption, that is, decide on whether dyslexics' cognitive performance can be enhanced or not, to any extent, under the placebo treatment/effect.

### 3. The Study

The experiment was carried out in two phases, which were complementary to each other. The first one is a quantitative, psycholinguistics-based experiment, purporting to provide numerical data on the dyslexics' performance, after the placebo administration (section 3.2). The second one is a qualitative, interview-based inquiry, intended to provide textual data on the dyslexics' emergent, emic, and non-linear inner ideas and values (section 3.3). As a result, this mixed-methods approach could provide a holistic and unfragmented delineation of their task fulfillment. Thence, data triangulation and saturation can be achieved.

#### 3.1 Hypothesis

H1 (Experimental or Alternative Hypothesis): It is expected that there will be a statistically significant differentiation between two groups of adolescent dyslexic learners in relation to their reaction times (RT) during word recognition trial. In other words, it is expected that the administration of a placebo (i.e. fake treatment) shall have an effect on adolescent dyslexic subjects' reaction times (RT).

#### 3.2 Experiment (Quantitative Research)

##### 3.2.1 Design and Tools

In the present study, a parametric t-test and a between-independent-groups design has been implemented to ascertain whether there is a statistically significant difference between two groups of twenty-one (21) adolescent, dyslexic learners. The design involves an independent variable (IV), that is, the placebo administration, and a dependent variable (DV), that is, the subjects' performance on word recognition, tested in milliseconds (ms). The tools that this experiment was based on comprise a behaviour-based, lexical decision task (LDT), purporting to record the subjects' response times (RT) while making the cognitive effort to decide on whether the lexical items presented constitute true words or non-true words. The experiment is conceptually consistent with the digital application "PsyToolkit"<sup>3</sup> developed

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<sup>3</sup> Neither the "PsyToolkit" code nor lessons have been utilized for the purposes of this study. However, Stoet (2010) is fully acknowledged since his instruments' rationale has been a beacon of inspiration, guiding me throughout my postgraduate studies.

by Stoet (2010), having incorporated twenty (20) six-syllable lexical items, wherefrom ten (10) constitute true words and ten (10) non-true words. True words have been carefully selected to be in keeping with B level (CEFR), the level at which adolescent learners were, at the time.

### **3.2.2 Criteria for Word Choice**

All true lexical stimuli involved in the word-recognition trial have been selected through retrieval from the “Merriam-Webster” online word repository (edition 11th). The words’ occurrence, that is, usage frequency has been explored by means of the Google-Ngram-Viewer corpus. As is evident, there has been an attempt to decrease the likelihood of possible habituation to a number of words by selecting items not particularly related to the learners’ coursebook or any other material assigned by their teacher(s). Instead, all lexical stimuli are expected to be neutral as far as their propositional/referential or expressive meaning is concerned (Cruse 1997). Also, the group of pseudo-lexical items presented is conceptually in league with Keuleers and Brysbaert’s study (2010). Specifically, the word formation has been such as to abide by the phonotactic conventions of English. In particular, ten (10) pseudo-words have been generated, corresponding to the ten (10) true words by means of arbitrarily transitioning, eliding, or inserting one or more graphemes, keeping intact the nucleus, being adjacent to the words’ coda. As a result, the newly configured lexical items tend to have real-word characteristics that can be effortlessly and logically pronounced.

### **3.2.3 The Placebo Treatment**

A deceiving yet convincing treatment was administered to the subjects. Twenty-one (21) plastic, transparent tubes with a lid and with a sticker affixed on them (reading “Cog\_Dys”) each contained a 250-milli-litre liquid, coming from Orange-flavoured and Apple-flavoured juice. The taste was relatively sour (pH≈5.5) and its temperature was well tolerated (4° C or 40° F). The odour was recorded as pleasing and the date of expiry was twelve days (12) after the testing day.

### **3.2.4 Participants and Procedure**

The present experiment was held in the island of Zakynthos, Greece. Specifically, forty-two (42), adolescent (ranging from 15 to 18), Greek-native dyslexic students of English as L2 with a typical mental development

and with generally no evidence of psycho-physiological disorders, were involved<sup>4</sup> and tested in a safe, comfortable, controlled venue. Their contribution was recorded after the ethical approval of the University of Central Lancashire and the Directors general of the Schools were involved in the present study. The parents' or guardians' full acceptance was obtained, having responsibly declared that they give their assent. The participants' level of English language proficiency was at B2 (CEFR).

Drawing upon the opportunistic contingent of forty-two (42) individuals in Zakynthos, Greece, two (2) independent groups of twenty-one (21) participants were arbitrarily formed. In particular, a control (or neutral) group, abstaining from a treatment, and an experimental (or alternative) group which received the fake treatment aid, were formed. The neutral group was the first to be tested. In every assessment, every subject was supplied with a large 20-inch screen, whereby word stimuli were successively presented for a period of two (2) seconds. A large, clearly-lettered keyboard where the subjects had to use two buttons only, was also used; the (+) button for the true words and the (-) button for the non-words. After the neutral group trial, the experimental group was assessed. This group's subjects were asked to sip a tube of therapeutic juice which was the fake treatment. The dyslexics were invited to do so, having been told that this treatment is likely to foster their skills. After a period of one hundred and twenty minutes (120'), they were asked to perform the same task. At the end, the participants' mean scores were statistically juxtaposed.

### 3.3 Qualitative Research

#### 3.3.1 Design and Tools

The second part of this study encompasses a qualitative exploration through a semi-structured interview, which allowed the researcher to inductively dilate upon the attitudes of two subjects towards placebo-taking. More specifically, the subjects were asked about their perceptions on the use of placebo and its effectiveness in aiding them to deal with dyslexia. A semi-structured interview was utilised so as to ensure a more pliable interaction between the researcher and the respective interviewees since the placebo effect is multi-faceted. In other words, the set of questions could not be overall pre-determined, but carefully selected on the basis of the interactive and thematic flow of the interview, as its perception was expected to vary

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<sup>4</sup> All of the subjects were officially diagnosed by KESY (formerly known as KEDDY), namely the Greek Centres of Assessment and Support to Students with Special Educational Needs.



among learners (Howitt and Cramer 2020). Secondly, this qualitative exploration has majorly drawn upon a Thematic Analysis (TA). The reason was to commensurate with the study's overall scope to thematically identify both the affinities and dissimilarities between the interviewees' attitudes upon dyslexia as well as the way they are treated within an EFL context (Braun and Clarke 2006). In other words, the dyslexics' views on whether a fake treatment can be potentiated or not and whether their overall treatment by both SEN (Special Educational Needs) teachers and EFL teachers has been fair or not remains poorly understood. Thence, their views can possibly shed light on whether their learning difficulties are partially attributed to their pedagogical treatment. Finally, the overarching inquiry is comprised of the following research questions:

1. What are dyslexics' views on the placebo, that is, fake treatment?
2. How do dyslexics think a placebo can aid them in dealing with dyslexia?

### **3.3.2 Participants and Procedure**

Two (2) participants were asked to remain after the quantitative experiment so as to engage in a short interview regarding their views about the placebo efficacy (20 minutes long). In particular, they were asked to express their personal beliefs which presumably led to their decision to participate and contribute to the particular study. For anonymity reasons, their names remain unknown and, instead, pseudonyms are used; Participants B and A were at the age of 15 and 16s respectively. The interviews were recorded and thematically interpreted. It is reminded that the number is purposefully small since the scope of this qualitative investigation was to delve into unique and emic accounts – not necessarily generalisable and/or transferable (e.g. Howitt and Cramer 2020).

## **4. Findings**

This section will first report the findings drawn from the quantitative experiment, that is, the descriptive and the inferential statistics. Alongside them, the data gathered will be discussed and linked to the relevant literature. Then, this section will report the claims arisen from the thematic analysis (TA), implemented on the textual data generated.

## 4.1 Quantitative findings and discussion

### 4.1.1 Descriptive statistics

The present study comprises a cohort of forty-two participants ( $N=42$ ) tested in Zakynthos Island, Greece. Within the purview of the word-recognition test, it can be deduced that the initial experimental hypothesis is confirmed. In particular, it seems that the experimental group tends to recognise the lexical stimuli considerably faster than the neutral (or control) group. The experimental group managed to recognise the stimuli in 625.52ms, with standard deviation ( $SD$ ) 9.66, whereas the control group achieved to recognise the stimuli in 634.19ms with standard deviation ( $SD$ ) 14.16. Finally, all attempts were valid.

**Table 3.1 Mean scores and Standard Deviation on the Reaction Times (RT).**

Treatment	Groups	Mean and $SD$
Placebo positive	Experimental Group	625.52 (9.66)
Placebo negative	Neutral Group	634.19 (14.16)

With regard to Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances, it appears that  $F$  is equal to 6.391 with degrees of freedom ( $df$ ) at 35.31. As a result, the  $p$ -value is 0.016, that is, lower than 0.05 and, thus, equal variances cannot be assumed.

### 4.1.2 Inferential statistics

**Table 3-2. T-test, Degrees of Freedom, P-value, and Standard Error Difference.**

$t$	$df$	$p$	std. error difference
-2.316	35.31	0.026	3.74

Significant at the  $p<0.05$  level.

As is evident,  $t$  is equivalent to 2.316, the degree of freedom ( $df$ ) is 35.31 and, as a result, the  $p$ -value is considerably lower than 0.05 with standard error difference 3.74. As a result, it can be safely advocated that the difference between the two groups appears to be statistically significant.

### 4.1.3 Discussion of Quantitative Findings

Firstly, it can be ascertained that the dyslexics' recognition skills appear to have been fostered under the administration of a placebo within a controlled setting. In particular, the experimental group demonstrated a faster recognition performance than the neutral/control group in the lexical decision task (LDT) and this finding can be construed on the basis of the following considerations. On the one hand, such a performance could be predominantly attributed to the fact that the learners' confidence in successfully contending with the cognitive trial was considerably boosted. To dilate further, provided that the dyslexics appear to be facing various emotional problems throughout teaching and, especially, assessment, their actual performance usually ends up being detrimentally influenced (e.g. Lozanov and Gateva 1989). As a corollary of this finding, misgivings arise as to whether their performance can be objectively measured. Yet, in the present experiment, this negative variable of emotional weakness was considerably sidelined by virtue of their new, positive expectations and a new assessment attempt suggested a significant betterment. In addition, the dyslexics' motivational weakness seems to have been controlled alike. In accordance with a variety of studies (e.g. Barden and Burdett 2005, Carroll and Iles 2006; Kim and Pekrun 2016; Olsson 2019), the dyslexics' intrinsic motivation is critical to their academic performance. However, it is observed that teachers' and parents' or guardians' expectations constitute a deteriorating factor. The ostensible effectiveness of the present treatment appeared to assuage this discomfort and distress, and the expectancy of its result triggered by the dyslexics' internal and external context, seemed to be conducive to their recognition attempts. The effectiveness of placebo can also be expounded on the grounds of the teaching method of suggestopedia posited by Lozanov (1981). Despite the fact that this placebo treatment was not correlated with theories of language (e.g. structuralism or functionalism) or theories of learning (e.g. behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism) and, thus, theoretical approaches to form a method (with a syllabus, material and error correction policy), it does share propinquities with "suggestopedia", questioning the research paucity on this method. Specifically, the administration of placebo and the implementation of Lozanov's method evenly aim at learners' emotional affective filter (Krashen 1992), the authority, convincing concept which facilitates learning rather than impede it, along with the infantilisation procedure where learners are conditioned to passively assimilate the belief that they will succeed and then act independently and decisively (as it is the case with infants' development). It is argued at both tenets that relaxation and encouragement can accelerate

learning and respect towards teachers' interventions, and thus, they are highly likely to vouch for learners' success.

## 4.2 Qualitative Claims and Discussion

This qualitative exploration is reliant upon two (2) recordings, which were transcribed into full texts. By means of a Thematic Analysis (TA), the data and, in particular, a variety of codes generated convergences/parallels, that is, subordinate themes and superordinate themes. The latter ones appear to be representative of inner patterns of meaning, behaviour and thinking towards placebo and dyslexia.

### 4.2.1 Placebo's Generic Therapeutic Properties

Drawing upon both interviewees' accounts, fake treatment, if administered appropriately, appears to be perceived as a motivational galvaniser, which seems to reinforce one's cure in any health-related issue. The two interviewees are of the opinion that such a treatment can have a significant effect on one's self-esteem and overall problem handling. Throughout their accounts, they argue that such a treatment might offer a unique therapy that bears upon one's need to be treated. Participant B repeatedly refers to the notion of determination and self-approval, whilst Participant A considers the case of cancer tumors, which frequently drum up lots of motivational problems to carry on living. This information signifies the sub-theme "a motivational aggrandiser".

It's worth fighting for as there is something that can beat what you suffer from / A cancer patient may have problems because his psychology [mood or stance towards life] is strongly affected / A game of our minds.  
[Participant A]

The expectations about success . . . influence the results / It makes you feel ready to become the winner of life. [Participant B]

Such treatment can be conducive to people's overall physical empowerment as well. Participant B retrieves a fond memory of his/her, when his/her mother had once deceived him/her with a pain-killer to mitigate his/her nausea. However, as is obvious, a pain killer is unlikely to prevent someone from vomiting. Participant A states that s/he felt "almighty" because the whole context made him/her feel so. This information demonstrates the sub-theme "a power amplifier".

Ready to smack everything down / It is innocent and can help so much /  
This apple juice made me feel really strong, really almighty. [Participant A]

My mother once gave me a pain killer and persuaded me that I would beat  
my sense of puke [puking]. [Participant B]

#### 4.2.2 Placebo's Therapeutic Properties in relation to Dyslexia

Apropos the issue of dyslexia, both participants appear to side with the overall assumption that such a treatment can reveal the real performance of a dyslexic learner. Participant A argues that when s/he sipped the placebo, the entire support s/he felt made him/her believe in his/her abilities. Participant B also lays emphasis on the person that administers the treatment. This information resonates with the sub-theme “a motivational reinforcement”.

Placebo makes me count on me / Placebo makes me understand that this is  
nothing but an idea. [Participant A]

Teachers are around you. [Participant B]

Similarly, both participants tend to concur with the assumption that such treatment can be conducive to their skills. Even though no property can be linked to such a rapid and obvious amelioration, participants fervently support that it is the treatment which biologically and/or cognitively fostered their skills. It can be therefore inferred, that their determination to perform efficiently and successfully is the key factor. Moreover, the metaphor or, rather, conceit of Patrick Star—an imaginative character whose mental skills are below the average—can ascertain their intense effort to come to terms with the change they have experienced by referring to an example they are already privy to. This information bears upon the sub-theme “a skills booster for a better performance”.

With your juice, I thought that some nerves would work better. I would be  
speedier. [Participant A]

When I took your treatment, I felt a kind of air went through my mind. Like  
a quick fan doing away my mind's dust / Like Patrick's mind when solving  
maths. [Participant B]

## 5. Conclusion

Dyslexia still remains a convoluted issue, being incurable, at the moment. In global pedagogy, the lack of consensus on its causality and its treatment has contributed to an unprecedented uncertainty which puzzles SEN and EFL teachers. Within this conundrum, the dyslexics' performance appears to have been amply investigated, but literature clearly shows that little attention has been paid to the fluid confiding variables of testing. Learners' fragile educational identity pre-empts any possibility to fully compensate for their difficulties and the current methodology of teaching and assessment persistently fails to take it on board. This study uses a fundamental, cognitive-psychology experiment to suggest that the dyslexics' performance cannot be objectively measured until and unless the learners' internal and external context are equally considered. This assumption is in an inextricable league with Lozanov's methodology, which remains poorly explored, nowadays, and is decried as obsolete. This study comes to suggest that this methodology is reliant upon several pedagogic pillars that should be re-visited by contemporary pedagogy, including new perspectives, like the present one of fake treatment, which may challenge educators' and learners' perception towards dyslexia in an EFL context.

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**PART II:**

**INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS  
IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING CONCERNING THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN WITH MIGRANT BIOGRAPHY

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### **Abstract**

Nowadays, we are called to teach in schools that are no longer homogeneous, consisting of students from different cultural backgrounds who are facing the challenge of living and interacting effectively in new multicultural and multilingual societies. It is thus very important for every teacher to be able to respond to this challenge of migration and multiculturalism through appropriate teaching that will shape a school environment of mutual understanding and respect for all cultures and ethnicities. The study presented in this chapter is part of a European Project called SEAs4ALL (Successful Educational Actions for all) which aims to (a) increase the efficiency of learning, (b) generate equity, and (c) increase social cohesion and coexistence. In this chapter, I will share my experience of implementing technology in a multilingual teaching context in an attempt to create an effective language learning environment and provide all students with constructive learning opportunities helping them develop a positive attitude towards different cultures. Alongside these efforts, inviting parents and other volunteers from the community to be part of the teaching process also added to the language support successfully and provided a pathway towards improving Education. The chapter concludes with implications on how various teaching techniques supported by technology can be used to improve school curricula and enhance intercultural education in Cyprus and beyond, in other multicultural settings.

**Key Words:** Technology, Language Learning, Multilingual context, multicultural education

## 1. Introduction

Cyprus is located in southeast Europe at the intersection of three continents: Europe to the northwest, Africa to the south and Asia to the east and north. It has been the prey to several conquerors and under the domination of various enemies and as a result, it has always been multicultural. For the last decades, due to the socio-political developments, it has been an immigrant and refugee receiving country whose increasingly diverse population and growing number of immigrant children have altered the landscape of education. Furthermore, the partial lifting of the restrictions of movement across the Green Line in 2003 has led to some internal movement of Turkish Cypriots from the north to the south part of the island. This, in combination with labour worker immigrants from East Asia, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East resulted in an increase in the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity creating significant challenges in the education system.

Cypriot society is becoming increasingly multicultural, resulting in a growing number of students from diverse backgrounds being enrolled in local public schools. This sets a new challenge for our traditionally monolingual school system and policymakers and calls on the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MOECSY) to urge every educator to adopt strategies that will help them to incorporate diversity into the school curriculum in order to prevent the marginalisation of immigrant students. As interestingly asserted by Angelides, Stylianou, and Leigh (2004, 307), an educational system should not act as a “kettle of cultural assimilation that perpetuates biases, clichés, racist behaviours and cultivates the idea that the different have no place among us”.

It is teachers’ responsibility to enhance students’ self-esteem by communicating positive messages, influencing their performance and helping them become effective users of spoken and written language. To do so, “it is of great importance for teacher education programmes to first provide pre-service teachers with sufficient guidance in developing knowledge, skills, and dispositions for dealing with diverse issues in the classroom” (Diakou 2020, 145). Since multilingualism has become so common due to globalisation and the transnational mobility of the population, the ability to understand one another across and beyond all types of cultural barriers is a fundamental prerequisite for making our diverse democratic societies work. As a result, teachers should be well-prepared to

take active responsibility for these children's integration into a creative learning environment, keeping in mind the high dropout rates of these children as well as the fact that they are poor academic achievers and experience academic suspensions for related disciplinary problems.

In this chapter I will focus on how technology can facilitate the smooth integration of immigrant students into mainstream education, on the benefits of technology in primary education, and more specifically in multicultural classrooms, and on how technology is promoted in the new national curriculum. Finally, I will analyse the way I worked with my students, being part of this European Project (SEAs4ALL-Successful Educational Actions for All), and how I implemented technology in this specific multicultural school where I worked.

## **2. The Use of Technology in Multicultural Classrooms**

As it appears, our society is grappling with difficult issues involving race and ethnic relations and since "education is considered to be a vehicle for improving relations among diverse groups" (Diakou 2020, 144), it is important for teachers to employ strategies that would incorporate diversity into the curriculum of multicultural schools. The evolving opportunities and challenges created by technology support and nurture equitable education for students with differences and as a result "society benefits when that difference can be leveraged to create more choices, provide more perspectives, find new competencies and see innovative approaches not considered before" (Treviranus 2018, 4). In these difficult times we live, changes creating new ways with new literacies, and new forms of learning are essential, and no one can deny the fact that the widespread use of technology and social media can help in this respect. A rich variety of technologies, social media and platforms are nowadays used in educational systems worldwide to support learning and empower "students and teachers to share and engage with one another in new and more efficient ways" (Kimmons and Belikov 2018, 3), that value diverse perspectives, creativity, and individual expression. Social networking allows both students and teachers to "cultivate learning networks that extend beyond the confines of the brick-and-mortar classroom" (Kimmons and Belikov 2018, 3) while digital games are increasingly being used as supplementary teaching resources to the school curriculum. Some social networks which are explicitly education-focused (Edmodo, Class Dojo, etc.) not only can they provide instructional content but they can also serve as an educational environment in which students learn from their peers. They can be used not only for social contact but also as support for school work.

Recent research considers “the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as the centre-piece of digital inclusion and social inclusion” (Alam and Imran 2015, 349) since better access to information can indeed contribute to the social inclusion of marginalised members of society. A simple mobile phone can act as “the most powerful communication medium even richer than email or chat as it can act as a learning device despite its technical limitations” (Miangah 2012, 310) and allows children to progress based on their cognitive state. Technology and social media can also play a powerful role in raising students’ awareness of diversity and can contribute significantly to the teaching/learning of immigrant students. Educational programmes should therefore provide learners with opportunities to enrich their learning experiences by incorporating daily activities that reflect the world they [learners] live in. It is also important that teachers’ expectations of children’s learning are always high but realistic. It is not a question of putting too much pressure on young learners in order to succeed in learning, but a question of providing them with stimulating tasks, exposing them to the English language as much as possible, setting clear expectations, praising their efforts, and motivating them in this way to keep working and learning effortlessly.

As educators, we know that learning is best done through experience which can be achieved by providing students with rich, authentic learning tasks designed to connect what students are taught in school to real-life experiences. As technological advancements continue to revolutionise teaching, it is becoming more obvious that technology can be used to facilitate experiential learning and enhance current classroom practice if the educator manages to identify its potentials. Students can be encouraged to create and consume content through the use of sites such as YouTube and Instagram, they can connect and share information with others through social media and engage in role-play and games. Teachers can take advantage of these opportunities afforded by technology in order to help students learn in an authentic learning environment by investigating, evaluating, and gathering information from various sources, and creating the best learning environments possible for them. Having ultimate language learning goals in focus and clearly defining them allows teachers to use technology in a meaningful way to enhance learning and prepare interesting, relevant topics and materials using the right strategies. Technology is an empowering tool which can help students maximise their independence and boost their confidence, as it allows them to work at their own pace, reflect on and evaluate new content and develop critical thinking and problem solving skills; It is considered “a powerful tool that [teachers] can use to



differentiate [their] classroom instruction and address individual learner needs” (Lewis 2017, 95).

Technology can help learners to feel a greater sense of freedom since the learning process becomes more personalised, spontaneous, and ubiquitous promoting a more effective and flexible learning environment for language learning. Developing digital literacy skills will make students use technology as a learning tool and help them to “learn how to learn”, which is one of the main aims of the new curriculum. Creating interactive group activities through the world wide web can expose students to authentic content which can enrich the coursebook they are using while giving them opportunities to develop critical thinking and construct knowledge. There is also an increased engagement through the different learning activities making all children feel committed to complete their tasks successfully, improving the learning results, reducing the existing inequalities, and increasing the level of academic learning for all children. According to Zhang (2012), the positive outcomes of collaborative learning multiply when students form heterogeneous groups. Bringing diverse students together in meaningful interactive group activities, exposing them to unique cultural knowledge and pushing them to think in more complex and divergent ways, promotes critical thinking. Examples of different activities are mentioned in section 5 where I talk about my experience working within a multicultural context while being part of the European Project SEAs4ALL (Successful Educational Actions for All).

Teachers should aim at embracing technology in ways that not only support the learning process but also transform it. Their aim should be to facilitate the educational teaching and learning from different perspectives, in a multimedia way; this presupposes the inclusion of activities that have meaning for children and stimulate and support their critical and creative thinking skills, provide them with opportunities to produce language through a variety of different media while making sure that not much of the teaching time is spent on helping students understand how to use the tools. As Lewis suggests ‘the best implementations of technology are those where technology blends into the background and becomes invisible in the teaching process’ (Lewis 2017, 15). Through the implementation of ICT, teachers can offer students multisensory and multimedia experiences through a blend of sounds, images, animations, and graphics embracing “a stress-free environment, rich in language input, offered by online resources which can arm learners’ acquisition of fluency in spoken language” (Diakou 2015, 284).

### **3. The Multicultural Greek-Cypriot Educational System**

Cyprus has always been multicultural due to the existence of both the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities and the constitutional recognition of the Maronite, Armenian and Latin (Roman Catholics) minorities. Moreover, over the last few years, there have been many illegal immigrants entering the territory of the south, controlled by the Greek-Cypriot government of Cyprus, coming through the Turkish-occupied area of the island which, in combination with the mass influx of labour immigrants who entered the island in the 1990s, has led to a significant change in the demographics of Cyprus necessitating the reinterpretation of the monocultural direction of education.

There are many multicultural Cypriot Primary Schools where the majority of students are not Cypriot students but mainly Turkish Cypriots, Russians, Romanians, Bulgarians. These children come from poor economic backgrounds or families of limited education. They are characterised by high rates of early school leaving, absenteeism, and conflicts in the classroom, as well as conflicts with their teachers and families. According to school internal evaluations, these students have very low linguistic competence and low reading and writing skills. Overall, hardly any child has an appropriate level of attainment.

This inadequacy of multiculturalism prompted the MOECSY to promote a new policy aiming at social justice in education while eradicating stereotypes and prejudices, creating an intercultural school which would not exclude but would aim to promote immigrant students' inclusion in the educational system and society of Cyprus. This intercultural school "should be conducive to the success of all students despite their sociocultural, linguistic or religious diversity" (Hajisoteriou, Neophytou, and Angelides 2012, 396).

Cyprus as a member of the European Union was expected to ascribe to further European norms concerning human rights, antiracism, and intercultural education. The Commission of Educational Reform expressed concerns about the "narrowly ethnocentric and culturally monolithic Greek-Cypriot educational system and argued that this basically ignored multiculturalism" (Zembylas 2010, 43). The first attempt for change in policy actually ignored the Europeanisation and internalisation of Cypriot Education, treating diversity as a type of deficiency that needs to be treated quickly so that children can be assimilated before they encounter even more difficulties with the curriculum. As a result, the Commission urged the MOECSY to initiate a generic educational reform by introducing an immediate modernisation of the content of the curriculum and textbooks in

response to the contemporary trend of intercultural education. This resulted in a new curriculum produced in 2010 and piloted during the school year 2011-2012. In this curriculum reform technology plays an important role and suggestions are made for using online websites which include ready to use activities or websites that allow teachers to create their own activities. Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports never stops working on the improvement of the National Curriculum, incorporating new material (software and other) into the curriculum in order to facilitate the use of ICT in the educational process. In fact, efforts have been made by the Ministry to promote a policy that will facilitate the smooth integration of pupils of different cultural identities into the school and to cater for their linguistic and cultural needs as effectively as possible. At the same time, it supports the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus to organise optional in-service training seminars on issues related to multicultural education and, more specifically, the implementation of technology in teaching.

#### **4. The Role of Technology in Supporting the Implementation of the New English Language/EFL Curriculum**

The multicultural character of Cyprus and the existence of different ethnic groups led to the development of the updated national curriculum as mentioned in section 3, for all public schools where discourses of intercultural education appeared to emerge. According to the general aim of the new English curriculum in Cyprus students should develop positive attitudes towards English and foreign languages in general, acquire basic intercultural perceptions and skills as well as the necessary knowledge and communication skills to use the foreign language in a creative way for meaningful communication in various everyday circumstances responding effectively to the challenges of the 21st century (MOEC 2016). This curriculum focuses on the communicative approach to language teaching and learning taking into consideration students' diverse learning needs and its aims include “(a) the adoption of an intercultural ideology that connects Cypriot traditions with the knowledge of other cultures; (b) the development of attitudes such as democracy, tolerance, friendship and cooperation, and (c) the emphasis on the European dimension in education (MOEC 2010)” (Hajisoteriou, Neophytou, and Angelides 2012, 38). It is also expected to help children adapt to the rapidly changing times and the new economic, social, and cultural conditions, fulfilling major social and economic functions that are crucial to the stability, productivity, and health of the population. Finally, it aspires in cultivating respect for speakers of minority

languages or immigrant populations without regarding them as disadvantaged by the mainstream education system; this rather complex endeavour, requires an ethos that balances and respects individual students' native languages, and their communities as a way of life rather than a problem to be solved.

Additionally, the English curriculum stresses the development of positive attitudes towards people from other linguistic communities and cultures but at the same time, it focuses on the enhancement of their self-image and awareness of their own culture. Students are also expected to master an adequate level of comprehension in the English language and the cultural elements associated with it and enhance their ability to communicate and interact orally and in writing (MOEC 2010b, 455). MOECSY hopes that through this multicultural system, it will democratise education, give equal opportunities to learners from diverse global backgrounds and cultures, create favourable conditions for all students, and most importantly educate free and creative individuals who will be capable of respecting each other and solving unique intellectual and moral problems.

Besides the aforementioned aims which inform the new curriculum, the fact that English is one of the main languages being used by multilingual speakers in their translingual and transcultural communication along with the overwhelming spread of English as a lingua franca, and the globalisation of communication through the internet and social networks, resulted in the publication of new teaching books which are supported by a number of digital tools; these tools can be used by teachers to supplement the topics /activities introduced in class, and together with the new books, they are expected to bring a yearning for recognition of differences and the acceptance of otherness without the loss of ethnic individuality, identity or roots. They are also expected to support and differentiate language learning strategies so that all children can communicate more effectively. That is, through exposure to the topics covered in these new books and the support of technology, children will become familiar with new cultures and will be helped to interact effectively with other speakers who come from different cultural backgrounds while they also develop intercultural skills in socio-affective, linguistic-communicative learning strategies and interaction management dimensions.

It seems that technology cannot stay out of schools as it helps teachers to be more effective in their teaching. Additionally, since a teacher's main role is to help students learn how to learn, "ICT often serves as a tool to help learners develop metacognitive skills and strategies for permanent and more effective teaching and learning, and quality of education, in general" (Nisiforou and Laghos, n.d.). In 1993, MOEC initiated an ICT programme

aiming to enhance the educational process and since 2002, it has adopted a programme entitled, “The Integration of Information Communication and Technology” which is funded by the European Development Bank and the Council of Europe Development Bank. According to this programme, ICT is used in the national curriculum as a powerful tool in the teaching and learning process, aiming to enrich the learning environment and ensure a more effective implementation of the school curriculum (Annual report, MOEC 2002). The Department of Educational Technology of MOECYSY implements programmes for continuing professional development in the area of ICT research and practice, proposes new educational implementations, and promotes innovations related to the use of new technologies in education. Through these programmes, teachers learn how to integrate technology in educational practice changing the whole learning environment, becoming facilitators of knowledge instead of lecturers. The teacher has now a reinforcing role, encouraging children and assisting them through the learning process.

ICT is now a mature part of the curriculum; it is a set of tools that teachers implement in their teaching since it has the potential to transform the way education is being delivered. ICT was integrated into the primary school curriculum not as a separate subject but as an educational tool embedded in the teaching and learning process of other subjects. We could say that “ICT develops what is possible by reinforcing what teachers are skilful at doing, by extending what students are able to produce and by providing an entry point to content and enquiries that were not possible without the use of ICT” (Nisiforou and Laghos n.d.). The primary objective of the Education System in Cyprus is to continuously upgrade the education provided to ensure equal learning opportunities for all children through the implementation of an educational policy that is based on the values of equality, inclusiveness, creativity and innovation, with the aim of a balanced and comprehensive development. Educators, using new teaching methods and integrating ICT into their lessons for the benefit of students, implement programmes through international European partnerships which aim at promoting European democratic citizenship, ensuring sustainable development and enhancing social cohesion, in line with the strategic goals of the Ministry of Education Culture, Youth and Sports.

## **5. My Experience of Implementing Technology in a Multilingual Teaching Context**

Successful Educational Actions for All (SEAs4ALL) is a European Project promoting “Successful Educational Actions for Inclusion and Social

Cohesion” which aims at improving the academic achievement of all students and developing better coexistence and attitude towards social solidarity. It emphasises two main factors, interaction and community involvement, and its overall strategy is consistent with efforts to involve parents, particularly lower-income, minority-status, and culturally different parents, in their children’s education. Following this general strategy, the activities I adopted were aiming at families which were dealing with issues of alcohol and drug abuse, family violence, health care, and related social service needs, from social service agencies, involving in this way parents in their children’s education. Through successful educational actions (SEAs) the educational outcomes for many children and young people in Europe have improved and this was also evident in our school by the end of this project.

Interactive groups were cooperative learning groups that were used in this multicultural education programme. Students were placed in small groups where the task and the reward structure required face-to-face interaction in a situation in which students were guided by an adult, parent, or any other adult from the community. Typically, students from two or more ethnic groups, both sexes, and of varying academic abilities were brought together in groups of four or six to learn English. An adult guided the within-group interaction and students moved every 10-15 minutes from one activity to another, being given in this way the opportunity to take part in 4-5 different activities. SEAs have led to significant improvements in intergroup relations in classrooms diverse in race and ethnicity, nationality and performance levels. In addition, cooperative learning techniques increased student achievement, especially that of minority students and low-achieving students (Stephan 2004, 785). Being the teacher in these groups allowed me to develop positive relations at classroom level throughout the learning process. The role of parents was also important, especially for young children. Implementing SEAs in multicultural classrooms while inviting parents or other adults to contribute to the learning process brought about excellent results in terms of academic achievement, trust, and interracial friendliness. Furthermore, involving parents in children’s education was an innovative initiative and proved to have had a significant effect on educational achievement. Engaging both parents and children in learning improved both learning and behaviour. Parents involved in this project reported having gained more confidence in helping their children. Work commitments of course were cited as a barrier by only few parents since in the specific school where I was working, most parents were unemployed, thus, their involvement was more feasible. It was notable that parents believed that their involvement was extremely important not only

for their children but also for themselves since they felt that they were also learning along with their children.

Informed by the aims of the particular programme, I introduced activities of a more cooperative rather than competitive nature making sure that all students were given equal status. Exposure to interactive group activities supported by technology also appeared to have improved intergroup relations as they [activities] were structured in a way that required all group members' contribution to the attainment of a shared goal. Each student was able to make his/her contribution aiming at the final product. Interactive group activities were reconstructing my role as a facilitator and the learner as the active agent in the process of learning allowing students to take charge of their own learning. In such an atmosphere, conducive to learning, I managed to humanise even large classes. *Zimmertwins.com*, *Dvolver* and *boomwriter.com* were some of the tools I utilised, which allowed students to collaborate in order to create their own original stories as they got inspired and motivated by the many different animated clip art. These tools allowed students to foster a relationship of trust and partnership while writing creatively in groups. I circulated the classroom, acting as a facilitator, ready to support, redirect, and provide meaningful praise to help students with their learning.

Using videos in language learning transformed the way my students learned. A video would bring knowledge into my classroom in a much more interesting and motivating way but at the same time it would bring my classroom out into the world by giving them the chance to share their work with other students beyond the classroom. A video would also be used as a prompt for an individual or group project that students would work on and be engaged all through the learning process and as Lewis (2017) states "learning with video helps increase engagement and support knowledge retention" (58). Considering the aforementioned benefits, I incorporated video creation tools like PowerPoint, YouTube, Moovly which constituted a powerful mechanism for collaborative learning. Adding also live video interaction during class energised the classroom atmosphere and increased students' engagement and overall positive reactions. Students were also encouraged to listen to and interact with English native speakers through Skype.

Play is a natural process of learning for children. Vygotsky's work has been particularly important in recognising how play allows children to make meaning based on resources (real or imagined) in their immediate context to express feelings and to share intentions and ideas with other children. Digital games have the potential to enhance the language learning experience. Playing games in the language classroom or using Apps on



smartphones and tablets can have positive effects on motivation, willingness to communicate, and language socialisation allowing teachers to help children become motivated and enjoy learning English. There are common apps that lend themselves to language practice including weather app, travel apps, public transport apps, film apps with trailers of films, and sports apps that can empower learners and give them the chance to succeed in learning, allowing them to work at their own pace. Game-based language learning was used to teach skills such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening, reading comprehension and spelling serving as a link between the real world of knowledge and the visual world of the game. Playing games in the language classroom or using Apps on smartphones and tablets enabled me to build authentic tasks helping children to become motivated and engaged in the process of learning English. “Duolingo” for example, is an app I used in my classroom, which allowed students, to naturally progress at their own pace while I could point out their mistakes and praise their efforts. “Kahoot”, a game-based learning platform, was also used to boost collaboration, teamwork, and communication and encouraged students to participate in student-paced challenges. Finally, Rosetta Stone (an American education technology software that develops language) was offered for free by the Cyprus Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports allowing students to listen and repeat words, match words and pictures, and generally help students make progress in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

Furthermore, the use of storytelling through tablets to challenge racial (and other) oppression was particularly important. Students could listen to stories from around the world or they could create their own stories working together in groups in their classrooms or online with students from other schools in Cyprus or from abroad. Stories are considered to be a fundamental educational tool as they can be used to “analyse the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race” (Billings 2004, 58). Digital storytelling activities can be a powerful tool in the teaching and learning process, helping in differentiating the educational process in terms of technological enrichment of the learning environment for a more effective implementation of the school curriculum. Stories such as “Handa’s surprise” from grade two or “Beautiful Bananas” from grade three seemed ideal for enabling young learners to gain a fuller understanding of the concept of multiculturalism. I took advantage of the scenery, animals, fruit, clothing, and traditions from a different culture (Africa) allowing students to glimpse into a world beyond their immediate surroundings, gaining an insight into a way of life that was different. They *travelled* online to villages in Africa to see how different life can be. After



listening to the story, they could watch the relevant video on their tablets followed up by cooperative activities ([www.padlet.com](http://www.padlet.com)) and personalised questions which urged them to go beyond the plot of the story and enhanced their critical thinking skills.

Digital technologies were integrated into the primary school curriculum not as a separate subject but as an educational tool embedded in the teaching and learning process of other subjects and as a result, it can enrich education and more specifically language learning, offer new learning opportunities, and facilitate personalised and interactive learning. Also, digital technologies can improve learning outcomes in education by promoting equity in learning for disadvantaged, disabled, or multilingual students. Having access to the internet proved to have been fascinating and motivating for the students since they are developing communication skills with children in other schools both in Cyprus and abroad. Classrooms characterised by diversity could create advantages for learners. According to Eren, Bilgehan, and Gülnihal Gül (2017), such classrooms where diversity is plentiful, offer multiple perspectives on various issues leading to student engagement, richer and more meaningful learning experiences.” Technology encourages collaborative learning where learners are supported and motivated to evaluate each other achieving a substantial amount of learning, exchanging their knowledge, skills, and attitudes by interacting with each other in the target language.

## 6. Conclusion

Multilingualism and multiculturalism have become the norm, a routine facet of society. All teachers should learn how to address the needs of students with diverse cultural backgrounds, adopting viable intercultural classroom management strategies. The educational system of Cyprus is characterised by cultural diversity, and this should be reflected in its curriculum. A multicultural curriculum that encourages the use of technology could be a great tool for enhancing schooling experience for all students, providing them with equal educational opportunities and reaffirming in this way the significance of every minority group in the society. It allows teachers to create a stimulating environment and selected motivating materials for all students, ensuring that motivation levels are sustained during lessons and encouraging “cultural comparisons in a non-judgemental way promoting inclusion and raising awareness of cultural differences” (Lewis 2017, 91).

Since learning to communicate is considered to be a socialisation process, teachers should see the overall purpose of language teaching as the development of the learner’s communicative knowledge in the context of

personal and social development. The challenge before every teacher is not an easy one. If we are to provide equal access and opportunities for all, then the recognition of cultural diversity is essential to our survival. No ghetto schools should exist and teachers should not offer low-quality education, or have low expectations from any student. Instead, they should offer all students a high academic level of instrumental learning, differentiated instruction as a successful and effective teaching practice aiming at facilitating language learning while raising the educational attainment of migrant students.

Since our society is characterised by this ethnic and racial texture, we should make sure that education links schools to communities, helping teachers in this way to ‘better understand their students and increase their ability to draw on the community as a rich resource’ (Banks 2004, 767). The use of technology and social media, if used wisely and productively, contributes to students’ increased awareness and knowledge of multicultural citizenship education for participants and helps all children, especially those coming from economically impoverished backgrounds or recent immigrants, overcome any shame they may be harbouring about their origin. A teacher must provide equitable classrooms for multicultural school populations. Equal educational opportunities should be a fundamental educational goal making sure that “students should not only appreciate the differing perspectives and cultures of their classmates but also feel that they are on an equal footing with each other intellectually and academically” (Cohen and Lotan 2004, 737). In this way, they are more likely to succeed in their own learning and consequently gain access to the labour market and full participation in society.

As educators, we should not be treating the diversity of “other” pupils as a type of deficiency, keeping in mind that all languages and linguistic varieties are of equal value and importance, with no language or variety being intrinsically superior to any other since diversity is the norm within the Cypriot society. We have to look at students’ linguistic background, investigate their language proficiencies and adjust our teaching to the “respective learning environment of this specific multicultural school where we are working, preventing other children from looking at them through a prism of stereotypes they have acquired through the monocultural society they are growing up in” (Diakou 2020, 146).

Technology can give new power to language creating a new vision that energises learning and teaching, and developing an effective motivational intervention which aims at enhancing learners’ language learning process in the classroom. Considering that the mastery of a second language is a long-term process, the learner’s ultimate success largely depends on the level of

motivation which in turn, determines the degree of effort learners put into learning. The integration of technology in Cyprus' educational system can serve as an important component of the quality of education, being inextricably tied with high levels of motivation and positive learning outcomes. Furthermore, it is pertinent that ICT contributes positively to the learning which occurs in schools, and if it is to be effective, it requires the conscious effort and ambition of the entire school ecosystem that is the principal, teachers, parents and students to make it work. For this to be achieved, it is essential that stakeholders, (educators, students, parents) raise awareness of the value of technology in the educational process and the need for its use/integration into the school curriculum.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

# INTERCULTURALISM IN THE FL CLASSES: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICES WITHIN THE YOUNG LEARNERS' CLASSROOMS

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### **Abstract**

Fostering intercultural speakers within a foreign language (FL) classroom entails empowering students' intercultural and linguistic competence and preparing them for interaction with their classmates from different cultures; this, in turn, facilitates students' readiness to interact effectively within intercultural speech events demonstrating an intercultural competence. This paper provides an account of 400 Greek FL teachers' perspectives and practices in relation to developing interculturally competent speakers within a young foreign language learners' context. In particular, teachers were asked to complete a specially designed questionnaire with the purpose of identifying their perspectives and to provide a short portfolio which focused on a) their attempt and practices to raise students' intercultural sensitivity and awareness as well as students' strategies of effective communication and interaction and b) teachers' awareness of intercultural communication strategies that need to be developed in the classrooms. Findings revealed that a) the teachers made regular use of educational material related to other cultures and countries, b) they were fully aware of the communication strategies and their importance in the language teaching process but did not make any serious attempt to develop such strategies as they were not part of the national curriculum of foreign language education; c) they had limited experience with regard to the use of intercultural communication strategies therefore, they did not focus on them during their teaching. Given the above,

proposals are made for teaching practices that can help teachers to develop interculturally competent students even from an early education level.

**Key Words:** Foreign language, intercultural awareness, communication, Greek education

## 1. Introduction

Greece has been an immigrant and refugee receiving country for more than two decades, resulting in an increasing number of student-populations with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in school classrooms. The co-existence of these students at school has intensified the need for further empowerment of students' cooperation and peaceful interaction, promoting a culture of respect, mutual understanding, and exchange. Therefore, the need to promote intercultural communication competence, namely "the ability of the speaker to interact effectively with other speakers coming from different cultural contexts" (Papadopoulos and Griva 2017, 2) is intensive so as to ensure the effective exchange of transactional and interactional content among people coming from culturally-diverse backgrounds, as well as to foster the social integration of foreign citizens in the target society.

This particular chapter examines Greek FL teachers' perspectives and practices in relation to developing interculturally competent speakers at schools in an attempt to facilitate their smooth integration within the social context, encouraging multicultural friendships and exchanges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In what follows, this chapter will cover aspects of intercultural communication and will present the findings of a study conducted in Greece. Special emphasis is placed on providing a descriptive account of the basic components of intercultural communication, referring to intercultural sensitivity, awareness, and cooperation/interaction. The chapter also stresses the communication and intercultural communication strategies employed by young foreign language learners while the rest of the chapter is devoted to the description of the study and its findings leading to certain conclusions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 From Communicative to Intercultural Communicative Competence

*Communicative competence* is rooted in Chomsky's (1965, 4) "fundamental distinction between competence and performance". According to Chomsky

(1965), competence refers to “the shared knowledge of the ideal speaker-listener set in a completely homogeneous speech community”, and is language-internal in the sense that it does not relate to the external actual use of language, the latter being subject to performance which he defines “as the actual use of language in concrete situations” (4). Hymes (as cited in Ohno 2006, 56), on the other hand, relates performance to the encoding and decoding of the messages. Due to imponderable psychological and social factors affecting the speaker’s performance such as lapses of memory, distractions, errors and unfinished structures, performance does not echo a speaker's competence (Kadhim 2008; Ohno 2006).

Hymes (1972) is opposed to the idealised view of competence proposed by Chomsky, and argues that the social and cultural differentiations among a speech community which affect both the speakers' competence and their performance, as well as the multiple aspects of competence, need to be considered. He contributed considerably to the consolidation of communicative competence as an integral part of language classrooms, by separating competence into “linguistic competence, which deals with producing and understanding grammatically correct sentences, and communicative competence, which deals with producing and understanding sentences that are appropriate and acceptable to a particular situation” (Hymes as cited in Ohno 2006, 26). Based on the above definition of communicative competence, it can be inferred that being communicatively competent entails the ability to relate the knowledge obtained in the classroom with the real world (Saleh 2013).

Canale and Swain (1980) further developed the notion of communicative competence by identifying three basic components of communicative competences: grammatical competence-the knowledge of the language code, sociolinguistic competence-the use of language in relation to sociocultural rules in different social contexts, and strategic competence - “the ability of using language to achieve communicative goals and enhance the effectiveness of communication”. In a subsequent study, Canale and Swain (1983) added “discourse competence” as a fourth component to the notion of communicative competence which refers to the ability of the person to use words and phrases to produce discourse with a meaning.

However, appreciating that the social and school contexts are being developed and they have come to become more multicultural and multilingual, various changes have emerged and specialised educational and learning goals have been proposed to meet the new reality. In fact, the objectives of every educational system stem from and serve the contemporary needs of the society at a given time. The modern multicultural and multilingual reality developed as a result of globalisation and “changed



the conditions in which language learning and language teaching takes place” (Griva and Kofou 2019, 68). There is an urgent need for the traditional communicative component foregrounded in language teaching contexts to be enriched with intercultural elements. As asserted by Papadopoulos (2020, 78), “In a language classroom, developing intercultural speakers means giving students intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence and preparing them to interact with classmates from other cultures.” Intercultural communicative competence is a multidimensional term, which has been variously defined to meet standards proposed over the decades and is closely related to three different but interrelated components: *intercultural sensitivity*, *intercultural awareness* as well as *strategies/skills of intercultural cooperation and interaction* (Papadopoulos 2020). Based on these, every language education programme should aim at equipping learners with all these competencies to lead them to develop a more intercultural character.

## 2.2 Intercultural Sensitivity & Awareness

Intercultural sensitivity has been variously defined and placed at the centre of the interaction context. Research on intercultural sensitivity has shown that being sensitive to cultural differences can be important and contributes to the promotion of effective interaction and communication between members of diverse groups (Papadopoulos 2020). It has come to include various skills or within a broader context, competencies, which are considered to be of utmost importance when wishing a smooth cross-cultural contact (Bennett 2010). Worth noting are Bennett’s (1993) claims that intercultural sensitivity does not constitute an inherent human trait but it can develop through actual first-hand experience from people’s actions within a culturally-diverse environment, helping them to develop a sense of understanding cultural differences in a more complex way (Hammer et al. 2003).

Apart from intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, which entails understanding and respecting the relation between the world of origin and the world of the target community (Council of Europe 2001), is promoted as another very important component of intercultural communicative competent people. Language seems to be to a great extent a cultural construct, “language and culture are wired together” (Agar 1991) in such a way that Risager (2006 2007) coined the term *languaculture* to refer to this very interrelated connection of these components. In particular, intercultural awareness is examined as a factor which facilitates people’s actions within an environment characterised by linguistic and cultural diversity. Based on

Seidel (1981), intercultural awareness is seen as the “*tool*” that encourages the development of people’s communication skills while minimising the likelihood of misunderstandings in intercultural interactions. Meanwhile, Chen and Starosta (2000), refer to intercultural awareness as the cognitive aspect of intercultural communication competence which mainly focuses on understanding the cultural conventions affecting the way people think and behave. Therefore, it is advisable that people understand cultural diversity, so that they can modify their communication patterns to be congruent with the cues of unfamiliar interactants (Papadopoulos 2020).

### **2.3 Intercultural Interaction & Cooperation**

Intercultural interaction and cooperation competencies are considered to be major variables when researching or aiming at enhancing the intercultural communication of young language learners (Papadopoulos 2020). Indeed, according to the European Council, "Intercultural cooperation skills are essential for speakers to successfully participate in joint activities, work and do business with other people and be encouraged to work together to achieve a group's goals." (Council of Europe 2016,15).

What is worth noting is that through collaboration, students can develop various relationships which can be crucial for their co-existence with others. In particular, they can develop a positive interdependence, underlining that only through joint-efforts a task can be achieved and successfully completed (Johnson and Johnson 1989). They may also develop individual accountability, which can be achieved when the performance of each student is evaluated and communicated to the members of the whole group and to the student himself (Johnson et al. 1991). Another significant dimension is the development of a positive interaction, which can be defined as the actions and tendency of one person to encourage and facilitate the efforts of another person, to successfully complete a task while they can also develop interpersonal skills, which are considered important tools in students' efforts towards effective learning within a group (Johnson et al. 1991).

### **2.4 Intercultural Communication Strategies**

Apart from the above-mentioned dimensions and components of intercultural communicative competence, it is very important to focus on the intercultural communication strategies that are proposed by the Council of Europe (2001) and that should be considered carefully. According to Bernaus (2007), intercultural skills are not restricted to their socio-affective and linguistic-communicative aspects related to the willingness to engage

in a conversation with the other, and the effective utilisation of culture-specific experiences and knowledge, respectively. In fact, intercultural competence also captures the fields of learning strategies and interaction management. The former deals with the ability to apply the necessary techniques so as to manage communication problems caused by the gap observed when different linguistic systems interact (Bernaus et al. 2007). The latter “takes place in situations of language contact in which speakers update different codes to manage the communication output they produce in a conversation created by situations characterised by linguistic and cultural plurality” (Bernaus et al. 2007, 15).

According to current literature, a variety of strategies are employed in the course of interactions with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Some typical intercultural communication strategies involve: a) comparing and contrasting cultures, b) dealing with or tolerating ambiguity, c) accepting difference, d) defending one's point of view while acknowledging the legitimacy of others, and e) willingness to engage with the foreign culture (Council of Europe, 2011; Council of Europe 2016). Meanwhile, according to Papadopoulos (2020), supplementary and more student-friendly strategies can be developed especially at schools, highlighting the importance of showing respect for the interests and views of others, exhibiting curiosity for investigating and learning about the habits and lifestyles of people from different cultural environments, demonstrating empathy while communicating with a person from a different country, making an attempt to understand cultural norms through the observation of non-verbal communication (e.g. body language, gestures, etc.) and demonstrating patience when coming in contact with the ‘other’. Last, it is worth mentioning that by developing such strategies, people become competent in terms of their intercultural behaviour and profile which will facilitate their daily interaction with people in this diverse context.

Thus, all this multidimensional context of intercultural communication was considered to be a worth-researching field and it was placed at the centre of this particular research activity of the chapter.

### **3. Study**

#### **3.1 Aims of the Study**

Appreciating that intercultural competences can be developed through an appropriate and focused attempt at school, this particular study aimed at shedding light on the teachers’ perspectives and practices with regard to

fostering students' intercultural competence within the school context. More specifically, this study was designed and implemented to investigate:

- Greek FL teachers' perspectives and practices towards the development of intercultural competences in young learners.
- Greek FL teachers' teaching practices towards the development of students' communication and interaction strategies.
- Greek FL teachers' awareness of intercultural communication strategies.

### 3.2 Participants

Four hundred (400) Greek FL teachers participated in this study with an open call for collaboration and participation in it. The sample consisted of teachers who have been employed in 58 different primary schools with immigrant and refugee students in Greece. The following figure (Figure 5-1) presents the distribution of the participants based on their gender. More specifically, the females constituted the majority of the participants (84%) compared to the males (46%).

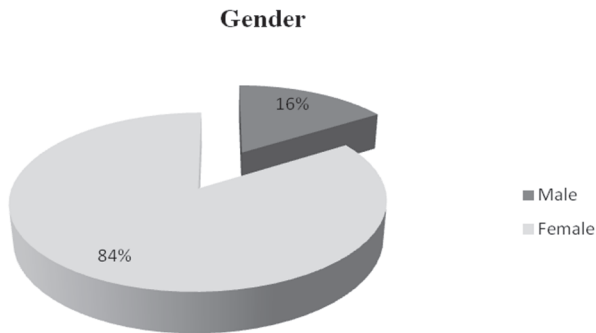


Figure 5-1. Distribution based on gender.

The teaching experience of the participants varied, as most of them, had a teaching experience of more than 20 years (49%), 11% of the teachers had been working from one to 6 years (11%), while another group of teachers had been employed for 13-20 years (23%) (Figure 5-2).

### Teaching experience

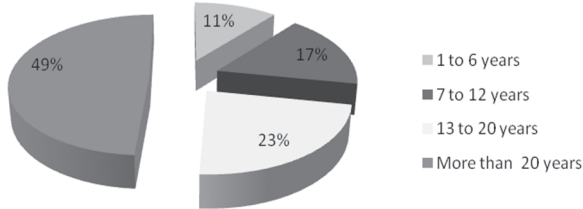


Figure 5-2 Years of Teaching Experience/Employment

As for the educational background of the participants, the majority hold a Bachelor (43.2%) and a Master's degree (51%), while a low percentage of the teachers (5.8%) hold a doctorate in a related education field (Figure 5-3).

### Qualifications

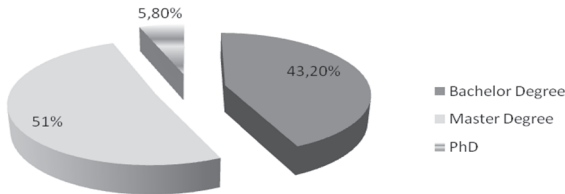


Figure -5.3 Participants' educational background

## 3.3 Data Collection & Analysis

In order to investigate teachers' perspectives and practices towards promoting interculturalism in their classrooms, teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire and provide a short portfolio which focused on their attempt and practices to a) raise students' intercultural sensitivity and awareness, b) develop students' strategies of effective communication and interaction, and c) develop students' intercultural communication strategies. The questionnaire, which was completed anonymously, consisted of three parts with closed-form and open-ended questions. The first part of the questionnaire focused on teachers' behaviour in multicultural classrooms. More specifically, the teachers were urged to reflect on the frequency of

certain actions in their classrooms based on pre-determined questions (see part 4.1) which concerned a) the goals they set when teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, b) the teaching activities they implement in their classrooms, having to choose among various in a pre-determined list, and c) the educational materials they make use of in multicultural classrooms, based on a list of educational materials that are commonly used. (It is worth mentioning that for sections b and c, there was also the choice “Other” offering the freedom to teachers to refer to another teaching activity or educational material they tend to use in their lessons).

Meanwhile, the teachers were invited to provide the researcher with portfolio materials they kept while teaching in multicultural classrooms. The material related to the first three sections of the first part of the questionnaire. In other words, the teachers had to provide photos/material that could show and certify the goals they set, the activities and materials they used in the classroom so that the researchers could make the connection between the teachers’ answers in the questionnaire and their teaching practice.

The second part of the questionnaire included closed/open-form questions that investigated teachers’ awareness of effective communication strategies employed by young language learners. In particular, the teachers were first asked to mention what strategies/techniques students made use of when they faced linguistic deficiency problems while producing written or spoken discourse in a foreign language. In the second stage, the teachers’ behaviour in terms of promoting learners’ communication strategies were investigated.

The last part of the questionnaire aspired to investigate students’ awareness of intercultural communication strategies. More specifically, the teachers were provided with a shortlist of intercultural communication strategies proposed by the Council of Europe (2016) and they were invited to choose the frequency with which teachers noticed such strategies being employed by students in the classrooms.

It is worth mentioning that the questionnaire was designed based on: (a) the findings and elements of the paper of Council of Europe “Living together in a culturally diverse world” which describes a conceptual model of the competences that people need to acquire in order to effectively participate in culturally diverse democratic societies; (b) the research work of:

- Heyward (2004), who has developed an analytical framework of intercultural literacy and the corresponding competencies that are necessary to be developed within the school context;
- Martin and Nakayama (2004) who focus on core issues and concerns of intercultural communication by integrating the social psychological, the interpretive and the critical perspectives;

- the Cultural Intelligence Centre (2005) which intensifies the need for cross-cultural communication, sharing knowledge and team spirit in this diverse world; and
- Odgers (2009) who focuses on intercultural approaches to education and learning in the modern classrooms of cultural and linguistic diversity, promoting principles that need to be followed.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Teachers' Practices in Multicultural Classrooms

As for their teaching behaviour in multicultural classrooms, teachers seemed to promote interculturalism in young learners' classrooms as shown in Figure 5-4 below.

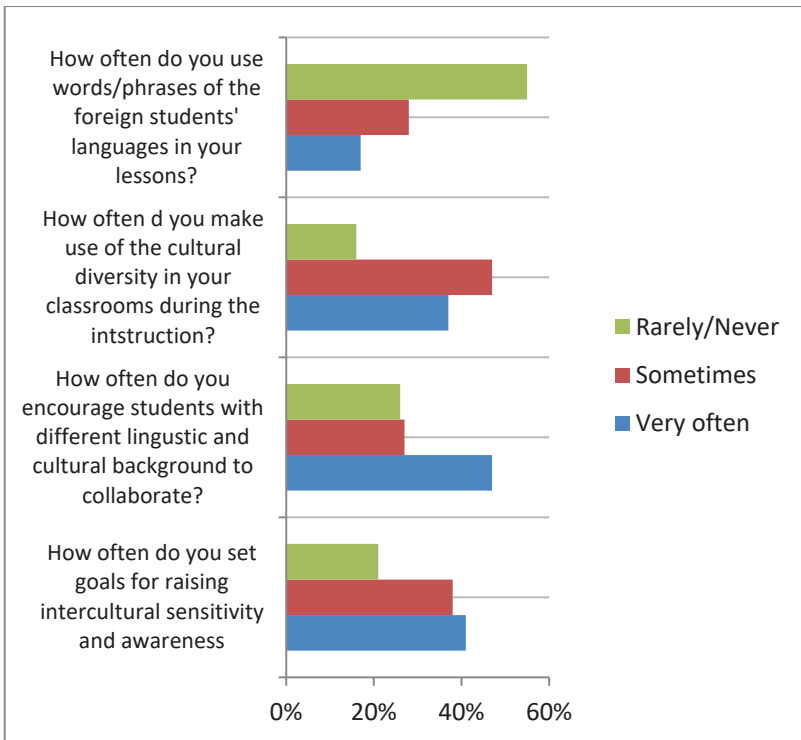


Figure 5-4. Teachers' behaviour in multicultural classrooms

Regarding the teaching methods/activities, teachers used to promote interculturalism in the young learners' classrooms, it has been shown (Table 5-1) that teachers make extensive use of intercultural games (35%), stories (31%) and songs (11%).

**Table 5-1. Teaching Methods/Activities used by teachers**

<b>Teaching Methods/Activities implemented in the classrooms</b>	<b>Frequency of Use (%)</b>
I use physical games	6%
I use digital games	5%
I use board games	2%
I use intercultural games/activities	35%
I use fairy tales / folk-stories	31%
I use picture storybooks	2%
I use readers	1%
I use ICT/New Technologies	2%
I use craft-based activities	2%
I use songs/chants/rhymes	11%
I use role-plays	3%

Table 5-2 below presents the educational materials used by the participating teachers to raise interculturalism and the frequency percentages of their use in the young language learner classrooms. As it is shown, the teachers make regular use of videos related to other countries (21%) as well as photos depicting monuments (21%), customs and traditions of other countries (20%).

**Table 5-2. Educational materials used in the multicultural classroom**

<b>Educational Materials used in the classroom</b>	<b>Frequency of Use (%)</b>
Videos about other countries	21%
Maps of other countries	7%
Recipes of other countries' traditional meals	12%
Documents about traditional dances of other countries	10%
Photos depicting monuments of other countries	21%
Historical and geographical information about other countries	7%
Customs and traditions of other countries	20%
Audio/Written documents in a foreign language	2%



In the portfolio, teachers were also encouraged to provide the researcher with materials related to activities they implement with young learners in their attempt to raise their intercultural sensitivity and awareness. Some of these materials/activities are described below along with authentic pictures taken during the activities.

The following craft (Figure 5-5) was created by a group consisting of young learners of various cultural backgrounds within the context of learning about Cyprus. They discussed with each other, they exchanged views and ideas about the statue depicted in the picture below, and then they collaborated on this craft.



Figure 5-5 Thematic Unit “Learning about Cyprus”: The Statue of Liberty, Nicosia (Cyprus)

In another thematic unit, young learners were urged to observe the flag of Serbia (Figure 5-6) and were encouraged to tell the colours used for the flag. The aim of this activity was dual; to repeat the names of the colours in the target language while at the same time learn about the origin of the flag, as well as the meaning and importance of the symbols and colours used on the flag.



Figure 5-6. Thematic Unit “Learning about Serbia”: Playing with Montessori materials

As shown in Figure 5-7 below, students were provided with photos depicting traditional costumes of Greece and Albania, in the thematic area “Learning about Albania”. They were encouraged to spot and mark the differences and similarities using red or green colour respectively. The activity aimed to familiarise students with the traditional clothes of each country while learning related vocabulary.



Figure 5-7. Thematic Unit “Learning about Albania”: Spot the differences and similarities

Another activity described by the teachers aimed at exposing students to aspects of British everyday life and lifestyle. Within this context, they got informed about the British bus, and they created a related craft. This activity also enabled them to recycle vocabulary related to the modes of transport.



Figure 5-8. Thematic Unit “Learning about the United Kingdom”: British Bus in our classroom

It is evident that participating teachers make use of a great variety of materials and educational activities towards raising students’ intercultural sensitivity and awareness. They seem to promote interculturalism in their classrooms by incorporating elements from other countries (flags, photos, dances, etc.) which can be extremely useful for the students’ contact with other cultural elements at school.

#### 4.2 Teacher’s Attempt to Develop Students’ Communication and Interaction Strategies

According to Table 5-3 below, the teachers seemed to be aware of various communication strategies employed by students and their importance in the language teaching process as well as in the daily interaction of speakers.

**Table 5-3. Communication Strategies employed by students**

Communication Strategies mentioned by the teachers	Reference Percentages (%)
Topic avoidance	44%
Message abandonment	38%
Meaning replacement	33%
Paraphrasing	47%
Approximation	22%
Mime/gesture	12%
Coinage	8%
Borrowing	20%

Based on the data outlined above, it seems that communication strategies related to the linguistic deficiency of the students such as paraphrasing and topic avoidance were more commonly used among students while more creative strategies such as miming/gesturing and coinage appeared to be used less frequently by students.

With regard to the teachers' attempts to promote the use of communication strategies in young learners, they seemed not to have made any serious attempt to develop such strategies as they [strategies] were not part of the national curriculum for foreign language education.

**Table 5-4. Teachers' behaviour in terms of promoting learners' communication strategies**

<b>Teachers' behaviour</b>	<b>Frequencies (%)</b>
How often do you encourage your students to practise/employ communication strategies within the context of your lesson?	Very Often:18% Sometimes:24% Rarely/Never: 58%
How often do you check whether your students unconsciously employ any communication strategies and/or their different alternatives?	Very Often:25% Sometimes:28% Rarely/Never: 47%

Although teachers mentioned a couple of strategies, they did not seem to promote their [strategies] development within the foreign language classroom, as they did not seem to encourage their students to practise such strategies when they encountered problems which may have occurred during speech events.

### **4.3 Teachers' Awareness of Intercultural Communication Strategies**

According to Table 5-5 below, the teachers appeared to have limited experience concerning the intercultural communication strategies that can be and need to be employed in multicultural classrooms.

**Table 5-5. Teachers' awareness of intercultural communication strategies**

<b>Intercultural Communication Strategies mentioned by the teachers</b>	<b>Reference Percentages (%)</b>
Show respect for the interests and views of others	24%
Exhibit curiosity about investigating and learning about the habits and lifestyles of people from different cultural environments	21%
Demonstrate empathy while communicating with a person from a different country	2%
Make an attempt to understand cultural norms through the observation of non-verbal communication (e.g. body language, gestures etc.)	12%
Demonstrate patience when coming in contact with the 'other'	8%

Teachers' lack of awareness of intercultural communication strategies is rather obvious considering the low percentages outlined in table 5-5, a fact which yields the need for further training on such issues.

## **5. Conclusions & Pedagogical Implications**

Through this particular study, an attempt was made towards researching the Greek teachers' perspectives and practices with regard to promoting interculturalism in the FL classrooms of young learners. Although various studies have been designed and conducted with the purpose of investigating language-oriented objectives, interculturalism is usually ignored or seems not to constitute a key-factor when teachers design and deliver their teaching sessions (Anastasiadou et al. 2020; Bucur and Papadopoulos 2020;

Cauli et al. 2020; Zorbas and Papalexatou 2016). Given that, the researcher decided to focus on interculturalism in of foreign language instruction.

Through this multidimensional study, an attempt was made to identify the emphasis that Greek foreign language teachers place on interculturalism and to investigate their practices towards promoting intercultural sensitivity, intercultural awareness, and intercultural interaction/cooperation in a broader attempt to empower students' intercultural communicative competence.

Based on the data drawn from the questionnaire and the teachers' portfolios, it was revealed that although teachers design and implement a great variety of activities that promote and raise young learners' intercultural sensitivity and intercultural awareness, they do not seem to go beyond that. In particular, although activities such as crafts, painting, role-plays, physical games offer a context of authentic communication and interaction (Papadopoulos and Savic 2020), teachers do not seem to make use of them for further development or empowerment of intercultural communication. To clarify it more, games and experiential activities can be implemented to encourage students to communicate with each other (Papadopoulou 2016; 2018) and motivate their participation in communicative situations which simulate real-life contexts of communication exchanges (Faerch and Kasper 1983). However, the teachers appeared to make use of them mainly to achieve linguistic objectives, that is, to develop students' language rather than their communication skills in the target language within a context of using and implementing game-oriented activities. What these teachers seemed to ignore was the importance of making use of such a context to foster both, interculturalism and language skills.

Findings have also shown that the teachers who participated in the study, seemed to support the promotion of interculturalism in their classrooms; however, they did not make a systematic attempt to foster and raise intercultural communication strategies. The Council of Europe (2016) made an extensive reference to the importance of promoting and cultivating intercultural communication strategies to students from an early age, as these are strategies that develop lifelong (Papadopoulos 2020).

Moreover, it can be noted that a number of educational programmes/projects which focus on the promotion of interculturalism in the young learner classroom have been implemented in Greece. For example, a recent project carried out by Papadopoulos and Theologou (2017) aimed at raising students' multicultural awareness through multimodal material; findings drawn from this project have been encouraging in terms of developing strategies for peaceful and effective communication and interaction in a multicultural context. Moreover, other projects have been designed, implemented and assessed to develop

immigrant students' Greek language skills as well as to develop Greek students' English language skills, essential for their daily communication with people from other countries (Lagou and Zorbas 2020; Papadopoulos and Theologou 2015). Thus, it was the author's view to research and offer a descriptive account of the teachers' actual practices in the classroom, appreciating the general theme of the volume.

Given the teachers' behaviour towards raising communication and intercultural communication strategies, several proposals are made which may offer an incentive for further research activity. Although grammatical and discourse competence have received great attention from research and teaching perspectives, the dimension of "*Strategic Competence*" has not been placed at the centre of attention, especially in Greece (Papadopoulos and Griva 2019). Teachers need to help students develop this type of competence which refers to their competence to solve what to a speaker appears as a problem, or a competence that helps speakers to enhance their communication and interaction. Thus, learners need to receive systematic training on developing communication strategies, following various approaches and methods. Indicatively, CONSTRADE approach – Content and Communication Strategies Development approach has been piloted and used in broader contexts and it has proved to help towards equipping students with skills and abilities to communicate intercultural (Papadopoulos 2020), especially taking "cultures" as a very common "content" around which communication strategies are developed.

More specifically, teachers need to raise students' awareness of cultural differences and encourage students to reflect creatively on them. Students need to realise the importance of coming into contact with other cultures, search for similarities and differences, and benefit from them. In this way, they will not only become more open to the culturally different but they will also develop critical thinking skills, which are considered to be advantageous with short- and long-term impact on learners.

Last, it is crucial that professional development in theoretical and pedagogical issues and practices related to the promotion of interculturalism in the FL classrooms be implemented. Teachers need to invest in their continuous professional development through participation in seminars, workshops, and conferences, all of which can support and empower their teaching behaviour.

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**PART III:**  
**LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION**

## CHAPTER SIX

# USING LITERATURE FOR LANGUAGE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND INCREASE OF THE STUDENTS' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

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### Abstract

This paper reports on a qualitative study concerning the teachers' perceptions of the role of literature – and novels in particular – in English language teaching and learning. Five teachers participated in the study by means of qualitative enquiry through interviews, and subsequent data were analysed thematically through coding. The findings of the study present the teachers' beliefs on the role of novels in ELT and elucidate the acceptance of novels as an invaluable source of motivating and stimulating activities that can contribute to the increase of students' language awareness. Additionally, the results substantiate and promote the catalytic role of novels in developing students' intercultural awareness, where language and culture are perceived as interrelated entities and novels are perceived as vivid cultural representations. The findings have significant pedagogical implications in curriculum design and teacher education, as they respond to the main argument against the use of literature in the language classroom, which is the lack of training and explicit guidelines pertaining their use as a resource in language courses.

**Key words:** Literary texts, novels, teacher education, language development, intercultural awareness

## 1. Introduction

Literature has always been a perpetual feature of language learning, and the transition from the aesthetic study of literature to its use as a resource for linguistic development in the language classroom has marked its implementation and use. For many decades, the use of literature for language teaching was marginalised because of the advent of communicative language teaching. Nevertheless, the current trend favours a resurgence of interest in using literature for language purposes, appreciating its valuable contribution to English language teaching (ELT). In the past few years, the role of literature in the English language classroom has been reevaluated to gain recognition as a fundamental component of ELT (Carter and McRae 1996; Collie and Slater 1987; Duff and Malley 2007; Lazar 1999, 1993 and 1990; Paran 2008). In that sense, my main interest does not concentrate on how to help students to study and examine literature. Rather, I will focus on the examination of the use of literature as a resource for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and on the use of tasks and activities related to literary texts that bring language to the central position of examination and study.

This chapter prominently aims to explore the field of English literature in English Language Teaching from the teachers' perspectives. Specifically, it aims at highlighting the interface of novels and language teaching, explaining the reasons why novels, among other genres, should be explored for further scrutiny with language teachers. This is not to provide a detailed account for the characteristics of using novels for language purposes since this is done extensively in many parts of this chapter. However, I emphatically feel that this research is important because it fills the gap of an empirical investigation of the use of novels in the language classroom, examining teachers' perceptions of their use and implementation.

Therefore, this chapter will not provide insights into the way literary competence can be developed, but will concentrate on the use of literature and more specifically the use of novels, as a means of encouraging, promoting, and facilitating language learning, thereby helping teachers make informed decisions on how and why they should use literature with their learners. Additionally, I will focus on the link between literature, cultural awareness and language teaching by examining how literature may epitomise the multi-dimensional character of culture. The following research questions have guided my research:

- What are teachers' perceptions regarding the benefits of using literary texts in the EFL classroom?

- What are teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of novels in the EFL classroom?
- How can novels be used in the EFL classroom to increase students' intercultural awareness?

In what follows, I will be providing information on the rationale of this study, describing what has driven me to put the use and implementation of literature under further scrutiny. This will be followed by a review of the relevant literature, situating my work in relation to existing research. The methodological design and paradigm which suited the purpose of this study will also be presented, followed by the findings of the study. The outcomes of the research will be first revealed and then discussed, contextualising them against comparable findings that have resulted from similar studies. The chapter ends with a presentation of some conclusions and pedagogical implications of the use and implementation of literary texts in EFL classrooms.

## 2. Rationale

The following are all conversations that took place at a school in Cyprus and are related to using literature in language classrooms:

A staff room at the school. A language teacher confronts another teacher who looks tired and upset.

“What is wrong John? Tired from the lesson?”

“Not really, it's just that my students are not interested in the lesson anymore. They are inactive and demotivated. I think they are fed-up with the coursebook.”

A corridor outside the classroom. Two language teachers meet up soon after their classes had finished.

“How did your students find the novel?”

“Well, they seemed to be very interested in the story. I was expecting much less interaction because I was not envisaging novels to have such a positive impact in their active involvement during the lesson.”

Another discussion between two language teachers:

“Maria, how did your students find using the novel for increasing their receptive vocabulary?”

“Well it was dreadful. The students were not as enthusiastic as I was expecting and not much was done with the novel in terms of language practice. But to tell you the truth, I do not even know how to use literature myself. I am not a specialist, you know, and I have never received proper training and practice.”

The location is now in a language classroom, on a different day. A teacher asks the students what they think about using literature in the classroom for a change. Several replies were given:

“Yes, that would be so much more interesting than using that coursebook all the time.”

“I love reading literature. Can we read Harry Potter?”

“Not if it is going to be the same as reading literature in Greek. I don't like the teacher telling me how to read the text and how to interpret the story”.

“Read a novel? I cannot read a novel in my L1, let alone read one in English.”

Conversations like the ones presented here sparked my interest in examining the use of literature – more specifically, the use of novels – with teachers who were teaching it. Reflecting on this type of conversations, I came to the conclusion that the language classrooms are what Collie and Slater describe as a “microcosm of the English language teaching world...reflecting a time when there is much questioning of the relationship between language and literature” (Collie and Slater 1987, 1).

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1 The Role of Literature in Language Classrooms

The role of literature in the twenty first century classroom has evolved, as a result of the consideration that some literary texts not only provide input for language acquisition, but they also constitute a great resource of authentic materials for the language learner. As Collie and Slater (1987) suggest, literature provides an abundant varied body of written materials which is vital in the sense that it talks, describes, and shares fundamental human issues which are enduring rather than ephemeral. Consequently, literary texts are important in that they increase students' motivation and interest (Lazar 1990, 1993; Paran 2006a, 2008). This is especially so if we consider that one of the most intriguing reasons for learning a second language is to get closer to its speakers and learn more about their everyday lives, routines and habits – and the students' integrative motivation can have a huge impact on their willingness to learn and bring the target culture closer in order to



make it more accessible. Moreover, the view of literature as an authentic material is accompanied by the presupposition that literary texts are not uniformly designed for ELT purposes. This fact makes the language used in literature purely authentic and relevant to be used in the language learning process. As a result, learners will greatly benefit from exposure to a language that is as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom context (Collie and Slater 1987, 3).

### **3.2 Research on the Use of Literature in Language Teaching**

Even though the relationship between language and literature especially in the last decades has met an increasing revival of attention, the use of novels with language learners still remains an underdeveloped topic with very few exceptions (Collie and Slater 1987; Lazar 1990, 1993; Tsai, 2012; Tseng, 2010; Yang, 2001); in fact, there are few reports or studies which empirically examine how novels can be used in the classroom for second/foreign language learning as most of the relevant literature deals with the perceived benefits of literature in general, but without looking at what happens in the actual classroom. In other words, there are reports on how literature could be used with the language learners, establishing methodological approaches and techniques that could be adopted by teachers in incorporating literary texts in their lessons, but these are very partly informed by classroom research (e.g. Collie and Slater 1993; Duff and Malley 2007; Lazar 1990, 1993, 1999).

At the same time, there is even less information on how teachers view the inclusion of literature in language teaching. As Duncan and Paran (2017) suggest, some of the information is anecdotal, as for example Bouman's (1983) reflection on how teachers view literature, and their belief that teachers are more worried about the use of poetry in the classrooms than the students themselves. Some information comes from the practitioners' documentation of some of the issues faced when teaching language through literature, and are a result of exploratory practice, reflective practice, or action research initiatives (e.g. Mitsigkas 2015; Paran 2006a; Weist 2004). So far, only three studies have explored this topic with more than one teacher and they either used a convenience sample of teachers working in UK Higher Education Institutions (Gilroy 1995; Jones and Carter (2011), or they evaluated and reported on the effectiveness of literature on acquisition of language skills and intercultural understanding in the high school context (Duncan and Paran 2017) – the only report of its kind.

An additional point that needs to be considered is that much of the research into the use of literature in language classrooms has been conducted

in higher-education contexts, with the participation of adult learners. Findings from these studies show that there is preponderance of the use of L1 in the language classrooms, a preference on Initiation-Response-Evaluation Sequences (IRE) and a predominantly teacher-centred approach in classrooms which does not allow students to take advantage of the opportunity to extend classroom talk to the discourse level (Donato and Brooks 2004; Mantero 2002; Weist 2004). Contrary to these studies, Boyd and Maloof (2000), Kim (2004), and Paran (2008) indicate how literature can have multiple benefits on learners, but emphasise the critical role that the teacher has in making the lesson enjoyable and efficient, by means of appropriate text-selection, design and implementation of effective activities and tasks, and student involvement which places the students at the heart of learning. Consequently, it is of great importance to initiate a deeper exploration into the teachers' perceptions on the use of literature in language courses, seeking to explore the impact of using such materials from the perspective of the people who teach it. Specifically, this study aims to shed light on the use of novels in the language learning classroom by investigating how teachers perceive their use in English language learning courses.

Taking as a starting point the crucial role of teachers and the importance of their approach in the use of literature in language teaching, I am compelled to engage in further scrutiny of how teachers view their learners' engagement with literature, and how they, themselves, respond to its needs and particularities.

## 4. The Study

The data presented in this chapter come from a larger mixed-methods research project on the use and implementation of literary texts in language classrooms, examining both students' and teachers' perceptions of the role of literature in ELT. In the study reported here, I will exclusively report on teachers' perceptions, and to that aim, I have adopted a qualitative research design using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six EFL teachers who work in private language schools in Cyprus.

### 4.1 Background to the Study

Despite the fact that magazines, newspapers and other authentic materials are seen as common supplementary materials for ELT in the public education sector in Cyprus, authentic unabridged novels are very rarely used – even on the occasions that these are included in the curriculum. Despite

the suggested benefits of introducing novels in the language classroom (Gareis, Allard, and Saindon 2009; Lazar 1990; Vandrick; 1997) as a means of language teaching, the regular and systematic use and implementation of literary texts can only be found in private schools in this context – where literature has a more renowned status. Gareis et al. (2009) consider that using novels as the primary material for instruction may appear to be a radical leap from tradition, and this may partially justify the exclusion of novels from the public ELT education in Cyprus. The school this research is based on, is a private seven-form secondary school in Cyprus. The English language is used as the primary language of instruction, and literature is taught from form one to form seven. It is also worth mentioning that the first year starts off with the use and implementation of texts which are considered to be children’s literature, complemented by some abridged texts, before starting to implement unabridged texts and full versions of literary texts in form two. In forms four and five, students have the option to do IGCSE Literature in English, and in forms six and seven students can choose to study English literature as an A-level subject. It is also worth mentioning that IGCSE English as a first language is a compulsory subject for all students in forms four and five.

## 4.2 Participants

The school and the teachers who participated in the study were selected on the basis of use and implementation of literary texts for ELT purposes. The demographic information of the six EFL teachers is summarised in Table 6-1 (the teachers’ names are pseudonyms). The teachers were randomly selected, with the only criterion being that they should all have previously used literature in their lessons.

**Table 6-1 Teachers' demographic information**

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Years of Teaching Experience as EFL teacher	Academic Qualifications	Native Speaker of English?
Maria	28	Female	5	BA in TEFL, MA in TEFL	No
Alex	32	Male	3	BA in English Language and Literature, MA in Literature	No
George	28	Male	5	BA in English Language and Literature, MA in Syntax	No
Katie	47	Female	23	BA in English Language, CELTA	Yes
Oliver	30	Male	6	BA in English Language and Literature, MA in TEFL	Yes
Robert	30	Male	4	BA in English Language and Literature	No

### 4.3 Data Collection & Analysis

The interviews varied in length, with some lasting up to one and half hours. All participants gave their written consent for participation in the study and teachers were asked whether they preferred to be interviewed in English or Greek; all of them but one chose English. Although an interview protocol was used, yet the design was deliberately left semi-structured to allow for additional follow-up questions on points that were important for the study and meaningful for the participants. The interview guide included questions about teachers' perceptions of the use of literary texts – and novels in particular – in the language classrooms and its effects on learners' language skills, criteria for text selection, the role of literature in increasing the students' intercultural awareness, the effects that novels have on students' motivation and participation, and how they have personally used literary texts in their classrooms. The interviews were audio recorded and digitally

transcribed for thematic analysis (Dornyei 2007), to identify recurring patterns regarding how the teachers positioned their students through recounting the role of literary texts in their learning. I generated an initial set of 10 codes guided by the interview questions that identified how the teachers dealt with topics such as the preferred literary genre to be used with students, the potential benefits of literature in increasing students' language skills, and promoting the development of their intercultural awareness. I then engaged in a second coding cycle which resulted in a more refined number of generated themes.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Benefits of Using Literature in the EFL Classroom

#### 5.1.1 Linguistic Awareness

I will begin by exploring how teachers collectively and individually identified how literature in general – and novels in particular – have the ability to introduce students to language learning conventions, as well as linguistic nuances that add to the positive outlook of the use of literary texts for language learning purposes. The participants of the study commented on the influence that novels have had on the linguistic development and language enrichment of their students, providing them with opportunities to see new language in a contextualised form:

In the context of ELT, novels can be used as a way to contextualise language learning and provide palpable evidence of how language is used in context. [Oliver]

Literature enables students to contextualise multiple language points ranging from vocabulary, adjectives and nouns, to figures of speech and tenses. Therefore, students are presented with the real communicative importance of language when it is presented in its actual context where they can assess its effectiveness and efficiency. [Katie]

A very substantial benefit that the teachers have noted is that of exposing students to rhetorical and stylistic devices through which they could gain familiarity with various linguistic clues. For example, the participants commented on their students' ability to learn the function of idioms, and gain familiarity with figurative language such as metaphors, similes, repetition:

Through literature, we can ask the students to find the different figures of speech and teach them how to identify metaphors and similes. We can also assign a written composition, asking them to use these similes and metaphors, so that they put them into context. [Maria]

Literature enables students to uncover the language used in a symbolic and metaphoric level and introduces them to the stylistic functions of the language. [Robert]

Another benefit in relation to the use of literature, and more specifically novels, in ELT courses as it comes out from interviews, is that they can be used for the development and practice of all areas of receptive and productive language skills; that is speaking, writing, reading and listening. It is imperative that classroom materials provide students with opportunities to develop all four language skills and language classes should incorporate activities related to these skills. Based on the data gathered from this study, reading seems to be the skill that is developed and practised the most, since the students are required to do some extensive reading in order to unfold the development of the story and respond to practical language activities:

The reading skills are definitely improved since they are unquestionably practised the most. [Alex]

Students have the opportunity to increase their reading skills through literature, but by liking literature, they can also be involved in extensive reading which can also help them develop their reading skills even further. [Katie]

Reading is the basis of comprehension questions, and as such, it helps students to subsequently engage in simultaneous development of other skills. [George]

In terms of language, the teachers have identified and frequently discussed the development of the students' vocabulary knowledge:

Students undoubtedly get an unprecedented opportunity to develop their vocabulary. For example, I would ask them to use unknown words in sentences and different contexts, in which they did not know that these words could be used, and explain why this is correct and what it does to the meaning of the sentence (i.e. Similes and metaphors) [Katie]

Two more teachers commented on the opportunities that literary texts offer to students for incidental vocabulary learning, a benefit which can also have further implications for exam-based and test-based tasks.

The expansion of students' vocabulary is a crucial benefit, as they can be encouraged to guess the meaning of the unknown lexical items found in novels out of context and the frequent encounter of words can help them increase their vocabulary knowledge incidentally. It would also be helpful for their exams, where they could use the acquired vocabulary in writing tasks, or vocabulary exercises – or even during oral tests. [Maria]

For vocabulary I ask them to underline unknown words, I then ask them to find synonyms to those words and I sometimes ask them to find their meaning in dictionaries. I also tell them to use the unknown words in featured writing tasks in their tests, and sometimes ask them to use the words in speaking when asking relevant questions so they can practise. [George]

Two additional striking findings which are relevant to the students' linguistic development were also noted by the participants. Although the relevant literature in the field frequently comments on the students' development of productive skills, yet no studies have reported any potential linguistic benefits associated with students' listening skills and the development of grammar knowledge – elements that the participants of this study have indicated emphatically and which challenge the current orthodoxies in language instruction through literary texts:

Grammar becomes more vivid on the pages of a story or a novel. For example, students can actually identify some grammatical points being taught in context, and this way new grammatical items become more meaningful. [Maria]

Based on my experience, students tend to memorise the different grammatical rules and they face difficulty in understanding how to use them in context. Therefore, the teacher can transform a “boring” grammar lesson into a more motivating one for the students, where they themselves can search for the uses of a given tense in the story. [Katie]

The use of audiobooks provides students with an unprecedented opportunity to practise their listening skills. [Alex].

The students can also improve their listening skills by watching a movie or by using an audiobook which can complement the use of the text. [Robert]

### **5.1.2 Personal Engagement and Educational Opportunities**

The teachers who participated in this study and in response to the wider educational functions of novels (Paran 2008), believe that students acquire an intellectual engagement and frequently engage in critical thinking,

learning how to develop their argumentative skills by using novels in the language classroom:

Students are asked to reflect on their thoughts critically in writing tasks, based on what they have read. I ask them guided questions which would also trigger their critical thinking and creative writing skills. [Alex]

My students are asked to think critically when reflecting on a literary text. I commonly encourage classroom debates, during which my students engage in an argumentation of a character's actions. They have the opportunity to think about it critically, and respond to it by reflecting on how they would act in a given scenario. [Katie]

Some additional features that the teachers have noted are that the students very often engage imaginatively with a text, and they are personally involved by identifying with the characters, increasing their emotional awareness at the same time. The students are given the opportunity to be engaged in an intellectual development by exposure to the writers' world, where sometimes the themes of a text become a mere representation of timeless values and constructs which are very similar to life experiences and they resemble our daily reality:

The authors express ideas or emotions which go beyond the representation of a made-up language and ideas found in coursebooks, and they require the use of more communicative language. It is precisely for this reason that students become interested in learning more about literature, and using it for their benefit language-wise. It also makes them feel more motivated to learn. [Oliver]

Novels can easily raise students' interest and motivation either by enabling them to identify with the characters, or by trying to find the hidden meanings behind different themes in the novel; sometimes, by reading between the lines of a novel. [Maria]

Literature gives birth to emotions that students may have never felt before, and can only be experienced through it. [Katie]

## **5.2 The Prevalence of Novels as a Means for Language Skills Development**

One of the most important questions that I aimed to receive an answer for through my study was related to the teachers' preference in relation to the literary genres they use(d) in class. All of the participants unanimously agreed that their personal preference is using fictive prose, either in the form



of short stories, or novels. The latter option was preferred by five teachers, though there was variation in the reasons they reported as to why they prefer novels over other genres (e.g. poetry, drama, etc.) as shown in the following excerpts:

I prefer using novels, and I often use them with my students – especially with those who need additional speaking practice and perhaps they are a bit shy; I know that they can benefit from the use of literature in terms of speaking so I promote the use of novels to encourage discussions. [Katie]

Definitely novels – I think that students find the language of poems more difficult whereas with novels students can actually have a character to follow and empathise with, a theme, and the suspense of the plot. [Robert]

I wouldn't use poetry and I wouldn't use drama because they are a bit difficult for the students to handle stylistically and linguistically. I would only use prose; mainly novels. [George]

There was one teacher who mentioned the limitations in relation to using any literary genre in the language classroom despite being wholeheartedly in favour of their implementation with language learners due to their reported benefits:

For teachers who work in public schools, the pressure applied on the teacher both by the employers and the curriculum, would not allow or encourage the use of literary texts. Also, because of time limitations, a piece of narrative in the form of the novel would be discouraged, mainly because of its length. [Alex]

Another teacher mentioned the limitations of using novels from the students' perspectives, reporting on the effect that literature instruction in students' L1 (first language) has on their [students] perceptions and understanding of using it in the L2 (target language). However, when students get the opportunity to interact with literature in their L2, they tend to prefer it over the literary texts they read in their L1:

There is also a false perception that the experience of using novels in English will be identical with the students' experience of using novels in Greek. I guess it is rather inevitable because students do not usually like literature in Greek because it is an exam-based subject, so they think that the same will occur in English. It is sometimes extraordinary to notice that my students tend to like novels in English more than the ones they are exposed to in their L1. [Maria]

### 5.3 Novels as a Way of Raising Students' Intercultural Awareness

Most of the participants feel very strongly about the role of the teacher in developing the students' intercultural awareness, considering an important aspect of their job to teach their learners about the culture in which the L2 is spoken. Although it is extremely hard to define culture due to its multifaceted nature which defies simple categorisation, yet by culture I mean the life of people in the country where the L2 is spoken, and the people's engagement in cultural activities. Sometimes, historical, sociocultural and socio-political information is required in order to understand another culture, and participants indicate the role that literary texts have in helping students "interact" with other cultures, therefore increasing their awareness:

I use novels because they enable students to gain an all-around understanding of the world and culture of the people in different eras. For example, students need to get familiar with what people of another era were allowed to say and what they were prohibited to say, what was considered as taboo and what was excluded from that notion. Also compare what happened then to what happens nowadays. [Oliver]

Literature helps to perceive the culture of the time around a novel was written unless it is timeless literature which is not culture of the language, but culture of the people. [Alex]

Some teachers emphasised the role that culture has in communicating the language successfully, especially in an L2 context. In other words, they consider culture an important element of language where successful communicative acts are linked to cultural representations and awareness:

Students should be introduced to the target culture because language and culture are interrelated and essential for successful communication. [George]

I need my students to get exposed to reading a novel so that they acquire a cross-cultural awareness which is made explicit with the use of language. [Robert]

In order to understand the language, students need to understand its culture; and vice versa. [Katie]

One teacher mentioned the opportunity that students have to get a glimpse of another country through its culture, by means of the language reporting on such features in a literary text:

The first thing that comes to my mind is that literature represents a culture, so through literature students can actually create a mental image of that culture and assess whether they like it or not. Through literature they can learn information that can help them decide whether they want to visit that country or whether they want to write something about it, therefore practising their language skills at the same time. [Maria]

## 6. Discussion

The findings show that teachers are seen to be explicitly in favour of the use of literature, and novels in particular, for language teaching purposes. They consider novels an invaluable and constructive authentic material in the sense that it is not fashioned for language teaching purposes, and it can therefore offer abundant authentic samples of language in use. Students are exposed to genuine language and they can use novels to contextualise language learning by gaining familiarity with many features of the written language, the grammar of the target language and the stylistic and rhetorical devices. Based on the data drawn from this study, teachers believe that novels can be used for students' linguistic development and language enrichment which can provide extended language practice for the students' skills (i.e. grammar knowledge, development of the students' lexicon, development of listening skills, etc.). Additionally, extensive reading and systematic exposure to novels are believed to enrich students' receptive vocabulary and introduce them to vocabulary learning techniques (i.e. guessing the meaning out of context) which can be employed without the intervention of the teacher in working out the meaning of unknown words. Moreover, a wide range of language-based activities can be directly extracted from the language classroom and adapted to meet the students' needs.

Teachers also believe that students can greatly benefit from exposure to the wider educational functions of novels which allow them to engage imaginatively and get personally involved in the learning process, by identifying with the characters and increasing their emotional awareness. This not only keeps them motivated during the process of learning the language, but it also makes the educational and linguistic journey an enjoyable experience.

The findings have shown that novels are perceived by the participants as the most appropriate form of literature in ELT, followed by short stories. Poetry and plays do not earn much popularity in terms of their use and implementation mainly because teachers do not believe that students demonstrate the same interest in them as they do for prose. The main explanation behind such preference can be given by considering the

students' exposure to novels in their L1 and their familiarity with the genre. Additionally, the variety of topics and themes expounded in novels correspond to the students' interests and personal engagement, an occurrence which justifies the students' predilection in them. The selection of novels and short stories as the most popular and appropriate forms of literature should not be surprising, since it can be attributed to the characteristics and features commonly shared by these two genres.

A major problem faced when teaching English as a second or foreign language has always been the formation of an authentic situation for language, especially in relation to its culture, a problem I have also encountered during my teaching and have observed through engagement in exploratory practice. In practical terms, this means that very frequently, language classrooms are very isolated from what Littlewood refers to as "the context of events and situations which produce natural language" (1986, 179). Harding (1937) suggests that in many instances, the context of events and settings which produce natural language are omnipresent in novels and require the students to take on the role of the onlooker and look on the events created by language, culture being one of them.

The participants have expressed the opinion that novels can empower students to immerse themselves into the whole contextual space where language resides and that they have been using it to raise their students' awareness of the use of the target language and culture, as well as expose students to cultural diversity; in this way, they create opportunities both for raising a discussion and working on subsequent related writing tasks. An emphasis has been placed on how novels function as a catalyst in developing an intercultural awareness where language and culture are interrelated, and novels are perceived as vivid cultural representations that can increase cross-cultural awareness.

A common feature in all six interviews was the recognition and appreciation of culture as being a large part of language teaching, which in many occasions, is seen to project itself through novels, and bridges a noticeable cultural gap in language teaching. Teachers have also stressed the importance of novels in introducing students to an array of mainly social and historical phenomena which might scrutinise what Lazar describes as the contextualisation of how a "member of a particular society might behave or react in a specific situation" (1993, 17). These phenomena also attest Duff and Maley's notion (2007, 6) that the "settings, characterisations, situations and assumptions which literary texts embody offer manifold opportunities for raising awareness of "difference" and for developing tolerance and understanding"; it is in this sense that literature can be a vehicle for culture. However, as teachers, we need to be very attentive and selective in the way

we want literary texts to reflect on the aspect of culture, since we need to be careful with what we want our students to do with the cultural elements found in novels and how we define culture.

## **7. Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications**

In this study I have tried to provide a broad description of the current state of literature in second/foreign language classrooms, with a particular focus on the teachers' perceptions on the use of literature for integrated language and culture teaching and learning. The study focused on the teachers' understanding of the value of using literature in the language classroom as well as on the manifold roles of literature in English language learning and implementation, as these were encapsulated in the interviews. The participants identified literature as a powerful tool for the language teaching arsenal, which can be used to diversify and complement the repertoire of classroom materials. The participants of this study are thought to be teaching to the curriculum, which incorporates the use and implementation of literary texts as an essential part of the lesson, a fact that showcases and reinforces the need for the inclusion of literature in EFL curricula. The implications of this are far reaching for settings without this kind of curriculum; considering teachers' perceptions that concur with the belief that novels are a valuable source when learning a language, it seems that the inclusion of literature could benefit the learning of a foreign language and may also have benefits for students' motivation. Therefore, instead of relying on sporadic uses of literature that will depend on the willingness of a few teachers to incorporate it into their lessons, literature could be considered central to the EFL curriculum and a useful supplementary material to be used with students at various proficiency levels. Additionally, promoting the use of literature as an authentic material in teacher education programmes may help to remedy the insecurity that many teachers feel when having to use literature in their language lessons for the first time, as this may help them acquire the know-how when it comes to using novels and other literary texts in class.

This research has looked at the perceived beneficial outcomes related to the use of literature, where the most indicative reasoning for their implementation in language courses lies in the observation that literature not only can it be used for language enrichment and increase of the students' language awareness, but it can also transcend the mere practice of language skills and intercultural learning.

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# CHAPTER SEVEN

## THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN TEACHERS' EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the effect of reflective practice on teachers' education and professional development. The participants of the study were 50 undergraduate university students, future EFL teachers, in their third and fourth year of studies. The students were asked to keep a reflective journal and make entries regarding various issues related to teaching and learning, teaching practicum and peer observations during a teaching practice course. Journal entries were coded and analysed implementing Ho and Richards' (1993) framework. It was found that the journal writing experience increased the degree of students' reflectivity over time. First, the students were mainly engaged in descriptive reflection rather than critical analysis of their own teaching. However, the training helped the students to become more critically reflective and to raise their self-awareness of the importance and lasting effect of reflection. More specifically, students reported having had the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings regarding their learning, teaching and peer observation process. The findings from this study highlight the importance of integrating reflective journal writing and training in both pre-service and in-service teacher education as they contribute to teachers' growth and professional development.

**Key words:** Reflection, journal writing, pre-service teacher education



## 1. Introduction

Reflection is important for teachers' professional development as it helps to raise their awareness of teaching and of teachers' responsibility for their actions in the classroom. Reflective journal writing is an essential part of reflective practice. It is a student-centred activity which is worthy of implementation in teacher education programmes as it allows pre-service teachers to reflect on their learning and teaching experience in a meaningful and purposeful way, raises their motivation and inspiration, and develops reflective skills (Lindroth 2015). Previous research shows that more instruction on reflective writing is required, educators need support and guidance on how and why to reflect, to develop critical thinking, based on synthesis, evaluation and analysis (Grant 2001). Additionally, deep learning and teaching experience as well as the incorporation of reflective journals into the curriculum at university level may enable educators to increase their awareness and knowledge of learning and teaching, to revise their ideas and beliefs, to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to become reflective practitioners (Beeth and Adadan 2006; Moore 2003).

This study investigates the effect of reflective practice on teachers' education and professional development through the use of reflective journal writing. The remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 2 discusses the relevant background to this study with respect to reflection practice and reflective journal writing. The study itself is presented in sections 3 and 4 and discussed in section 5.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Reflection

According to Richards (2001), reflection is important for teachers' professional development as it helps to raise their awareness of teaching. Reflective practice is essential in order to find solutions to problems, to be active, to think independently and construct knowledge, to be open-minded and responsible regarding instruction and curriculum (Clarà 2015, Larrivee 2010, Richieri 2017). Reflection promotes situated learning, action and thinking (Erlandson 2014) and provides an opportunity to observe and evaluate teaching experiences, feelings, beliefs, thoughts and assumptions (Abou 2007). It is therefore important to encourage teachers to engage in reflective practices as it gives them a deeper understanding of the teaching/learning process (Griffiths 2000).

As maintained by Kabilan (2007), reflection is based on transformative learning and critical thinking and involves self-examination and self-exploration through metacognitive and reflective processes. It emphasises the relationship between thoughts and actions and a sense of critical perspective. As such, it presupposes action, purpose, systematic and rigorous processes of meaning-making and problem-solving, analysis of experience, attitudes and evaluation of personal and intellectual growth (Beauchamp 2015).

Clarà (2015) emphasises the notions of meaning-making and transformation from incoherence to coherence, observation and inference, analysis and synthesis as essential for reflection; she distinguishes between reflection-in-action, or reflectivity as it was called by Schön (1983), that takes place during an action, teaching and learning process, and reflection-on-action that is implemented after a lesson or a teaching session has occurred. Cruickshank and Applegate (1981, 4) define reflectivity as “the teachers’ thinking about what happens in classroom lessons and thinking about alternative means of achieving goals and aims”. Reflectivity triggers teachers’ development and progress regarding their self-awareness, teaching, actions and training. Bartlett (1990, 205) developed the concept of critical reflectivity based on which teachers need to take “broader cultural and social contexts” into consideration and to ask not only “how to”, but also “what” and “why” questions in order to become critical practitioners.

Reflection can be narrow when it is restricted only to the teaching process and broad when it has both internal and external orientation, including personal, cognitive and moral dimensions as well as the social, economic, cultural and political environment of teaching (Noddings 2012). Farrell (2008) identifies two main forms of reflection: the weak version (reflection – a thoughtful practice which is carried out informally and does not necessarily lead to improved teaching) and the stronger version (systematic reflection on their own teaching), which, as he maintains, enhances teachers’ responsibility for their actions in the classroom.

Researchers in the field have come up with different interpretations delineating the phases involved in reflective practice. For example, Kolb’s (1984) reflection model has four stages that represent the experiential learning process: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. It is based on our own experience that is reviewed, analysed, evaluated and then practically implemented. Bartlett (1990) suggests five phases in the process of reflective teaching: mapping that is primarily descriptive and procedural and concerns teachers’ actions and practices; informing that deals with the meaning and intention of the teaching process; contesting that is focused on

teaching development; appraisal and acting that are primarily reflective and emphasise evaluation, self-analysis, theory building and planning. Rodgers (2002) proposes a cycle model of reflection that consists of four phases: presence in experience, description of experience, analysis of experience and experimentation. Jay and Johnson (2002) put forward a three-stage typology of reflection: a descriptive stage, a comparative stage and a critical stage. These three stages help the practitioner to establish a new perspective of teaching via alternative views, perspective, research and critical analysis.

Effective and successful teaching relies on transformative learning based on reflection, critical thinking, analysis of weaknesses, strengths and challenges in class, learning and teaching styles (Tillman 2003) and one way of achieving this is by keeping reflective journals.

## 2.1 Reflective Journal Writing

Reflective journals are used to promote critical reflection in teaching and are related to classroom teaching or the practicum (Lee 2007). They are used for reflection development as they provide a space to reflect, a link between the theory and practical experience, and a link between prior knowledge and new understandings (Yost, Sentner, and Forlenza-Bailey 2000). They are also viewed as a metacognitive tool that supports the reflection process and is widely used in teacher education (Rosemary 2005). Journal writing training focused on critical reflectivity development should therefore be provided to both pre-service and in-service teachers (Ho and Richards 1993, Ho 2009, Lee 2007,).

Ho and Richards (1993) propose a Framework for measuring critical reflectivity. The framework makes a distinction between primarily descriptive and primarily reflective entries organised under the following topics: a) theories of teaching, b) approaches and methods, c) evaluating teaching, d) self-awareness, and e) questions about teaching. Primarily descriptive entries are focused mainly on the description of the lesson content, application of teaching methods and approaches, expressions of beliefs, and solutions to problems in teaching based on tutors' guidance and advice. Primarily reflective entries, however, add a justification and a personal opinion, identify contradictions between theory and practice and demonstrate how theories evolved. Teachers' pedagogical knowledge and experience are as important as information about the learners' background and the school context. Positive and negative lesson evaluation are included together with the diagnosis and solution to problems and plans of action. Finally, personal growth is recognised based on teachers' self-perception, teaching style and language proficiency. According to Ho and Richards

(1993) and Ho (2009), the development of teachers' critical reflectivity can be measured by seven traits, as shown in Table 7.1.

**Table 7-1 Framework of Descriptive and Reflective Entries**

Theories of teaching	Approaches and methods	Evaluating teaching	Self-awareness	Questions about teaching
<b>Primarily Descriptive Entries</b>				
Beliefs/ Expert views	Teaching methods and approaches			Advice
Application of theories in class	Lesson content	Tutors: solution to problems		Suggestions
<b>Primarily Reflective Entries</b>				
Justifications/ Personal opinions	Teacher's knowledge and experience	Lesson evaluation	Teacher self-perceptions	Reasons
Theory vs. practice	Learner's background information	Problem diagnosis	Teaching style/ language proficiency	
Critical analysis	The school context	Classroom management	Personal growth	
		Plan of actions	Personal goals	
		Alternative lesson		
<b>Traits of development in critical reflectivity</b>				
(1) a greater variety of types of critical reflectivity				
(2) being more able to come up with new understanding or theories				
(3) being more able to reflect across time span and experiences				
(4) being more able to go beyond the classroom to broaden contexts				
(5) being more able to evaluate both positively and negatively				
(6) better problem solving by the teachers				
(7) being more focused on 'why' questions				
(adapted from Ho 2009, 114–115)				

Reflective journals help teachers to think about their actions, strategies and experiences in class in order to get insights into their teaching and improve it (Zulfikar and Mujiburrahman 2018). According to Casanave

(2013), reflective journals should include feelings and emotions, interests and curiosities for better awareness and understanding of the self and the teaching process, which are crucial in the field of teacher education (Garza and Smith 2015). Teachers can review their practices as a way of solving complex problems in order to increase the effectiveness of their lessons. They can develop conscious teaching and thus foster the teacher–student relationship (Richards and Ho 1998).

This study seeks to explore the role of critical reflection in teachers' education and professional development by investigating students' entries in their reflective journals, their perceptions regarding reflective practice and its benefits in their learning experience and instructional practices.

### **3. The Study**

#### **3.1 Context**

The research was conducted as part of the teaching practicum course at a public university in Cyprus, undergraduate level, which was designed to introduce students to different language teaching methods, approaches, techniques and principles as well as to teaching practice. It aimed to familiarise students with new developments in language teaching, a wide range of practical teaching ideas reflecting current methodological practice, the role of English as a world language, and the evaluation of new technologies in the classroom. An increased focus was on teacher development, learner autonomy, context-sensitive teaching, lesson planning, classroom management and language assessment. Students became familiar with reflective teaching via individual and collaborative teacher development activities, decision making, planning and action, classroom and peer observation, self-inquiry, self-evaluation and teaching practicum as a means of professional development. The duration of the course was one semester and it was divided into two parts: theoretical (lectures, seminars and discussions) and practical (teaching practicum). The students were required to teach one lesson (45 minutes) to intermediate and upper-intermediate undergraduate university students and to observe at least six lessons delivered by their peers. Reflective journal writing was part of their formative assessment. Students were provided with feedback after each journal entry which they had to consider when they were writing a new journal entry.

### 3.2 Participants

The participants of the study were 50 undergraduate university students, future EFL teachers, in the third and fourth year of teacher education programme at university. Their ages range from 19 to 26 years (mean 20.9, SD 1.5), 10 are male, and 40 are female. Their exposure to English and their years of studying L2 English vary from 8 to 21 years (mean 13.4, SD 3.3), the mean age of onset (AoO) to L2 English is 7.5 years old (min 0, max 12, SD 3.12). They have either advanced (29) or intermediate (21) English language proficiency.

### 3.3 Materials and Procedure

The data on the participants' background were obtained via questionnaires. As for the main focus of the research study, the students were asked to keep a reflective journal and make entries on various issues related to teaching and learning, teaching practicum and peer observations in a teaching practice course. Journal entries were coded and analysed according to Ho and Richard's (1993) framework.

The students were first asked to write a reflective journal entry on their learning experience (1 entry) and lessons that they had taught and observed (1 entry). There was no restriction on the number of words for their reflection journal entries (they ranged from 200 to 1000 words). The researcher then marked and wrote comments on the journals based on the framework developed by Ho and Richards (1993), related to the five topics outlined in Table 7-1: theories of teaching, approaches and methods, evaluation of teaching, self-awareness and questions about teaching and to the seven traits of development in critical reflectivity. A short lecture was then given to the teachers explaining in detail the framework developed by Ho and Richards (1993).

The marked journals were then returned to the students who were given time to ask questions about the comments written by the teacher educator and their relevance to the framework. This was done in class with all students so that they would have the chance to discuss the framework in more depth and raise awareness of all its areas and aspects which had (not) been included in their reflections. Then, the students were required to submit new entries in the reflective journal which would focus on the content of the programme and their learning experience (1 entry), lesson planning and teaching (1 entry), peer observation (1 entry) and reflective journal writing (1 entry), taking the tutor/peer feedback and the areas outlined in Ho and Richard's framework into consideration. The students

were provided with detailed written and oral feedback in order to enhance their professional development.

In addition, focus group discussions (10 students in each group) took place in class at the end of the semester (duration: 20 minutes each) aiming at getting an in-depth insight into the students' perceptions and views expressed in an oral mode in front of their peers and the tutor. These discussions focused on learning/teaching, the content of the programme, lesson planning, classroom management, peer observations and journal writing experience.

Iterative and recursive content analysis of the data was implemented in order to reveal thematic patterns. The data were thoroughly reviewed in order to find repeating themes; these themes were coded with keywords and phrases such as traits of critical reflectivity and degree of critical reflectivity in line with Ho and Richard's (1993) framework. Then the types and tokens for each theme/category were counted and converted into percentages. Analysing both written and oral data seemed essential for enhancing the validity and reliability of the study and bringing more rigorous findings.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Students' Reflective Journals: Critical Reflectivity Categories

The analysis of the students' reflective journal entries showed all students evidenced traits of critical reflectivity. They paid more attention to the practical implementation of teaching approaches and methods in class than to new realisation of theories or their own teaching theories based on their learning/teaching experience and on the consideration of their learners' background and context. They were asking questions about their teaching trying to understand their role as teachers, though not everybody was able to evaluate their own teaching as shown in Figure 7-1.

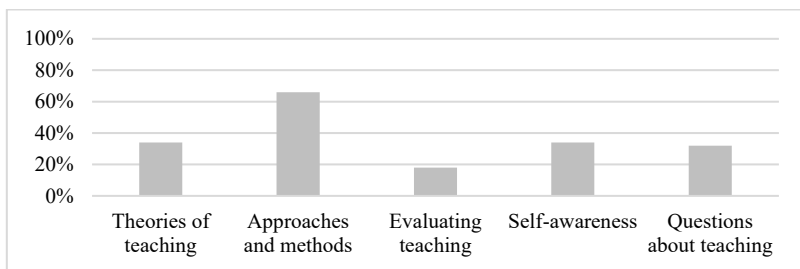


Figure 7-1 Frequency of occurrence of traits of critical reflectivity in each category

In their reflective journal entries, students tried to express their views regarding theories of teaching based on their learning/teaching experience. They stressed the use of verbal and non-verbal cues in instruction, the knowledge of teaching methods and techniques that underlie the teaching and learning process. They emphasised the importance of planning and preparation, and the implementation of theory in teaching practice. See the following example:

Teaching is not a simple process, but on the contrary, a complex one that requires consistency and devotion; thus, lesson planning is crucial for teachers in order to provide a functional and productive lesson to students. Teachers need to be well-prepared before class and need to take into consideration many factors when they plan their lessons. [S1]

The students devoted a lot of space in their journals describing the approaches, methods and techniques that they found useful and effective in their own teaching and their peers', based on peer observations. They tried to implement both explicit and implicit ways of teaching in their lessons, taking affective factors, students' needs and individual differences into consideration. It was important for them to combine theory and practice, to be flexible in class and to implement an eclectic teaching approach. See the following examples:

Also, I understood that teaching methods depend on each one of us, according to our preferences. An example is that a teacher can use the direct method in order to succeed in communication in the target language...[S13]

I have learned the importance of teaching planning, some teaching approaches and methods as well as the teacher's and student's role. I discovered that teaching is not something abstract. [S26]

The students were not as productive in terms of their own teaching evaluation, based on their teaching practicum, probably because they were still students, without much experience of teaching. However, they tried to express their views, as it can be seen from the following journal excerpts on lesson delivery, problems and challenges, their feelings and attitudes, the significance of a rapport between a teacher and students and good lesson planning and preparation. See the following examples:

I came up with the word 'impartation', because a great part of teaching has to do with giving or sharing knowledge and therefore establishing a certain kind of communication between the teacher and the students. [S34]



I learned that teaching requires a lot of effort and preparation. The teacher has to be able to predict a lot of difficulties, come up with different ways of delivering the material and even if fully prepared he or she still has to be able to come up with a solution on the spot. [S49]

Only some of the future English teachers could reflect on their self-awareness (19/38%), evaluate their teaching practice in a critical way (10/20%) in order to improve their teaching and to have more efficient and productive lessons; this could be due to the fact that critical reflectivity takes time to develop, even under the guidance of their tutor and in collaboration with their peers. The course helped them to understand the role of a teacher in a better way, to be more critical in the analysis of their lesson preparation and delivery, taking tutor/peers' feedback into consideration, to be able to reflect, to have a continuous growth and professional development. See the following examples:

All in all, teaching for me is not just a job, but I believe that the teacher needs to become the source of inspiration to the students and make their lesson interactive and productive for them by applying a variety of activities that cover all aspects of language teaching. [S50]

My teaching practicum experience has notably increased my respect and appreciation towards the teaching profession. I became fully aware of the fact that teachers/professors do not work tremendously hard merely when it comes to teaching their students, but they have to work twice as hard before each lesson in order for the desired results to be achieved. [S8]

Only 15 (30%) of the participants really tried to raise questions about their teaching, to find reasons for certain problems and challenges that they face in class instead of simply seeking advice and suggestions from their tutor and peers. They expressed their views in relation to teaching as a profession, their future career, and their aspirations for improvement regarding their teaching skills and professional development. See the following examples:

For me, the teaching practicum course has already made me reconsider the career of the teacher as it seems to be a fascinating experience keeping you busy interacting with unique cases of classes every day. [S21]

I am the kind of person who takes pleasure in hard tasks regarding my study and my future career as this is how I know that I am doing something meaningful and rewarding, at least to me... teaching practice invites us to step out of our comfort zone... it enables us to have at least some basic

knowledge on how to become successful teachers/professionals in the future. [S37]

Overall, the students focused on the learning and teaching experience. They critically reflected upon the effectiveness of teaching methods and approaches, lesson planning and of the factors that should be taken into consideration while preparing for a lesson. They also reflected on classroom observations and how they affected their own teaching, lesson delivery and classroom management. It should be noted that not all students were willing to share their thoughts regarding their future teaching career, their concerns and aspirations with respect to their professional development. Taken together, the analysis of the data revealed that reflective journal writing experience and the relevant training and discussion contributed to the development of their critical thinking and reflection skills as the students produced more reflective journal entries.

#### 4.2 Students' Reflective Journals: Degree of Critical Reflectivity

The analysis of the data showed that there was some development of students' critical reflectivity over the three-month period (one semester) of the teaching practice course. Students managed to express a greater variety of types of critical reflectivity, to come up with new understandings of theories, to reflect across time span and experiences and to solve problems. See Figure 7-2:

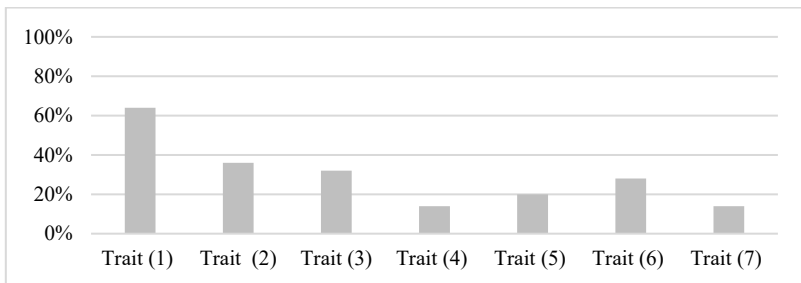


Figure 7-2 The degree of development in critical reflectivity: Journal entries  
Traits of development in critical reflectivity: (1) a greater variety of types of critical reflectivity; (2) being more able to come up with new understanding or theories; (3) being more able to reflect across time span and experiences; (4) being more able to go beyond the classroom to broaden contexts; (5) being more able to evaluate both positively and negatively; (6) better problem solving by the teachers; (7) being more focused on 'why' questions (Ho, 2009: 114-115).

Engagement in greater variety of types of critical reflectivity can be seen in the following examples:

Up to this point, I am very satisfied, and pleased with the skills I have been equipped with through the course, although I am sure there is still a lot to learn and plenty of otherskills to acquire, but if I end up choosing teaching as a career, I assume that I will be employing the vast majority of them. [S45]

My interest in becoming a teacher has gradually increased not only because of the different things we get to learn in class, like the several teaching methods, approaches, and techniques, but mainly because of our experience during teaching practice. [S7]

The students provided evidence of their new understandings of theories essential for facilitating the learning/teaching process, taking individual differences and needs into consideration as well as the educational setting, knowledge transfer, implicit/explicit, socio- and educational background. See the following excerpts:

Until now, we have managed to see teaching through various lenses such as grammar, lexicon, reading, listening, writing, speaking. These are crucial elements in our choice of teaching materials since they're an integral part of our environment and hence our need for communication. [S18]

During the teaching process, students and instructors get to co-operate and create a dynamic relationship in which the transfer of knowledge and possible life experiences can take place. [S25]

Ability to reflect across time and experiences is an important feature of students' reflection journal entries and their professional development as critical and reflective practitioners and future teachers. They were able to acknowledge the problems and challenges that they had experienced and to emphasise their progress. See the following examples:

I feel that my perception of what teaching actually entails has changed. I learnt from lectures that I should do my best when I create my own lesson plan and teach in front of a real class with real students. Everything is easier in theory, but when things become real, we have to do our best to show what we really know. [S33]

Through the teaching methodology course, I was able to learn new things about the many ways you can teach and become a successful teacher... This course also helped me a lot in relation to presentation skills and oral speaking as I had never thought that I would be able to talk in front of a

crowd. Our teaching practice showed me that I am capable of teaching and also made me realise that I would really like to become a teacher one day. I am even more excited about learning and developing professionally. [S42]

Not all students showed evidence of their ability to go beyond the classroom to broader contexts like their future teaching career, the impact teachers have on society, or the development of the younger generation as this requires critical analysis, evaluation, synthesis and teaching experience. See the following examples:

I understood that my actions in class can really affect our society. I am a teacher and I teach children who will grow up and become members of our society, so I am a role model for them in terms of behaviour, knowledge and expertise. [S2]

At this moment, I can assert with certainty that I have gained a lot of knowledge and information that would certainly be helpful in my possible future career. Teaching was not exactly what I wanted to follow, but after following this course and learning more about teaching, I got more interested. [S15]

What was interesting was the fact that some students were able to evaluate their teaching negatively, which was indicative of their ability to view their skills more critically as the following quotes show:

I've already started teaching some young learners, and I find it really interesting and important for my future as an English teacher. The young learners helped me discover some of my mistakes and correct my way of teaching. For example, as they get bored easily, they helped me to start looking for alternative ways to teach something. I noticed that when they get excited, they learn more easily. [S28]

The observation task gave me the opportunity to closely examine the teaching experience of other students and not only gain innovative ideas about my own TP, but also to remain critical and identify possible weaknesses associated with my own teaching that could be corrected in future TPs. [S31]

It seems, however, that this was a skill shared only by a small number of participants (10/20%). The analysis of the data revealed a development pattern: the students were more able to solve problems they had encountered during their teaching practice. They gradually became more prepared for classroom management and for finding relevant teaching techniques for

keeping their students engaged and interested and facing challenges in class. See the following examples:

A role-play or a game is a very good way to keep students' attention, combining learning and fun. It is important to let them be part of your lesson during class to prevent them from getting bored. Moreover, we as teachers should be prepared for everything. That is the reason why we need a lesson plan. [S6]

We learn how to teach efficiently and how to avoid several problems that may occur during a lesson related to IT issues, discipline, classroom management, lesson preparation and lesson planning. For example, when I was teaching I could not follow my lesson plan as the computer and screen projector were not working so I had to improvise; luckily, I had thought about some extra class activities in advance. [S14]

Only a few participants actually managed to focus on 'why' questions in their reflection journals. See the following examples:

I felt very stressed, and I think that this prevented me from teaching in the way that I would like to. However, I believe that it was a very important moment because it gave me the chance to feel all that a teacher might feel during a lesson. [S27]

The idea of teaching, much like the idea of public speaking, has always been very stressful for me. However, after creating the lesson plan for my teaching practice and reviewing my material numerous times, considering everything problematic that could potentially come up and ways of solving these issues by going over them in mind, I feel less nervous and more in control of the situation. I feel prepared to teach, something which at the beginning of the semester felt quite impossible for me. This is something I owe to everything I have learned and seen in class so far. [S35]

### **4.3 Focus Group Discussions: Teaching and Learning Process**

Focus group discussions on their learning/teaching process, the content of the programme, lesson planning, classroom management, peer observations and journal writing experience revealed that the students had discovered new ways of and approaches to teaching. Students highlighted that these ways and approaches involve explicit, implicit, imaginative, creative and fun activities, interactive lessons, group work, engagement with students, and development of interesting lessons through the implementation of games, flashcards, technology and video. They agreed that there should be proper planning and preparation in order to have a coherent lesson.

The students emphasised that teachers need to be organised and to be able to face challenges and difficult situations in class. Some of them put forward that it is necessary to have a back-up solution or a plan as well as innovative ideas. They argued that there should be a balance between teacher and student talk time, feedback, motivation, enthusiasm, energy, emotion, attitudes, friendly atmosphere and interactions. Most of them acknowledged that teachers should rely not only on course books but on the use of authentic materials and the use of a diversity of activities and techniques like photos, handouts, PowerPoint presentations, games, whiteboards, videos, music, songs, fun activities, group and pair work, brainstorming and sharing of personal experiences. The importance of a teacher's use of body language and eye contact was also highlighted in students' comments in creating a student-friendly atmosphere in class.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study, which is in agreement with the previous study by Ho (2009), has shown that students' degree of critical reflectivity can be measured by and developed with Ho and Richard's (1993) framework. Teacher training seems to be more effective by implementing reflective journal writing whose use was perceived favourably by students. Writing reflective journals for their practicum classes helped the students, future English teachers, to increase their awareness, to reflect on their experiences and to gain practical knowledge, valuable for their future teaching career. It enabled them to engage in professional development. The students believe that their engagement in the actual writing of reflective journals helped them to monitor their progress in an organised and consistent way, to become creative thinkers and reflective practitioners. They acquired relevant knowledge and skills for self-evaluation and constructive criticism, to reflect on action and in action (Clarà 2015).

Journaling is beneficial in terms of keeping track of students' achievements, the effectiveness of their teaching, their progress and their professional improvement. Students also commented on the perceived beneficial impact of the reflective journal writing on the instructional process, a finding which provides evidence in support of the previous findings by Moore (2003), Beeth and Adadan (2006) and Lindroth (2015). Constant engagement in journal writing helped them to reflect on the progress of their learning/teaching, teaching problems and beliefs, classroom issues, events, teaching methodology, teaching techniques and procedures, material preparation, lesson planning and delivery, strengths and weaknesses, beliefs and communication with students.

For most students, a reflective journal is a medium for self-improvement as it promotes teaching conscientiousness, based on critical reflection and reflexivity (Finlay 2012). It helps to boost awareness of their teaching and enhances their teaching skills and sensitivity to students' needs. The participants in this study were convinced that reflective practice would help them to become reflective teachers in the future, to increase their awareness and to improve their classroom performance. This finding is in line with Zulfikar and Mujiburrahman (2018).

Overall, the students found reflective journal writing very useful. They had the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings regarding their learning, teaching and peer observation process. Clearly, this experience was beneficial to them as they claimed to have learned a lot from their teaching practice and peer observation. They kept working hard, learning, teaching, observing and writing their reflective journals throughout the semester. Individual and personal views of the students obtained via reflective journal entries were in line with their public voices in class that were elicited via focus group discussions at the end of the semester.

The analysis of the data showed that at the beginning of their teaching practice course, the students engaged in descriptive reflection rather than in critical analysis of their teaching. Training helped the students to become more critically reflective, to raise their self-awareness of the importance and lasting effects of reflection. This is in line with Francis (1997) and Lee (2007), as the shift from descriptive to more critical reflectivity is a continuous process and is part of professional development. Thus, it is of great importance to implement reflective journal writing and training, with both pre-service and in-service teachers.

Additional longitudinal research with more participants, from both public and private universities in Cyprus, pre-service and in-service teachers, is needed in order to further investigate the perceptions of pre-service teachers and university instructors regarding the use of reflective journals. Future research can help to examine the value of reflective practice, the effectiveness of pre-service teachers' reflective journal writing training and its impact on teaching.

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