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Assessment of textbooks for the Greek Language as a Second and/or Foreign Language used in Greek Minority Primary Schools

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Abstract

This paper studies the textbooks for the Greek as a second and/or foreign language used in the 1st grade of the Greek Primary Schools for the Muslim minorities that live in the area of Thrace in Greece. According to the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) the Muslims of Thrace were exempted from the exchange of populations in order to become the “bridge of the Greek – Turkish friendship” (Tsitselikis, 2003; Papanis, 2008). Despite the common religion, this Muslim minority is racially, linguistically and culturally dissimilar. It is composed of 3 groups: the inhabitants of Turkish origin, the Pomacs and the Gypsies (Roma). The investigation looks first at the policy framework and in particular the Program “Education of Muslim Minorities” (www.museduc.gr) started in 1990 that aims at: the integration of the children of the Muslim minorities to the Greek educational system, the improvement of their performance at school, knowledge of the Greek language, in-service training of the educational staff of these schools and development, publication and implementation of innovative teaching material. The second part of this study examines the textbooks used in the 1st grade of these schools in order to teach the Greek language and whether parameters – criteria such as the target group, the teaching staff, the methodology used, innovation etc. were taken into account by the authors of the books. The findings reveal that there has been an effort in the past few years by the Greek State to improve Minority Education but a great deal still needs to be done in order to avoid discrimination and to ensure equal chances in education for the minority children.

Introduction

School textbooks are one of the main means by which school knowledge is transmitted (Bonidis, 2005). They are used as a guide to the teaching and learning process, providing a main source of easily accessible information for students.

Language textbooks must be written in a way to motivate students and activate their learning process. Their main aim is to make students capable of using language in a correct way depending on the communicational situation. Thus, in this context, the assessment of school textbooks must be continuous in order to be revised, improved or even withdrawn (Bonidis, 2005).

This study is focused on examining the Greek as a second and/or foreign language textbooks used in the 1st grade of the Greek Primary Schools for the Muslim minorities that live in the area of Thrace in Greece. The parameters – criteria used for the assessment of these textbooks were developed by the Hellenic Pedagogical Institute and are included in books entitled: “*Specifications of Educational Auxiliary Means*”, Tomes

I, II and III (1999) and “*Schoolbook and Educational Material at school: Questionings – Possibilities – Perspectives*” (2005) respectively.

The concept of minority

The International Law defines as minority that part of the population that is different from the majority of its citizens either in language, either in religion, either in race or in national conscience (Tsitselikis, 1996; Papanis, 2009). The existence in the same editorial grounds of population groups, heterogeneous in origin, in religion, in social structure, has caused various disputes, frictions and turbulences in the internal of the countries.

The International Court of Justice that played an important part in the protection of minorities and of their rights introduces four criteria which characterize a minority group (Papanis, 2009):

- The number
- The non-dominant position of the minority
- Its members are citizens of the state
- Its members’ desire to preserve their features, such as their language, their religion, their ethnological features and their culture.

These four criteria determine the relationship between the minority and the dominant group as well as the degree of their assimilation by the dominant culture or the maintenance of their minority identity.

The Muslim minority of Thrace

According to the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) the Orthodox Christians of Constantinople and of the islands Imvros and Tenedos, as well as the Muslims of Thrace, were exempted from the exchange of populations in order to become the “bridge of the Greek – Turkish friendship” (Tsitselikis, 2003; Papanis, 2008). Despite the common religion, this Muslim minority is racially, linguistically and culturally dissimilar. It is composed of three groups: the inhabitants of Turkish origin, the Pomacs and the Gypsies (Roma).

In the following table, it is shown the distribution of the Muslim minority of Thrace:

Distribution of the Muslim minority of Thrace		
Muslims	Population	Percent
Of Turkish origin	56.000	50%
Pomacs	38.000	34%
Gypsies (Roma)	18.000	16%
TOTAL	112.000	100%

Source: Papanis, A. (2008), *The Muslim minority of Thrace*.

The educational program for the Muslim minority children

The targets of the Program “Education of Muslim minority children” are the following (www.museduc.gr):

- To integrate the Muslim minority children into the Greek educational system and into the Greek society.
- To improve their education with an emphasis given on the good knowledge of the Greek language that will contribute to their future integration in the employment field on better terms.
- To ensure the acceptance of these children by the educational staff and by all the citizens of Thrace.
- To supply the teaching staff, on the one hand, with special knowledge, and, on the other hand, with appropriate and innovative teaching material.
- To support the families in order to reinforce the performance of their children.

Methodology

For this study, we used the textbooks for the teaching of Greek as a second and/or foreign language used in the 1st grade of the Greek Primary Schools for the Muslim minorities that live in the area of Thrace. The methodology used is the qualitative content analysis (Cohen & Manion, 1994) based on four main parameters – criteria that are presented below. Each one of the parameters contains various more specific questions – points that we tried to locate in the textbooks (Hellenic Pedagogical Institute, 1999, 2005).

Parameters

Parameters concerning the student

- Is the teaching material in tune with the level of language knowledge of the students?
- Is the content of the texts in tune with the interests of the students?
- Is the teaching material user-friendly?
- Does the teaching material give the possibility of self-initiated action to the student?

Parameters concerning the teacher

- Does the teaching material include a teacher's book containing clear instructions for the teacher?
- Does the teaching material give the possibility of self-assessment to the teacher?

Parameters concerning the teaching approach

- Team work, co-operative learning and speech development.
- Types of oral and written activities and exercises, dramatisation activities.
- Types of texts, authentic texts, topical issues, cross-cultural approach of knowledge.
- Grammar: Functional or structural?
- Does it take into account the principles of intercultural education?

Parameters concerning the form and the organisation of the material

- The colours and the illustration of the textbooks.
- The textbooks' cover and how attractive they are to children.
- The use of multimedia.
- The quality of print.
- The quality of paper.
- The number of pages of the textbooks.

Results

The results found are presented schematically in the following table:

<i>Textbooks for the Greek language as a second and/or foreign used in the 1st grade of the Greek Minority Primary Schools</i>	
<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
They take into account the students' interests.	No self-initiated action by the students.
Reinforcement of communication and interaction.	No self-assessment of the students and the teacher.
They take into account the level of the students' knowledge of the Greek language.	No readings beyond the activities and exercises.
They refer to the students' everyday life and reality.	No separate units – no titles.
The teacher's book provides clear and step by step instructions for him/her to follow.	No review units.
A lot of supplementary material: readers, CDs, board games.	No clear student objectives.
The material is based on the holistic language approach.	Not very attractive illustrations.
The material is based on the principles of the intercultural education.	Not attractive cover.
Basic vocabulary. Small dictionary at the back of each handbook.	Bad quality of paper and print.
Basic grammar and main structure of greek phrases.	Too many of textbooks and pages for a 1 st grade student.
A lot of illustrations that accompany the texts.	
Innovative material.	

Conclusions

As with all assessments of Second and/or Foreign language textbooks, several points need to be taken into consideration (Tsitselikis, 2003). These include:

- The target groups these textbooks are designed and intended for.
- The difficulties that the minority schools face.

- When the textbooks for the minority schools were written and published.
- The fact that minority schools are bilingual and not intercultural.
- The teaching staff of the minority schools and their training.

The textbooks for teaching Greek as a Second and/or Foreign language, when published, were very innovative in content and methodology compared to the ones used in the Greek primary schools (<http://www.ideopolis.gr/modules/news/article.php?storyid=90>). They consisted part of the programme for the improvement of the education of Muslim minorities. The main emphasis of this programme was given to developing good knowledge of the Greek language because, in this way, Muslim minority children could have equal chances on education and employment. However, there has been neither adaptation nor improvement of the textbooks in the last decade since their initial publication (www.museduc.gr).

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