

Greek Teachers' Understandings of Typical Language Development and of Language Difficulties in Primary School Children and Their Approaches to Language Teaching

Authors : Konstantina Georgali

Abstract : The present study explores Greek teachers' understandings of typical language development and of language difficulties. Its core aim was to highlight that teachers need to have a thorough understanding of educational linguistics, that is of how language figures in education. They should also be aware of how language should be taught so as to promote language development for all students while at the same time support the needs of children with language difficulties in an inclusive ethos. The study, thus argued that language can be a dynamic learning mechanism in the minds of all children and a powerful teaching tool in the hands of teachers and provided current research evidence to show that structural and morphological particularities of native languages- in this case, of the Greek language- can be used by teachers to enhance children's understanding of language and simultaneously improve oral language skills for children with typical language development and for those with language difficulties. The research was based on a Sequential Exploratory Mixed Methods Design deployed in three consecutive and integrative phases. The first phase involved 18 exploratory interviews with teachers. Its findings informed the second phase involving a questionnaire survey with 119 respondents. Contradictory questionnaire results were further investigated in a third phase employing a formal testing procedure with 60 children attending Y1, Y2 and Y3 of primary school (a research group of 30 language impaired children and a comparison group of 30 children with typical language development, both identified by their class teachers). Results showed both strengths and weaknesses in teachers' awareness of educational linguistics and of language difficulties. They also provided a different perspective of children's language needs and of language teaching approaches that reflected current advances and conceptualizations of language problems and opened a new window on how best they can be met in an inclusive ethos. However, teachers barely used teaching approaches that could capitalize on the particularities of the Greek language to improve language skills for all students in class. Although they seemed to realize the importance of oral language skills and their knowledge base on language related issues was adequate, their practices indicated that they did not see language as a dynamic teaching and learning mechanism that can promote children's language development and in tandem, improve academic attainment. Important educational implications arose and clear indications of the generalization of findings beyond the Greek educational context.

Keywords : educational linguistics, inclusive ethos, language difficulties, typical language development

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