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Exploring Pre-service Teachers' Perspectives on the use of Bilingual students' Mother  
Tongue

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The phenomenon of migration dates back to the emergence of man on Earth. However, after 2015, migration flows have increased due to various factors such as war, globalization and economic instability. Greece is one of the most affected countries, as it is considered one of the main gateways to Europe. Many economic migrants and refugees are staying in Greece permanently or temporarily. This has led to a multiculturalization of Greek school classrooms, forcing educators to deal with the problems created by language differences in the classroom. However, one of the biggest problems facing educational institutions in Greece is that teachers are not prepared to address the special needs of bilingual students.

This study examines the impact of migration on Greek school classrooms and the challenges faced by pre-service teachers in meeting the needs of bilingual students. Specifically, the study aims to investigate the perceptions of Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) students at the University of Athens regarding bilingualism and the use of different languages in their classrooms. The study employs a qualitative approach using thematic analysis to analyze data collected through online questionnaires.

The results indicate that respondents feel unprepared to include bilingual students in their classes and underscore the need for better training from the college. The study highlights the need for more courses at the University of Athens that provide pre-service teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to teach in a multilingual and multicultural classroom. Although respondents acknowledge the importance of the mother tongue in the lives of bilingual students, they do not use any other language in the classroom. The study concludes that the lack of inclusion of mother tongue in the school context contributes to respondents feeling unprepared for teaching in a multilingual classroom.

Keywords: language awareness, mother tongue, linguistic diversity, teachers' beliefs, early childhood education, multilingual learner.

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I had once read that life is like a train ride. Each person chooses his own wagon, and who he/she takes as a fellow passenger to keep him company on the journey of life. So, I decided to look at my own life as a journey, and one of the stops on that journey was the distant (at least from Athens) but beautiful city of Oulu. There I met people, experienced situations, and created memories that I could not have imagined even in my wildest dreams. For all this and for all these people, I will always be grateful, and I believe that a thank you is not enough.

Speaking of journeys, I also have to mention the one that troubled me the most. As strange as it may sound, this thesis has been in the works for many years. It has been a journey that has included everything: pandemics, lockdowns, natural disasters, and a lot of anxiety to get to its conclusion. But now, about three years later, I can finally say that it is finished. Of course, this completion would not have been possible without the help of various people.

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# CONTENTS

- 1 INTRODUCTION..... 1**
  - 1.1 My interest to the topic..... 2
  - 1.2 Aim and the research questions..... 3
  - 1.3 Thesis structure ..... 4
  - 1.4 Background of the Study..... 4
    - 1.4.1 From emigration to immigration..... 4*
    - 1.4.2 Education in Greece..... 6*
    - 1.4.3 Early Childhood Education..... 9*
  
- 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ..... 13**
  - 2.1 The importance of preserving the mother tongue ..... 14
  - 2.2 The importance of developing language skills at preschools..... 15
  - 2.3 Language Awareness and the use of mother tongue in the classroom..... 16
  - 2.4 Multilingual learner..... 18
  - 2.5 The role of preservice teacher education..... 19
  - 2.6 Teachers’ beliefs ..... 20
  
- 3 METHODOLOGY..... 23**
  - 3.1 Themes ..... 25
  - 3.2 Data collection..... 26
  - 3.3 Data analysis ..... 29
    - 3.3.1 Phase 1: Familiarization with the data..... 29*
    - 3.3.2 Phase 2 and 3: Generating initial codes and searching for themes. .... 29*
    - 3.3.3 Phase 4: Reviewing themes..... 32*
    - 3.3.4 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes..... 32*
    - 3.3.5 Phase 6: Producing the report..... 32*
  
- 4 FINDINGS ..... 34**
  - 4.1 Theme: “Preparedness” ..... 34
    - 4.1.1 Code: Resources courses ..... 35*
    - 4.1.2 Code: Teacher training..... 36*
  - 4.2 Theme: “Beliefs” ..... 37
    - 4.2.1 Sub-theme: “Use of mother tongue”..... 37*

4.2.2	<i>Sub-theme: “Bilingual students”</i>	39
<b>5</b>	<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<b>43</b>
5.1	Answering the research questions.	43
5.1.1	<i>Beliefs</i>	43
5.1.2	<i>Preparedness</i>	45
5.2	Further considerations	46
5.3	Limitations and ethical considerations of the research	47
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>49</b>
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>51</b>
	<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>59</b>

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The migration of people is not a new phenomenon. The phenomenon dates back to the emergence of humans on Earth. However, after 2015, there has been an increase in migration flows (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) due to various factors such as political destabilization, armed conflicts, climate change, and economic and social inequalities (Ziomas, Capella, & Konstantinidou, 2017). Countries around the world have been challenged to face a migration wave and adopt new behaviors (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Thus, immigration is a recurring issue in various forms and occupies a central place in the global debate (Laliotou, 2010).

Before continuing, it is necessary to clearly define some terms to avoid misunderstandings. Migration and immigration are terms that are frequently used, and both refer to the movement of people from one place to another. However, the Glossary on Migration (2021) published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) explains that migration includes both internal and international movements, while immigration refers exclusively to the movement of people from one country to another. Migration can be classified as voluntary or forced, temporary or permanent, and there are various reasons for migration, such as economic opportunities, environmental disasters, or political instability. On the other hand, immigration is often forced and driven by socioeconomic factors and may also be influenced by political or social factors.

Due to its geopolitical location, Greece (Saiti & Chletsos, 2020) has been one of the host countries for economic migrants and refugees in recent years (Saiti & Chletsos, 2020) and has been the focus of attention as it is considered the main gateway for immigrants to Europe (Figgou, 2018). A refugee is a person who is in a country other than their country of origin and cannot or will not return because they are afraid (IOM, 2021). Refugees are qualified for the protection of the United Nations provided by the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). An economic migrant, on the other hand, is a person who changes countries for economic reasons (IOM, 2021). Finally, an immigrant is a person who changes countries with the aim of settling in a new country for economic or family reasons (IOM, 2021). It is worth noting that during this period, a total of 36,890 adult refugees were in Greece, while the number of refugee children between the ages of 4 and 15 ranged between 8,000 and 8,500 (Ziomas, Capella, & Konstantinidou, 2017). Under these circumstances, the integration of refugee children into educa-

tional institutions was necessary, resulting in the multiculturalization of school classes and forcing educators to deal competently with linguistically diverse groups of students. Consequently, it is necessary to develop more effective methods that can meet the special needs of refugee children.

According to the Greek Scientific Committee for the Support of Refugee Children (2017), one of the biggest obstacles for educational institutions in Greece is the lack of experience of teachers in dealing with refugee children and the insufficient training they receive. As a result, many teachers are unprepared to deal with the problems posed by linguistic diversity in classrooms. Therefore, given the prevalence of different languages in Greek schools, in Greece, it is necessary to equip teachers with more knowledge to meet the demands of new and multilingual classrooms.

## **1.1 My interest to the topic**

I had the idea for this research long before I decided to do my Master's in Education and Globalisation at the University of Oulu. Especially during my time as a student at the Faculty of Primary Education at the College of Athens. During my education, I was confronted with a situation where a student of Filipino descent was present in class and did not understand the Greek language. Consequently, the student did not participate in class and instead doodled in the back of the room. I was amazed at the teacher's behavior towards this student, as she did not engage with her and made her virtually invisible. When asked how she dealt with this student, the teacher stated that she did not know what to do or how to include her in class.

Having recognized the situation of the continuous influx of immigrants and refugees, I considered the above incident as a reality for many teachers. The inability to integrate non-native speaking students is a daily phenomenon. Taking all these considerations into account, I tried to put myself in such a situation, starting from the adequacy of the training I received as a student on the subject. I have come to the conclusion that the training I have received, both theoretical and practical, is minimal and certainly not sufficient to consider myself capable of dealing with this reality.

When I came to this realization, I wanted to find out if what I felt was true of others and if we had the same ideas. My initial idea was to study the opinions of students in the Primary Education department regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom and bilingualism. However, since many similar studies had already been conducted in this field, I decided to approach the students at the University of Athens who are studying in the Department of Early Childhood Education. My decision to approach the students of Athens who are studying in the early childhood education department seems logical since they have similar academic programs and will be equally interested in the research topic.

The fact that I have completed similar training and am familiar with the topic of the research, combined with the extensive knowledge of the topic, I believe makes me suitable to conduct this research. The investigation could be an interesting contribution to the literature in the field of preschool education.

## **1.2 Aim and the research questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine, understand, and draw broader conclusions about Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) students' views of bilingualism and the use of the mother tongue of their students in the classroom. The study will examine the challenges of bilingual education in early childhood education and explore how these students perceive the role of the mother tongue in development of their students.

The main questions are, "What are DECE students' perspectives regarding the use of different languages in their classroom (language awareness) and how well prepared do the students feel to teach in a multilingual classroom?" Overall, the study will seek to contribute to the literature on early childhood education and bilingualism and further our understanding of the complex relationship between language and education. In addition, the aim of this study is to provide valuable insights for prospective early childhood teachers and in service teachers. It will help them understand the importance of addressing linguistic diversity and provide insight into developing effective practices to promote bilingual education in the early childhood education setting.



### **1.3 Thesis structure**

This study consists of six parts: After the introduction, the background is presented. First, the context of Greece's relationship with immigration is examined to illustrate the country's complex relationship with this phenomenon. In addition, the Greek educational system is presented, including the changes that have been made over time to integrate bilingual students into the system. In this section, the DECE and its curriculum are presented as, this study aims to investigate the views of the students of the Early Childhood Education Department. Therefore, an understanding of the background of this department was necessary.

The second chapter focuses on the theoretical framework, discussing the concept of language awareness and the importance of the mother tongue. It also examines the benefits of multilingual students and explores the importance of teachers' beliefs in classroom decision-making.

The third chapter describes the research design, methodology, and data collection process, the research instrument used to collect data, the research sample of participating students, and the phases followed in analyzing the data.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the qualitative study, followed by the fifth chapter, which attempts to provide answers to the research questions posed and to interpret and discuss the results. Limitations and ethical considerations are addressed in this chapter. Finally, the sixth chapter addresses the conclusions and implications of the study.

### **1.4 Background of the Study**

At this point I will try to lay the foundations for this study by presenting the relationship between the phenomenon of immigration and Greece and the way the educational system deals with it. This part of the work is considered very important, as understanding the context is crucial to understand the purpose and goal of the study.

#### **1.4.1 From emigration to immigration**

This is not the first time that Greek society has dealt with the phenomenon of immigration (Triandafyllidou, Marouf, & Nikolova, 2009). Greece is a country with a long tradition of immigration. The last two decades, immigration has affected the country in different ways, as

it was a country that both sent and received immigrants (Damanakis, 2005; Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). A look at the history of the country shows two migration periods, the first one started in the late 1890s until the beginning of the 20th century and the second one from 1955 to 1973 (Triandafyllidou, Marouf, & Nikolova, 2009). According to Triandafyllidou, Marouf and Nikolova (2009), both migration periods were a result of the economic crisis, while during the civil war (1946-1949) and the military dictatorship (1967-1974) many people sought asylum as political immigrants.

As mentioned above, during the first two migration phases, Greece operates, mainly, as a country of sending migrants. However, from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s, there was a decrease in migratory outflows and an increase in the inflows of repatriated Greeks (Paleologou, 2004; Triandafyllidou, Marouf, & Nikolova, 2009). According to Triandafyllidou, Marouf and Nikolova (2009) the reason for the return of repatriated Greeks is related to social, political, and financial factors. Nostalgia combined with the restoration of democracy, Greece's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) as well as the financial difficulties that the host countries faced, led many to return to Greece (Triandafyllidou, Marouf, & Nikolova, 2009).

Since the late 1980s, Greece has become a host country for immigrants (Palaiologou & Faas, 2012). The collapse of communist regimes in Eastern European countries in 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall in the same year, and the financial development of the country (Damanakis, 2005; Palaiologou & Faas, 2012; Triandafyllidou, Marouf, & Nikolova, 2009) are the main reasons for the mass influx of immigrants to Greece (Paleologou, 2004). After 1989, mass economic migrants entered the country, mainly from neighboring Albania and other Balkan countries (Triandafyllidou, Marouf, & Nikolova, 2009). In less than ten years, the number of foreigners living in Greece has increased (Damanakis, 2005; Triandafyllidou, Marouf, & Nikolova, 2009).

In the last decade, Greece has been in the spotlight because of the economic and social crisis. In addition to the internal problems facing the country, since 2015 it has had to cope with the rapidly growing number of migrants and refugees. Due to the armed conflicts and instability in the region, people now come mainly from the Middle East and Asia (Vergou, 2019). Therefore, migration is a reality and an integral part of Greece that has accompanied the country throughout its history.

## 1.4.2 Education in Greece

### *Challenges and Progress in the Greek Education System: Focus on Immigrant Education*

Education is considered one of the fundamental rights of every citizen, as stated in international conventions. Therefore, in the Greek education system, all children have access, regardless of their legal status (Figgou, 2018; Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011; Vergou, 2019). The obligation of the state is to continuously improve the level of education offered and to provide equal and quality educational opportunities to all citizens regardless of their origin, religion, economic status, gender or language. The mission of education is to form free people who respect each other and their values and have all the necessary skills of modern life (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011).

The educational system of each country portrays the way that society is shaped and at the same time, it expresses society's ideas and principles (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). Thus, if the ideas of cohesion and equality prevail, it can promote respect for different and pluralism, while on the other hand, it can promote stereotypes and prejudices (Archakis & Tsakona, 2016; Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). It must serve the needs of the citizen and society while keeping pace with global developments. The main characteristic of the Greek educational system is the centralization under the government and in particular under the Ministry of Education and Religions (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). According to Gropas and Triandafyllidou (2011) the responsibilities of the ministry are related to the regulation and operation of schools as it is responsible for the formation of the curriculum, the structure of the school, the content of textbooks, and the employment of teachers. Despite all its efforts, the Greek education system remains isolated on a global scale, clinging to old principles such as rote learning and standardized tests.

One of the efforts that have been made was the urgent reform at the end of 1990 in order to address the educational needs of the Greek minorities of Thrace, the repatriated Greeks, and the economic migrants mentioned earlier (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). The basic need of these individuals was to learn the language and in order to address this, reception classes were created, first in the gymnasiums and high schools of regions with a large number of repatriated Greeks and immigrants and then in primary schools (Damanakis, 2005; Palaiologou & Faas,

2012), while in the late 1990s the first intercultural schools were established (Figgou, 2018; Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011; Paleologou, 2004).

### *Intercultural education in Greece*

As mentioned earlier, Greece has become the focus of attention due to the economic crisis and migration issues (Zsófia, 2018). Greek society has taken on a strong multicultural character (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011) and the idea of a homogeneous country began to fade away (Palaiologou & Faas, 2012). Greek authorities and local communities were confronted with the enormous challenge of managing the reception of migrants and refugees. One of the most important issues they faced was the education of migrant and refugee students (Archakis & Tsakona, 2016; Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). Cultural diversity is undoubtedly reflected in the Greek public school. According to data from the Institute of Greek Diaspora and Intercultural Studies (IPODE), the percentage of foreign and repatriated students in elementary school is 10% of the total student population. This is by no means a negligible percentage, which, seen at the school level, can occasionally exceed 50% of the students in a school, which is particularly the case in large urban centers, especially in areas where there is a high proportion of repatriates and foreigners (Damanakis, 2005; Figgou, 2018; Palaiologou & Faas, 2012).

To counteract this, the first policy adopted was the establishment of reception classes where children can learn Greek (Palaiologou & Faas, 2012). Reception classes take place in parallel with classes and students learn the Greek language (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). The duration of attendance in the reception classes depends on the needs of the students, but usually they are integrated into the mainstream classes after two years (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). Even though mother tongue learning is institutionally regulated in Greece, unfortunately it does not take place in schools (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011; Paleologou, 2004), while at the same time there are non-formal efforts, mainly voluntary, to learn the mother tongue with the establishment of community schools.

Great emphasis is placed on learning Greek as a second language to enable immigrant students to integrate into Greek society, an idea that is consistent with ethnocentric views that the Greek language and culture have a higher value than other languages and cultures (Archakis & Tsakona, 2016). In this way, according to Mitits (2018), the Greek education system fails to promote multilingual education, leading to monolingualism. As Palaiologou (2004) points out in

her research, "Greece treats foreign students as monolingual" (p.327), ignoring their background and forcing them to learn the Greek language (Laliotou, 2010). This attitude can lead to possible linguistic marginalization and academic failure, which in turn can lead to dropping out of school and their future social, economic, and political marginalization (Mitits, 2018; Paleologou, 2004). Such a perspective, of course, contradicts the principle of equal opportunities in the education system of Greece. Moreover, these classes do not promote the integration of students into society, as the classes are kept separate (Zsófia, 2018).

Efforts to establish intercultural education extended beyond the reception classes. In the early 1990s, under pressure, a new law was enacted concerning the education of repatriated Greeks and immigrants (Damanakis, 2005). More specifically, the 1996 law (2413/1996) and the establishment of the "Office of Intercultural Education" (Paleologou, 2004) are the first official steps taken by the state to address the educational needs of minorities in Greek society (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011; Paleologou, 2004). Under this law, twenty-six intercultural schools have been established throughout the country. An admittedly small number when compared to the number of schools that exist in the country, as well as the large number of students who unfortunately cannot be enrolled in school (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). Of these, thirteen are primary schools, nine are gymnasiums and the remaining four are high schools. It is important to note that the number of intercultural schools in Greece has remained the same at the time of writing this study.

These schools follow the curriculum set by the Ministry of Education, same as for all the other schools in the country. However, as Gropas & Triandafyllidou (2011) point out, the main difference is that the intercultural schools offer courses for learning the mother tongue of the students and they have the freedom to spend more teaching hours in learning Greek than completing the curriculum. Finally, it is important to emphasize that research shows that intercultural schools have a higher number of immigrant students, as Greek parents avoid sending their children to these schools, which leads to marginalization rather than the integration of students in society (Palaiologou & Faas, 2012).

The lack of multicultural kindergartens is evident from the above. Preschool is the place where the foundations for the linguistic, social, emotional, and moral development of children are laid (Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018; Kultti, 2013). In this environment, students for the first time come into contact with educators and peers through which their primary socialization is

taking place (Kultti, 2013). In preschool age, when children are in preschool, a significant part of their personality develops. The development of the children is influenced by the stimuli they receive within school and play a decisive role in their life (Kultti, 2013; Salmon, Gangotena, & Melliou, 2017). After the 1990s in Greece, preschool is a starting point for the education of the immigrant and refugee children, the repatriated students, as well as for the local students.

The entrance of so many refugees and immigrant student, puzzled the teachers too, who are called to manage a new educational reality, without being properly trained and educated (Mitits, 2018). The idea of not being well trained is often the reason why teachers experience anxiety and stress in reception classes (Palaiologou, 2004). Also, as Mitits (2018) mentions in her article many teachers think that multilingualism is an educational problem, and they ignore the advantages of the diverse linguistic and cultural background of their students (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009). Teachers think that family is responsible to teach the home language and even though they encourage the use of home language, they believe that this action might delay the learning procedure (Mitits, 2018). And even if they value the idea of multilingualism, they barely promote it in their classrooms (Mitits, 2018). However, according to Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, and Torgersen (2017) the purpose of language education is to promote intercultural competence and communication and that teachers should invest in promoting a multilingual classroom. Research has shown that teachers' beliefs influence the way in which they are teaching in the classroom (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009).

### 1.4.3 Early Childhood Education

This study is concerned with the field of early childhood education and the preparation of prospective educators for the use of an additional language in the classroom. Therefore, it is considered important in the context of this study, to explain the school under study and, the pedagogical curriculum in order to highlight the inadequacies of the student's preparation.

#### *Department of early childhood education at the University of Athens*

Before 1982 preschool and primary school teachers had to undergo a two-year training program. After 1982, laws transformed this program into a four-year college-level course. This reform marked Greece as an early adopter of such changes in teacher training within Europe. The Pedagogical Department for Preschool Teachers at the National and Kapodistrian University of

Athens commenced its activities in the 1984-1985 academic year and was later renamed the "Department of Early Childhood Education" (DECE) in 1997 (*Student Guide*, 2019).

The Department of Early Childhood Education (DECE) covers a broad range of topics related to education, drawn from a variety of academic courses. It provides training in applied pedagogy, in the teaching of various cognitive subjects, and in theory and research in the social sciences and humanities. The main objective of the DECE is to train and develop professionals who have a critical understanding of social and educational realities. Students in this department acquire knowledge, skills, and competencies that enable them to engage in educational and social research and to actively participate in various educational organizations and institutions (*Student Guide*, 2019)

DECE focuses on advancing knowledge in education, humanities, social sciences, and psychology that form the fundamental theoretical basis for preschool teachers' professional identities. It also fosters knowledge that can be applied to educational projects. Students acquire a comprehensive understanding of complex educational science concepts, can define and explain complex social and educational phenomena. Since the 2014-15 academic year, research labs were created to support ongoing research activities within DECE. One of them is "Intercultural Education and Educational Intervention" (*Student Guide*, 2019)

### *Curriculum*

In order to answer the main questions of this thesis, it was considered relevant to begin by reading and analyzing the study guide of the Department of Early Childhood Education (2019). There, I find a long list of courses, in various branches and fields of education. In the long list of courses, I found that only three of them are related to bilingualism and the phenomena of migration and globalization, while at the same time in the program of studies, there is a thematic week with the main theme of "intercultural education". More specifically, I refer to the courses entitled "Globalization and Education", "Bilingualism and Education", "Migrants, Minorities and Education: Identities and Social Hierarchies" and the thematic week on "Intercultural Education" which we highlighted above. The above courses were chosen for their relevance to the topic of the work, as they combine the phenomenon of migration within a broader context and focus on bilingualism in particular. At this point, it is considered right to briefly present the

content of the above courses, as mentioned in the study guide of the Department. All the information was driven from the study guide provided from the website of the Department (*Student Guide, 2019*)

- "Globalization and Education": The course aims to examine how globalization affects policies and the national education systems. In addition, the course examines the functioning of the European Union and analyzes how social and political rights are established within the framework of European institutions. The aim of this course is to provide preschool teachers with a better knowledge of reality and respect for diversity and multiculturalism.
- "Bilingualism and Education": The goal of the course is for students to acquire a solid understanding of the basic concepts and approaches related to bilingualism/multilingualism as a psychological phenomenon. Societal issues related to bilingualism and bilingual education, including addressing biases related to bilingualism, will be addressed. It is important to note that this course, which we believe is extremely important, is an elective and not a required course.
- "Migrants, minorities and education: identities and social hierarchies": This course tackles the difficulties of integrating students from diverse backgrounds, focusing on the Greek educational system. Its main goal is to equip students with the conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical tools necessary to understand, and successfully navigate the complicated challenges posed by ethnocultural diversity in the classroom.
- "Intercultural Education" is a one-week intensive workshop that focuses on a specific topic. The main objective of this workshop is to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address the challenges associated with the presence of immigrant and refugee children in Greek schools, using insights from educational psychology and didactic methodology.

As mentioned in the above section of this thesis, the transformation of Greek society into multicultural, brought about significant changes at all levels of the social, economic, and cultural life of the country. And by extension, in education, something that makes teachers' training on issues of interculturalism and bilingualism necessary (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, & Tsakou, 2011; Mitits, 2018; Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, & Klecka, 2011). In fact, it is considered that there is no teacher who has not teach in a multicultural and bilingual classroom (García & Kleyn, 2012). So, the need to prepare the teachers now is more important than ever (Weisman & Garza,



2002). As stated in Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, and Klecka (2011) work, study guides should help students develop the appropriate skills that will enable them to cope in a modern classroom. Moreover, a lack of adequate knowledge can have the opposite effect and lead to misunderstandings (Premier & Miller, 2010). Therefore, from what has been said, I believe that just three courses in the whole study guide, where some of them are not even mandatory, are not enough.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.*

*If you talk to him in his language that goes into his heart”*

*Nelson Mandela*

Language is considered one of the most important communication instruments that a human has (Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018; Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017). With language as a tool people recruit, transmit and share information and knowledge, experiences, and thoughts (Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017). The learning of a language is considered as preparation for the later life of the student, emphasizing its communicative substance and its use in the workplace (Byram, 2013; Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018; Hornberger & Link, 2012). In addition, language allows people to understand the society that surrounds them and the norms that it has established (Padilla & Vana, 2019; Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017). Language is an element of a country's identity and therefore learning a new language also shows its culture and history (Kecskes, 2008; Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017). Nowadays, the importance and the role of language in education has received lots of attention especially due to the increased diversity of languages in schools (Skinnari & Nikula, 2017; Weisman & Garza, 2002).

For this reason, it is crucial to scientifically and theoretically explore the phenomenon of language from different perspectives. In this regard, this chapter will attempt to provide a theoretical framework from the relevant literature that can support my work. After highlighting the importance of maintaining one's mother tongue, the discussion proceeds to examine the notion of losing one's mother tongue, and the basic theory of this work, namely language awareness, will be presented. Having established this theoretical foundation, the text places these ideas in the context of education and school. Here, the importance of preschool language skill acquisition is emphasized, as well as the crucial role that educators play in this process. Furthermore, the text emphasizes the importance of beliefs when it comes to making decisions and taking initiatives.

## **2.1 The importance of preserving the mother tongue**

Mother tongue for people is not just a communication tool, a vehicle for transmitting information and knowledge, feelings, and thoughts. Mother tongue is something much more important. It is an essential component of someone's identity and a key parameter of his or her culture (Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017; Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017). Thus, it is a social construction, which expresses a specific philosophy, a style and ethos of life (Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017). However, in the case of immigrants and refugees, the phenomenon of ignoring their mother tongue, their culture and history is often observed (Damanakis, 2005; Laliotou, 2010). In fact, as Griva, Kiliari and Stamou (2017) mention, this phenomenon appears in Greek society as well as in Greek schools. More specifically, a monolingual ideology prevails, according to which each language is related to a society and each language is different and distinct from the other (Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017). Thus, the immigrants and refugee students are taken for granted that they will learn the Greek language as if it was their mother tongue and ignore their previous knowledge (Archakis & Tsakona, 2016; Atkinson, 1987; Griva & Chostelidou, 2013a; Paleologou, 2004). At the same time, those students are obliged by the curriculum to learn the prestigious foreign languages, such as English and French, while their own mother tongue is undervalued (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017). In recent years, however, efforts have been made by the various institutions of the European Union and UNESCO with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Language (The council of Europe, 1999) to protect and promote linguistic diversity within Europe (Damanakis, 2005; Mitits, 2018; Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017)

In an era of globalization, language is in a state of constant change (García & Kleyn, 2012). Decreased use and low academic ability in a language has as a result the decline of that language (Hornberger & Link, 2012) and, consequently, lead to "Language loss". "Language loss" equates to either abandonment of the mother tongue as a language of everyday communication or complete loss of the mother tongue (Fillmore, 2000). In other words, the speakers forget how to use their language. Languages spoken by immigrants and refugees are often associated with unemployment and low social prestige (Archakis & Tsakona, 2016; Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017). Therefore, the incentives for immigrants to learn the dominant language (host country language) are increasing (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017). Immigrant and refugee children are often confused and experience linguistic-cultural shock (Kultti, 2013). This situation leads to

the rejection of the mother tongue-first language and consequently to its loss (Gropas & Triandafyllidou, 2011). This process becomes even faster during the first years in education (Cummins, 2005). Loss of language also affects family relationships (Fillmore, 2000). When the language of the home or family differs from the language of society, it gives children the impression that the mother tongue is an obstacle (Fillmore, 2000).

## **2.2 The importance of developing language skills at preschools**

Preschool education and care are considered one of the key stages in a child's development and the best investment to ensure the child's future success. The child's early years are considered particularly important for the acquisition of cognitive and non-cognitive skills and the delays at this stage are difficult to conquer in the later life of the child (Boyd & Huss, 2017). In the educational system, language is an important part of the school curriculum and serves speech, reading and writing objectives (Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018). The development of oral language is considered as a fundamental stone for the communication with others, which results in the smooth psychological development of the individual and his social adjustment to the environment (Boyd & Huss, 2017; Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018). Through language, the child develops interpersonal relationships, expresses emotions and feelings, cooperates with others in accordance with the rules, and, finally, integrates smoothly into the group of peers, family, school, and society at large (Tsokalidou, 2005). Thus, the importance of language is, also, understood by the students themselves (Boyd & Huss, 2017).

Research has shown that it is important for preschool children to be in an environment where they have the opportunity to learn about other languages, as this has positive effects on their language and communication development (Boyd & Huss, 2017; Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018). According to Coelho, Andrade, and Portugal (2018), the idea behind the above research is related to Hawking and his theory of language awareness, which emphasizes the importance of students' prior language knowledge. It is also important to emphasize the importance of having different languages for students who have a mother tongue other than the predominant language in the classroom. According to researchers, preschools today should aim to create a multilingual environment (Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018) that allows children to use their mother tongue (Matziouri, Tsioumis, & Kyridis, 2014) and teachers to use their students'

knowledge for the benefit of all (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017). In this way, students will find it easier to shift from the mother tongue they use at home to the dominant language (Boyd & Huss, 2017; Matziouri, Tsioumis, & Kyr-idis, 2014), creating "additive rather than subtractive" students (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017, p. 1) who retain the elements of their identity (Archakis & Tsakona, 2016; Matziouri, Tsioumis, & Kyridis, 2014).

### **2.3 Language Awareness and the use of mother tongue in the classroom**

According to the Association of Language Awareness, language awareness is defined as "explicit knowledge of language and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching, and language use."(van den Broek, Oolbekkink-Marchand, Unsworth, van Kemenade, & Meijer, 2018; Ahn, 2015; Jones, Barnes, & Hunt, 2005). Even though the concept of language awareness can be considered complicated (van den Broek, Oolbekkink-Marchand, Unsworth, van Kemenade, & Meijer, 2018), the main purpose and goal of language awareness is to make a connection between language mastery and knowledge about languages (van den Broek, Oolbekkink-Marchand, Unsworth, van Kemenade, & Meijer, 2018). Language awareness provides students with opportunities to come into contact with different cultures, which is considered as a step toward creating a culturally responsive classroom (Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017). Van den Broek, Oolbekkink-Marchand, Unsworth, Van Kemenade, and Meijer (2018) mention in their work that Language Awareness "aims to complement language learning by learning about language" and that it can be seen as a connecting tool between languages (p.2). Therefore, Language Awareness provides a comprehensive paradigm that spans the cognitive to sociocultural spectrum (Ahn, 2015; Jones, Barnes, & Hunt, 2005).

The teaching of the second language must respond to the needs of each pupil, while at the same time it must be free from discrimination (Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017) and not reject the importance of the language and culture of minorities (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009). However, it is common to give emphasis to a single language and its learning, and usually, it is the dominant language mostly because language diversity can be seen as a problem (Safford & Drury, 2013). According to Krulatz, Steen-Olsen and Torgersen (2017) the monolingual example is linked to ethnocentric ideologies, resulting in migrant pupils only learning the language of the host country and forgetting their mother tongue. In addition, students are entering a monolingual educational

system where they are already seen as underachievers (Björklund, 2013; Safford & Drury, 2013).

However, according to surveys, the use of the mother tongue is a decisive factor in the development of the student's personality (Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017). The use of the various mother tongues within a multicultural classroom allows the formation of the identity of the pupils while at the same time gives the opportunity for “bonding within and across national borders” (Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017, p.3), creating an intercultural discussion inside the classroom that benefits all the students (Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018; Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017; Salmon, Gangotena, & Melliou, 2017; Tsokalidou, 2005). Languages develop in interdependence with each other and meanings are 'transferred' from one language to another (Corcoll, 2013; Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017). Studies have shown, that the use of the mother tongue in the classroom has great results for all the students and at the same time the avoidance of the foreign language, might have negative effects on the academic and cognitive growth of the students (Jones, Barnes & Hunt, 2005).

As the researchers mentioned in their work by creating a multilingual environment, students come into contact with other languages and by learning them, they gain an additional knowledge about different cultures, and as a result they create a sense of respect for them (Corcoll, 2013). In the academic field, according to Coelho, Andrade, and Portugal (2018) these students have a better phonological display and acquire more skills that will be useful in their professional careers (Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018). It also improves students' social and communication skills (Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018; Corcoll, 2013; Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017) and strengthens the mother tongue of native students (Corcoll, 2013; Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017; Tsokalidou, 2005). Last but not least, the inclusion of bilingual children was made as an issue of civil and educational rights (Safford & Drury, 2013; Ugurlu & Kayhan, 2017). Teacher's contribution to this process is important. When the teacher uses practices that promote interculturalism, it contributes to the success of the students (Martins-Shannon & White, 2012).

In the Greek context, multilingualism and difficulties in teaching Greek are seen as weaknesses and causes of the poor academic performance of these students (Atkinson, 1987; Griva & Chostelidou, 2013b; Tsokalidou, 2005). At the same time, it is assumed that the coexistence of different languages has a negative impact on Greek students (Tsokalidou, 2005). This leads to

avoiding or minimizing the use of a language other than the dominant one in the classroom (Corcoll, 2013).

## **2.4 Multilingual learner**

The term multilingualism is used in the context of this thesis, where I refer to students who are able to use two or more languages (Mitits, 2018). According to the research, multilingual students show characteristics such as multilingual awareness, better language skills (grammar and text structure), translation skills, and they are better at problem solving than monolingual students (French, 2015; Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2015). Nevertheless, these students have a positive attitude towards learning different languages (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017). Finally, Mitits (2018) argues that multilingual students have better social skills in addition to their academic performance. Thus, multilingualism, which used to be portrayed as more of an obstacle to students' education and integration into society (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2015), is now presented as an advantage for people over monolingualism due to the positive results of various studies (Mitits, 2018).

In summary, I can say that the mother tongue should be developed to such an extent that it can be the basis for learning a second language for the benefit of the student (French, 2015). In such a case, the child learns a second language in addition to his/her mother tongue. This is additive bilingualism, a term that refers to the positive results of multilingualism, which has a positive impact on the student's intellectual development and, consequently, on his linguistic development (Mitits, 2018). In any other case, it has negative consequences for the students (Mitits, 2018). As Kecskes (2008) points out, a multilingual student is not two monolinguals in one body and the different languages they know do not mix with each other, but coexist and reinforce each other (Kecskes, 2008). The mother tongue is a necessary condition for the child's overall mental development, socialization, emotional and social development (Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017). Denying a child today the right to learn his or her mother tongue is the same as not accepting his or her identity (Dimitriadou, Tamtelen, & Tsakou, 2011).

## **2.5 The role of preservice teacher education**

Teachers are now called upon to play the role of mediator between the various elements. In other words, teachers must be able to select the appropriate methods and strategies for teaching immigrant, refugee, and repatriated students (Premier & Miller, 2010). They need to be able to identify racist phenomena and intervene appropriately, as well as collaborate with organizations and individuals to support their students and their families (Griva & Chostelidou, 2013b). In order to fulfill their roles, teachers are forced to develop new skills that will benefit them in their professional career (García & Kleyn, 2012).

The large number of studies in this area proves that the issue of teacher training in multilingual education is a particular concern of researchers. The results of these surveys show that teachers are not prepared to address issues of diversity and cultural diversity in the classroom because they express fears (Griva & Chostelidou, 2013a). The inadequacy and inability of Greek teachers to deal with intercultural issues in the classroom is largely due to their lack of initial training. As mentioned earlier, the level of information, training, and competence regarding multilingual education is low to nonexistent in their undergraduate studies, so they feel unable to fulfill their teaching responsibilities (Atkinson, 1987; Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017; Safford & Drury, 2013; Tarnanen & Palviainen, 2018; Tsokalidou, 2005; Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, & Klecka, 2011). Most of them also mentioned their dissatisfaction with the proposed curriculum and instructions given to them and emphasized the need for support (Atkinson, 1987; Björklund, 2013; Griva & Chostelidou, 2013b; Tsokalidou, 2005).

From the above, it appears that Greek teachers are not confident in dealing with the use of another language, which leads them to distance themselves from the idea of multilingualism in their classroom. However, according to Premier and Miller (2010) and García and Kleyn (2012), today's teachers need to be prepared to find themselves in such a classroom. According to Björklund (2013), most pre-service teachers are particularly sensitive and aware of their students' difficulties. They believe that school is a place where respect should be taught, and equal opportunity should exist regardless of students' backgrounds (Griva & Chostelidou, 2013a). However, what makes things difficult is that there is uncertainty about how to train teachers so that they can cultivate these beliefs and values and consequently apply them in their teaching (García, 2008). As García (2008) mentions, there are several ways to inform and train pre-service teachers. At the same time, García and Kleyn (2012) argue that the principle for creating



any program that addresses teacher education on this topic must be based on recognition of the language group's past, language and theories of bilingualism, and "awareness of how to teach a pedagogy of multilingualism (p. 2)" (García & Kleyn, 2012)

Observation of students in the classroom by prospective teachers is a method that has a positive impact, according to Premier and Miller (2010), as the experience shapes the way teachers teach and their pedagogical principles. Research shows that teachers who teach in mixed-ability classes are able to build their competencies and skills in a variety of areas. Teaching in mixed-ability classes helps teachers be more tolerant of diversity (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009). Through in-service training, prospective teachers acquire views and knowledge about bilingualism, discard old ideas, and understand the hierarchical relationships between languages (García & Kleyn, 2012; Tsokali-dou, 2005; Weisman & Garza, 2002).

## **2.6 Teachers' beliefs**

Teachers' perceptions are influenced by beliefs (Putjata, 2018). Beliefs refer to the understanding of a particular environment and situation as true, and they are shaped by various factors such as education and experience (Borg, 2011). To be more specific, personal beliefs are powerful filters that shape the way one views the world, other people, and oneself. Researchers agree that beliefs have a much stronger influence compared to knowledge and are a more powerful motivator of behavior (Mitits, 2018; Putjata, 2018). Even when beliefs are unsubstantiated, personal beliefs have a strong influence on professional practice and are a stronger predictor of an individual's behavior than professional knowledge (Fang, 1996; Tarnanen & Palviainen, 2018). Due to the influence of personal beliefs on the professional application of teaching, teachers' beliefs are considered one of the fundamental factors that determine the quality of education (Fang, 1996).

Researchers, in this context, studied how beliefs influenced their teaching in the classroom, especially to students from different ethnical and cultural groups (Miguel, 2019). In addition, they insisted that teachers' educational decisions strongly reflected their own cultural background, and teachers who had a positive attitude toward diversity tend to have multicultural literature in the classroom (Mitits, 2018). In conclusion, teachers' beliefs and the importance of

shaping an intercultural environment play an important role in the educational process (Fang, 1996; Putjata, 2018). Beliefs about interculturalism should already be shaped in universities during students' studies. Decisive in a field of education is to have an agreement of personal and professional beliefs.

Teachers are people who grow up, acquire their knowledge and skills, develop their moral and ideological values and beliefs in a particular society in which they usually work later. When teachers have prejudices against some of their students due to their different religion and culture, they are likely to adopt attitudes and practices that will harm the course of these students and lead them to marginalization and educational exclusion. For example, when some teachers have low expectations of students, this may have an extremely negative effect on the school performance of these students and create negative feelings towards the host country and its culture (Atkinson, 1987; Magos & Simopoulos, 2009; Matziouri, Tsioumis, & Kyridis, 2014; Putjata, 2018). Therefore, for teachers to be able to contribute to the fight against stereotypes, prejudices, and racism in the school, they must first deconstruct their personal prejudices (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009; Matziouri, Tsioumis, & Kyridis, 2014).

The problem of bilingualism and bilingual education in Greece is relatively new. As mentioned in the previous parts of this thesis, it is beginning to preoccupy the educational community and educational policy actors in the last decade. One of the main reasons for the emergence of this concern is the huge immigration flow and the return of repatriated Greeks to the country. Although teachers value and understand the importance of multilingualism and encourage students to learn foreign languages such as English, French, and German because they associate it with professional success, they show negative attitudes towards the use of different languages in the classroom (Mitits, 2018). According to researchers, teachers are seen as a factor resisting the changes introduced by the state and the ministry and supporting a monolingual ideology (Damanakis, 2005). However, as French (2015) points out, only teachers' attitudes can change this prevailing ideology in Greek society (Damanakis, 2005).

The above subsections were intended to illustrate the crucial role of language in human life. In particular, the discussion focused on the importance of preserving the mother tongue and preventing its loss. Research has shown that the mother tongue is an integral part of a person's identity and culture, and that the loss of the mother tongue can lead to cultural dislocation and

loss of identity. Therefore, it is important to recognize the value of the mother tongue and encourage its use.

One way to promote the use of the mother tongue is to apply the theory of language awareness. Language awareness focuses on language learning through learning another language. This approach is about providing opportunities for students to engage in meaningful interactions that improve their language skills. Through these interactions, students can continue to build their language skills. The benefits of bilingualism were also highlighted in the section on bilingual students. Research has shown that bilingualism can bring cognitive benefits, such as improved problem-solving skills and critical thinking. In addition, bilingualism can promote intercultural understanding and communication, which is increasingly important in our interconnected world.

The last section of the chapter discussed the importance of the teacher in promoting the use of the mother tongue. Therefore, it is important that teachers recognize the value of bilingualism and promote the use of the mother tongue in addition to other languages in the classroom. Teachers' beliefs are critical to their actions and instruction, especially in the area of language and bilingualism.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

In this section of this study, I will analyze the methodology that I followed, and I present the research tool that I used in order to conduct this study and describe in detail the reasons that I chose this specific research tool. After that, an explanation of the data collection and data analysis process is presented.

This qualitative research uses thematic analysis in order to illustrate and understand the challenges that Greek preservice teachers face in teaching Greek as a second language to immigrant and refugee students that don't share the same linguistic background. Qualitative research is not only one research methodology whose use is constantly gaining more and more acknowledgment and importance, but also a methodology that is particularly relevant and useful for investigating and expansion of knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2019). It is characterized by a heterogeneity that have produced a variety of "approaches" for qualitative techniques, including phenomenology, ethnography, action research and more (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013, p. 398). Qualitative research is characterized by the pursuit of the researcher to explore and understand in depth perceptions, beliefs and experiences of specific persons regarding a phenomenon, in order to create a deeper, better and more refined knowledge of the subject research phenomenon (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018 p. 2). That includes a holistic and deeper interpretation of participants in research and their environment in relation to the research phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As that result, researchers during qualitative research constantly reflect, learn and evolve (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As claimed by Braun and Clarke (2020) qualitative research is accompanied by assumptions and choices that research do according to their interests. A critical step in conducting qualitative research is recognizing the theoretical positions that need to be reflected on throughout the process (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Finally, qualitative content analysis usually uses the individual subjects as the unit for analysis, rather than natural linguistic units (e.g., word, sentence, or paragraph) most frequently used in quantitative content analysis. When using the theme as a coding unit, initially the expressions of an idea are investigated. Consequently, it is possible to set a code in a piece of text of any size, as long as it represents that single research topic or issue questions. In the context of this research, I will apply a thematic analysis approach developed by Braun and Clarke.

To be more precise, this method is presented below. Thematic analysis can be defined as one of the most important methods in the spectrum of qualitative analysis, even though it is rarely acknowledged and sometimes even considered by researchers as a tool rather than a method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In contrast to this view, Braun, and Clarke (2017) believe it should be considered a theory in its own right and have addressed its development by writing texts to provide clarity on thematic analysis. In point of fact, until the publication of Braun and Clarke's (2006) article, thematic analysis was conducted in a non-systematic and intuitive, way both in terms of the logic of the coding as well as in terms of the final capture of themes.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can be defined as a recurring meaning within the data where their recognition, organization, and understanding are done systematically. The aim of the thematic content analysis is to select the key points of the interviews, to understand the text based on the research questions, to focus on key themes, and to find common ground among the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2017). In this sense, thematic analysis is applied when the goal is to investigate the perceptions of a social group for a practice, a concept or otherwise when the goal is to capture the collective beliefs of a social group about a social object or social entity.

The thematic analysis differs from other qualitative analytic methods due to the flexibility that provides in different aspects of the data management process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexibility concerns various factors needed to complete the survey, such as the research question, the sample size, and the data collection method (Braun & Clarke, 2017). In this way, the researchers have the opportunity to focus on patterns that concern them based on the subject that they investigated and the questions that they want to answer (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a method that requires creativity from the researchers without this implying that clarity is not required in the data-gathering process and methodology practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At this point, it is important to mention, that thematic analysis shares some similarities with other research methods, such as content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis. However, the thematic analysis does not demand the same level of theoretical and technical expertise, that other approaches do. It is more flexible and easier to use, which makes it a good option for beginners' researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p.80).

Lastly, it is noteworthy to acknowledge the similarities that do exist between different approaches, but for the purpose of this research, I will solely concentrate on thematic analysis without delving into its distinctions and similarities.

Thematic analysis was chosen as the research method because it is a method of qualitative data analysis that allows for the identification of patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges Greek teachers face when using another language in the classroom. Thematic analysis was the most appropriate method to accomplish this goal because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Identifying patterns and themes within the data can lead to a deeper understanding of the challenges that prospective teachers face, which was particularly important for this study because it allowed for participants' experiences and perceptions to be explored in a way that was tailored to the research questions and objectives. As someone who strives for organization, the way the thematic analysis was conducted allowed me to follow specific steps in analyzing the data. This approach helped me separate the main themes and put them into a structure that made it easier for me to analyze the data. This allows for a coherent and well-structured analysis that makes it easier for the reader to understand and absorb the information.

### **3.1 Themes**

The strength of thematic analysis lies in its flexibility, which allows researchers to identify and determine themes according to their research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, it is important to note that the identification of themes in thematic analysis should not be based solely on the researcher's discretion. The themes that emerge must be related to the theoretical background and established frameworks to ensure the success of the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and thus the success of the research. Identifying the themes in the thematic analysis is a critical step in understanding the data and the resulting categorization.

Braun and Clarke (2017) describe two ways to identify themes in data: the inductive approach (data-driven) and the deductive approach (theory-driven). The inductive approach is used to identify themes within a given data set, without prior assumptions about the number of themes.

The inductive approach is useful when investigating an unknown topic (Braun & Clarke, 2017), whereas in the deductive approach, the topics are predetermined by the researcher.

In addition to the above division, I also divide the themes into latent (underlying) and semantic (explicit) (Braun & Clarke, 2017). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the latent approach refers to issues that are present within a set of texts but may not be immediately apparent to the analyst or reader. In other words, the underlying meanings. In contrast, in a semantic approach, themes are easily identified by the researcher and are represented without looking for the underlying meanings. For the purposes of this thesis, I will conduct a deductive thematic analysis at the semantic level. Below there would be an analysis of the phases followed during the process of obtaining and analyzing the data.

### **3.2 Data collection**

Data were collected from the end of January 2023 to the beginning of April 2023 (8 weeks in total). Questionnaires were distributed online on various platforms, mainly via Facebook. Each questionnaire contained information regarding the study, ensuring the anonymity of participants, as no personal details were retained, and contact details of the researcher in case of the desire to communicate with her regarding the study. Participants are students who are currently studying at the University of Athens in the Department of Early Childhood Education. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were initially intended to collect the opinions of the participating pre-service teachers about the use of their native language in their teaching and how well-prepared they felt for multilingual teaching.

Questionnaires are research tools used to collect data from individuals through a series of questions. As a research method, they are often used in various fields such as sociology, psychology, and education. This instrument can be used in different ways to meet the needs of the research. The way it is used can affect the response rate and the quality of the data (Couper, 2000). Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out that questionnaires can be used in qualitative research to collect data through open-ended questions. Questions can be modified to elicit detailed responses from participants, which allows researchers to analyze qualitative data. By modifying them to be more specific, researchers can make the respondents to answer in more detail.

The decision to use a questionnaire as the primary research tool was made considering that it was the most appropriate way to collect the necessary data at the time of the study. More specifically, I felt that data collection would be easier and faster with questionnaires because they allow each participant to complete them at a time of their choosing. In addition, questionnaires allow for a large number of surveys, and since the goal was to survey many people for generalization purposes, it seemed more logical to me to use a questionnaire. In addition, the questionnaires were chosen to facilitate the coding and creation of themes according to the chosen research methodology. And this is because the questionnaire allows comparability and facilitates systematic analysis and interpretation of the data. This research is characterized by a deep respect for the participants and adheres to the ethical principles of transparency, honesty and integrity. No form of deception or misrepresentation is undertaken.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1: Questionnaire) is structured and includes a total of eleven questions, three close-ended and eight open-ended questions. The three close-ended questions were about their personal information. An open-ended question does not force participants to give predefined answers but allows them to answer in their own words. As a result, participants feel more able to freely express their thoughts and concerns (Babbie, 2020). This provides researchers with rich data that they can use to gain greater insight into the topic being studied. It was considered unnecessary to request further permits as all the necessary information is included in the questionnaire. In the following, the questions of the questionnaire are reproduced in translation, since, as already mentioned, the research is addressed to Greek students. The Greek wording is quoted next to the questions. It is important to acknowledge that minor differences in translation may arise due to the differences between those two languages. Despite efforts to ensure accurate translation, subtle variations may occur.

Some personal information was asked at the beginning, such as gender, age, and year of study. Then, the following questions were asked, with the primary objective of providing comprehensive answers to the research questions under consideration. The first questions focused on the academic aspect and the education provided by the university on the research topic. To be more precise: “How do you think your current training prepared you in hosting bilingual students in your future classroom?”, “Outside the Academic program, what training or seminars on teaching Greek as a second language have you investigated or pursued?” and “How do you think your teacher training should form you to support bilingual students and why? Do you believe



it is necessary to have courses on bilingualism at DECE to meet the educational needs of bilingual students?”. The next set of questions mainly delved into students' beliefs and perceptions about bilingualism and the use of the mother tongue in the classroom and beyond. Specifically: “How do you think that the use of another language in the family and friendly environment of the bilingual student affects their performance in lessons?”, “What do you think are the special needs (for example: the mother tongue) of bilingual students and how do you think those needs should be met?”, “How do you think the need to preserve the mother tongue should be met by teachers?”, “How do you think the presence of bilingual students would impact your whole classroom?” and lastly, “What do you think is the reaction of student teachers faced with bilingual students in their class?”. These questions were important in guiding the next steps of the data analysis process as they became the framework for extracting relevant findings from the data. Each question was examined in light of emerging themes and subthemes.

At this point it is important to mention that the questionnaire was answered only by a limited number of respondents. I received five answered questionnaires from final year students, with four women and only one man. The age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 27 years old. Of them, two respondents were 23 years old and one each were 19, 22, and 27 years old. Finally, in terms of year of study, two respondents were in their second year of study, two were in their fifth year of study, and one was in their fourth year of study. I recognize that this is a small sample size and cannot fully represent the entire student population. The time limits and resources I had to write this thesis did not allow me more time to undertake more steps to collect more data. Nevertheless, while this sample size is small, I believe that the conclusions stemming from the analysis can still be noteworthy and significant. It's important to consider this limitation when analyzing and interpreting the findings.

Below you will find an outline of the steps that were taken in order to respond to the primary research questions based on the data that was collected from the questionnaires, using the guidance given by Braun and Clarke (2006). By following those steps, it is believed that we can create meaningful insights and conclusions regarding the research questions.

### **3.3 Data analysis**

At this point, I will analyze the stages that were followed as defined by the reflexive thematic analysis approach. To be more precise, Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) in the methodology they developed, present six phases: familiarization with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes and producing the report. After the presentation of each phase in this chapter, the next chapter will present the findings of this study. The presentation of the findings is followed by another chapter that contributes to the overall understanding of the research topic through a discussion of the findings and suggests possible avenues for future research.

#### **3.3.1 Phase 1: Familiarization with the data**

In this phase, the researcher familiarizes himself with the data collected from the questionnaires by reviewing and transcribing the answers given. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) point out the importance of knowing the data before coding or making initial reflections. They recommend a “repeated reading” and a thorough search for meanings and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This leads to the researcher gaining an understanding of the content and context of the data.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, I read the data several times before starting the analysis. In the first reading, I formed a first idea of the themes and patterns that emerged from the responses of the interviewees. On a second reading, my choices became more and more apparent, and I began to decide how I would create the themes. During the initial stages of the analysis, I took notes and engaged in reflective thinking in order to ensure that the coding process was systematic. In a final reading, I was able to start the coding process. It is important to note that the coding process is an ongoing one and may require multiple rounds of revision as the researcher's understanding of the data evolves (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### **3.3.2 Phase 2 and 3: Generating initial codes and searching for themes.**

At this point, having gained a good understanding of the data, I move to the second phase, which is to develop initial ideas or codes that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that codes are essentially patterns that emerge from the data

that the researcher finds interesting and that align with the topic they are investigating. Essentially, coding is a method of organizing and analyzing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a thorough process of examining the data closely to find meanings and patterns that facilitate further analysis for the researcher.

At this stage, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) advice on how to generate codes. While examining the answered questionnaires, I tried to take notes on the answers given and underline the phrases or words from the respondents' answers that I thought I could use later in my research. In this way, I had the opportunity to identify concepts or patterns that might be relevant to my research questions. This phase contributed greatly to the development of the main themes. Therefore, it was easier for me to move on to the next phase, more specifically Phase 3 and the search for themes.

It is important to mention the codes that emerged from this process. The first code, "*teacher training*", indicates that educators recognize the importance of training to effectively support bilingual students. The second code, "*resource- courses*", highlights the expressed need for an insufficient number of courses from the University. The third code, "*importance of preservation*", indicates that respondents value the preservation of the mother tongue and recognize its cultural importance. The fourth code, "*classroom use*", indicates that respondents recognize the potential benefits of using the mother tongue in the classroom to support learning and promote student engagement. The fifth code, "*positive attitude*", indicates that respondents have a positive attitude toward bilingual students in the school setting. Finally, the sixth code, "*willingness to support*", indicates that respondents are willing to support bilingual students in their learning and development. Due to the size of the sample and the exact scope of the study, only 6 codes were generated that related to my research question. Although the size of the coding pool is limited, the process would have been the same with a larger sample and similar conclusions may still have emerged.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), in phase 3, researchers search for the themes. The codes that have been produced in an earlier phase are now compared and merged into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To be more precise, after the initial coding, the researcher is trying to identify commonalities and differences as well as relationships between the codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this phase, sub-themes may arise while at the same time, some codes can be

discarded (ibid). Creating themes is not a step-by-step process, but a dynamic one, where the researcher revisits the data and the codes as many times as it needs it (ibid).

Below will be explained the steps that I followed in order to create the themes. The initial step was to identify connections, such as differences and similarities between the codes, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). From this process, two main themes emerged, specifically “Preparedness” and “Beliefs”. Under the theme “Preparedness” codes related to the training of the respondents on the use of the mother tongue of bilingual students and how well prepared are to welcome bilingual students inside their classroom based on the training provided by the DECE and the University of Athens. Under the theme “Beliefs”, two sub-themes were created: “use of the mother tongue” and “bilingual students”. In that theme, I gathered the ideas and perceptions of the respondents on the two sub-themes. The sub-theme "use of the mother tongue" refers to respondents' opinions about the use of the mother tongue inside the classroom and how it can affect students, while the sub-theme “bilingual students” refers to respondents' opinions regarding the existence and management of bilingual students in the classroom. The main themes of “Preparedness” and “Beliefs” are subordinate to the overarching theme of “teachers’ readiness to support bilingual students' learning”. It is noteworthy that the generated themes are based on the decisions and interpretations of the data that I made.

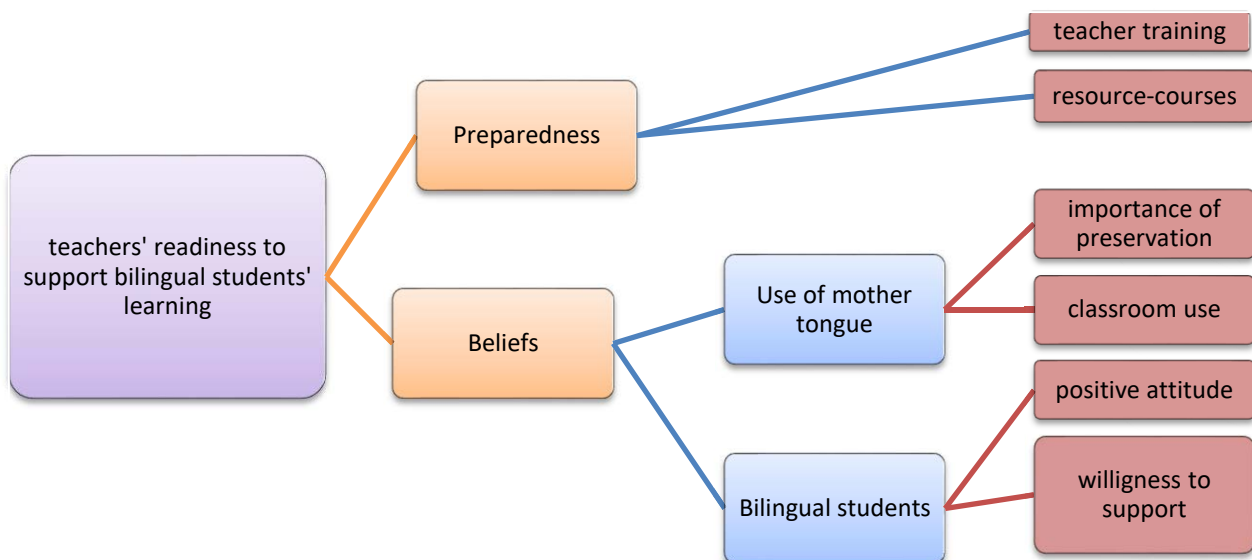


Figure 1. Overview of the thematic analysis: overarching theme, main themes, subthemes, and simple codes.

### 3.3.3 Phase 4: Reviewing themes.

In this phase, I review the themes, particularly the quality and relevance of the themes that emerged in the previous phases of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to ensure that they are relevant to the research questions. In this phase, I review the themes that emerged from the data in relation to the purpose of the thematic analysis and the research that has been conducted in the field. I initially, found two main themes, “Preparedness” and “Beliefs”, and among the beliefs, “use of the mother tongue” and “bilingual students” were appropriate. These were combined into the overarching theme of "teacher readiness to support bilingual students' learning. I then review the coherence of the themes and whether they cover all the important elements. This was done separately for each theme. As Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, this stage is important because the results can reinforce interpretations.

### 3.3.4 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes.

Upon completion of Phase 4, this phase further refined and defined the themes to ensure their accuracy and relevance to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this phase, the main characteristics of each theme are identified, and it is given a descriptive and informative name. It is important to note that in this phase the existing subthemes also become clear and contribute to the analysis of the two main themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006) point out, in this phase the position of the themes in the stories we want to present to the readers is perceived. It is not a simple paraphrasing of the data, but a search for the reason that is an important part of the story we are trying to tell. As part of this study, I have already formed groups from the codes. Then, from the codes, the subthemes and major themes emerged under the overarching theme of "teacher readiness to support bilingual students' learning".

### 3.3.5 Phase 6: Producing the report.

The last phase is the writing of the paper and the presentation of the results. The thematic analysis results have been summarized and presented clearly and concisely so that the findings can

be effectively communicated to the target audience. The aim is to convince the readers of the reliability of the analysis as it is based on evidence from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A detailed presentation of the findings and conclusions follows this.

## 4 FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the opinions and attitudes of male and female DECE students at the University of Athens, the prospective teachers of tomorrow, on issues related to the pedagogical management of bilingual students' profiles. In order to better frame the results of the open-ended questionnaires, two main themes and two sub-themes were created with the corresponding data: "Preparedness" and "Beliefs", with two sub-themes: "use of mother tongue" and "bilingual Students". The themes emerged under the overarching theme of "teachers' readiness to support bilingual students' learning", as shown in Figure 1. In this section, I will present the findings of my analysis.

In this section, words and phrases from the answered questionnaire will be presented. The responses provided were originally in Greek and have been translated in English. The quotations will be in English. In order to maintain anonymity, the names of the respondents are used in a modified form.

### 4.1 Theme: "Preparedness"

In a society that constantly changing, it is crucial for education to adapt to these changes and ensure inclusion. As revealed in the first part of this paper, Greece is a country with a significant population of bilingual individuals with lots of bilingual students inside the classrooms. Therefore, it is necessary to create bilingual programs to promote inclusion, academic success, and cultural identity among bilingual students. However, the creation of bilingual programs is inextricably linked with the teachers and how well they are prepared to welcome bilingual students.

Analysis of the questionnaires identified the category "Preparedness", which includes the codes "*resources courses*" and "*teacher training*". To illustrate how each of these categories was formed, selected quotes from participants are presented along with their interpretation.

#### 4.1.1 Code: *Resources courses*

DECE students' responses indicate that they do not feel prepared to accommodate bilingual students in their classrooms. Students expressed concern about the limited number of courses on bilingualism, which they felt did not provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to deal with bilingual students in their classrooms. One of them expressed the opinion that their education should provide students with more resources to support bilingual students “I believe that the training we receive should provide us with the resources to be properly prepared to welcome bilingual children into the classroom and to be able to offer them the best possible” (respondent 4, Code *teacher training* and *resources-courses*). This quote indicates that DECE students often have a desire to address the needs of bilingual students but feel that their education lacks resources to do so. This suggests that there is a gap between the skills and knowledge that students feel they need and what is currently being offered in their university. Another respondent emphasized that “teaching should be supportive and encouraging toward bilingual students. Having appropriate courses at DECE is essential” (respondent 5, *resources-courses* and *teacher training*). This underscores the need to have appropriate courses in order to train and improve teachers' knowledge and skills in dealing with bilingual students. In other words, to prepare them for a linguistically diverse school environment.

The presence of the linguistically diverse school environment has been acknowledged by two respondents and they emphasized the globalized context in which we live, and they point out the necessity of inclusion in education. Once again, they expressed the idea of including more courses on bilingualism in the academic program. Quote from Respondent 3: “as we live in a globalized context that makes inclusion necessary, and the field of education is one of the central pillars of acceptance and of inclusion. Therefore, yes, I consider it necessary to have courses at DECE that deal with bilingualism” (code *resources-courses*). This indicates that the respondent recognizes the importance of providing teachers with the necessary resources to support a diverse student body.

Similarly, Respondent 1 quote, “It is necessary to have such courses at the university as multiculturalism has prevailed in schools in recent years” (code *resources-courses*), indicates that the respondent understands the changing demographics in schools and the importance of preparing future teachers to work. The responses of these two respondents indicate that they recognized the changing educational landscape and the importance of teacher education programs



in addressing the challenges associated with a linguistically diverse school environment. It was emphasized that more courses on bilingualism should be included in the academic program to provide teachers with the necessary resources to support a diverse student body.

#### 4.1.2 Code: *Teacher training*

Complimenting the above code, this code focus more on the teacher training in general, not only in the context of university. It is noteworthy to mention that in the question regarding the additional training on teaching Greek all the participants responded in negative, showing that they have not received or pursued training apart from what the Academic Program was offering. The fact that they have not received additional training from seminars in combination with the small number of offered courses from the Academic program, may have caused the insecurity and lack of preparedness that the respondents express in previous questions. The negative responses to that question raise new ones. Based on the previous responses on the importance of having adequate training and many courses on that subject, the negative response is contradicted. Further research on that could shed light on the reasons behind their decision for not seeking additional training.

Lastly, another respondent emphasized on the strong theoretical- scientific background and practical strategies, suggesting that a comprehensive teacher training program is necessary to provide teachers with the tools they need to effectively meet the needs of diverse student populations. The same respondent stressed the need for courses related to bilingualism and intercultural education “Mainly through the theoretical-scientific background, but also with specific practices. However, the need to have knowledge subjects in DECE related to bilingualism and more generally to intercultural education is imperative” (Respondent 2 code *resources-courses* and *teacher training*).

## 4.2 Theme: “Beliefs”

In the methodology section, I discussed at length the importance of teachers' beliefs in decision-making and their attitudes toward their students, since, according to various researchers, teachers' perceptions are shaped by their beliefs, i.e., their understanding of the world and their views of themselves and others (Borg, 2011). Beliefs have a strong influence on professional practice and are an important predictor of teacher behavior (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009). Researchers have found that teachers' beliefs influence their teaching, especially when it comes to students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Miguel, 2019). Therefore, teachers' biases toward students from other cultural backgrounds can affect students' educational experiences and lead to marginalization and exclusion. For example, if teachers believe that bilingual students perform poorly, this can negatively impact student achievement. Therefore, teachers need to challenge and deconstruct their beliefs.

I recognized the importance of further examining students' perspectives on bilingualism. To this end, I analyzed respondents' answers under the broader theme of “Beliefs”, which resulted in two sub-themes: “use of mother tongue” and “bilingual students”. These sub-themes emerged from the codes I identified during data analysis. Below are the findings of this analysis for each sub-theme.

### 4.2.1 Sub-theme: “Use of mother tongue”

The use of the mother tongue in the classroom has a positive effect on students' academic performance and strengthens their language skills (Jones, Barnes & Hunt, 2005). Language awareness connects different languages and helps all students. (Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017). However, the use of another language in the classroom can be seen as a problem, perpetuating the notion that linguistic differences are a problem (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009). In the Greek context, multilingualism is often viewed as a problem and the use of another language in the classroom is avoided, which has a negative impact on bilingual students. Therefore, it is important to explore the beliefs of future teachers in order to reduce past prejudices and create a supportive environment. Below the codes that formulate the sub themes are presented to shed a light on the phenomenon described above.

*Code: Importance of perseverance*

From the answers it can be concluded that the respondents understand the importance of mastering the mother tongue in bilingual students. One of them emphasizes that it is crucial to keep alive the language spoken in the bilingual students' family, as this can be seen to connect the bilingual students to their heritage, values, and traditions, which are often deeply rooted in the language. It also helps foster a sense of identity, pride, and belonging in the child, which can contribute to their overall well-being and success in life. "Preserving the mother tongue is particularly important as it is the language that the child throughout his or her life" (Respondent 5 Code *Importance of Preservation*).

Another holds the view that the bilingual students should learn not only the language of the country they live, but it is essential for them to master the language of their origin as it seen as a way to maintain their cultural identity and connect them with their family and community "However, I think it is very useful and logical that children to know the language of the country they come from" (Respondent 3 Code *Importance of Preservation*). Both of them suggests the importance of preservation as it can be an advantage for them to maintain their cultural heritage.

Finally, the respondents unanimously mention that in order to preserve the mother tongue, it is important that the child uses the mother tongue mainly in the family and in a friendly environment. More specifically, one of them emphasizes the importance of the family environment for language learning, pointing out that in the family and friendly environment the child has more opportunities to practice and better master the language: "In daily use in the family environment, in the interaction of the student with peers of the same nationality" (Respondent 1 Code *Importance of Preservation*). At the same time, another suggests that there must be interaction with the school in order to facilitate language learning through collaboration: "This can be achieved with appropriate support and reinforcement from both the school and the family environment" (Respondent 5, Code *Importance of Preservation and Classroom use*). The last idea is also accepted by another respondent who gave a similar answer: "In its use both in school and in its family and social environment" (Respondent 2 Code *Importance of Preservation and Classroom use*).

It is evident that the preservation of the mother tongue of bilingual students can be achieved through consistent use in both family and school settings, as suggested by the respondents.

However, since the focus of this study is on teachers, the emphasis will be primarily on the school environment rather than the family and friends.

#### *Code: Classroom use*

Respect for the mother tongue of bilingual students was emphasized by all respondents. For example, one of the respondents acknowledged the important role of respecting the mother tongue and stressed that it should be integrated into the educational process as it can be seen as an advantage for bilingual students. “It should be treated with respect and be a valuable part of every student's quiver” (Respondent 4 Code *Importance of Preservation and classroom*). Another one suggests the support that teachers should provide to their bilingual students without given any explanation, “Educational staff should support and advise bilingual students, learn their mother tongue” (Respondent 3 Code *Importance of Preservation and classroom use*). This giving us the idea that it doesn't not suggest the use inside the classroom, as support can be mentally. Only, Respondent 2 believed that the mother tongue could be preserved through its use in the classroom and recognized its potential to support this effort. “With the essential use of the mother tongue in the school context” (Code *Importance of Preservation and classroom use*).

At this point it is vital to mention that Respondent 1 and Respondent 5 highlighted the role of specialist teachers. They felt that formal instruction by qualified teachers could contribute to the preservation of the language better, “...but also by being taught by a specialist” (Respondent 1 Code *classroom use*), “by learning from a professional...” (Respondent 5 Code *classroom use*). Again, they didn't not mention the use inside the classroom, probably because of the lack of knowledge. Finally, the individual efforts of bilingual students, such as reading in their mother tongue, were recognized as a means of contributing to language maintenance “...and by reading extracurricular books in the mother tongue” (Respondent 3 Code *classroom use*).

#### 4.2.2 Sub-theme: “Bilingual students”

Research shows that bilingual students show several characteristics compared to monolingual students, such as language awareness, improved language skills, translation skills, and improved problem-solving skills (French, 2015; Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2015). They also have positive attitudes toward learning different languages and show

better social skills (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017). In the past, bilingualism was seen as a barrier to education and integration (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2015). However, recent studies have shown that it offers advantages over monolingualism (Mitits, 2018). Nevertheless, the presence of bilingual students is often perceived as an obstacle due to deeply held beliefs and under the influence of various prejudices (Magos & Simopoulos, 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the beliefs of prospective teachers on the topic. The following codes are presented below to shed light on the underlying phenomenon.

*Code: Positive attitude*

Previous research has shown that the presence of a bilingual student in the classroom is a steppingstone for the rest of the students and for the academic success of the class. It is of particular interest what the respondents think about the bilingual students themselves and their existence in the classroom.

One of the respondents emphasize the positive side of the presence of bilingual students. He/She believes that it could have a positive impact on both bilingual and native students. This view highlights the opportunities for greater cultural understanding and diversity in the classroom, which can enhance the learning experience for all students "...I think that the presence of bilingual students can be educational and useful for the rest of the students, as they come into contact not only with another language, but also with elements of a different culture." (Respondent 3 Code *positive attitude*). Building on this, another respondent notes that this interaction between students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can increase empathy, which in turn leads to creating a positive and safe place for students to grow as individuals and improve their interpersonal skills. "...both the efficiency of the whole increases and the interaction between individuals and the cultivation of empathy" (Respondent 2 Code *positive attitude*).

From the above, it appears that the presence of bilingual students in the classroom is viewed positively, which contradicts what was previously found in the literature and research on the subject. This is evidence that the respondents like the idea of having bilingual students in their class while emphasizing that the positive effect depends on the teacher and the way their presence is handled. Thus, the connection with the preparedness and appropriate training of DECE students becomes clear.

Another important aspect that was explored was the respondents' opinion about the general idea of how teachers react when they have bilingual students in their class. The respondents gave different answers. Three of them, expressed the view that many teachers feel a certain level of stress due to their lack of training and guidance: “It is definitely stressful for them...” (Respondent 1 Code *positive attitude*). The second one mentions: “I believe that the presence of one or more bilingual students can give the teacher a sense of anxiety related to the correct management of it all, without this meaning that he will not be able to execute it with the correct manipulations” (Respondent 5 Code *positive attitude*). Finally, “I think, that teachers are stressed because of insufficient guidance from the University” (Respondent 3 Code *positive attitude*). While one of them posited that this stress can also have positive effects: “...but stress can have a positive effect” (Respondent 1 Code *positive attitude*). Since the respondent did not follow up on his thought, it can be assumed that stress can have positive effects, as it can be considered as a lever, giving them the opportunity to find other ways to support students.

On the other hand, one of them said that the presence of bilingual students in the classroom is not a new reality and therefore they could feel ready to integrate bilingual students in the educational process. This notion is contrary to the ideas revealed in this research. The respondent assumes that teachers would not feel the same stress because of their experience with a phenomenon that is not new. However, this idea does not apply to all teachers, especially those who are just beginning their careers in the field. “Having bilingual students in the classroom is not a new reality, so I think teachers are somehow ready to include students in the educational process.” (Respondent 2 Code *positive attitude*).

#### *Code: Willingness to support*

Another aspect that was explored is the willingness to support these students. Respondent 3 expressed the idea that the willingness to support bilingual students is for teachers to support and advise them in promoting an inclusive classroom environment. This perspective suggests that educators should play an active role in ensuring that bilingual students receive the support they need to help them meet the challenges of learning, “Educational staff should support and advise bilingual students learn their mother tongue” (Respondent 3 Code *willingness to support*).

Therefore, the idea of proper management and adaptation of teaching methods by the teacher was presented. To be more precise, one of the respondents suggested that the ability to manage and adapt teaching methods is related to the teacher's willingness to support bilingual students. The response emphasized that teachers need to be well prepared to support bilingual students "...it will depend on how the teacher handles it" (Respondent 5 code *willingness to support*). Respondent 3 also mentioned that teachers should adjust their lesson plans and create a learning environment to support the academic success of all students. In other words, they need to create a balanced learning experience that accommodates all students. "Teachers should design their lessons in such a way that the performance of the whole is not affected ..." (Respondent 3 code *willingness to support*). Building on this, Respondent 2 suggests that teachers should design their instruction to support the special needs of bilingual students in a way that does not interfere with the progress of the whole. "Teachers should adjust their teaching so that the performance of the whole is not affected because of the bilingual students" (code *willingness to support*).

This view recognizes the central role of the teacher in managing class dynamics to ensure that whole-class performance is not compromised. Therefore, it can be assumed that with proper teacher training, the presence of bilingual students can be integrated into the classroom in a way that maintains the overall effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

In summary, the findings make it clear that prospective teachers express a desire to be better prepared and have more resources to effectively support bilingual students' learning. The study underscores the importance of including more courses on bilingualism and intercultural education in teacher education programs. It also shows that respondents value and respect the mother tongue of bilingual students and want to create a positive classroom climate that promotes cultural understanding and empathy. However, these two ideas are interrelated because it is difficult for them to achieve the goal of integrating the mother tongue if they do not have the knowledge and confidence that comes with it.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The presence of bilingual students in Greek schools is a reality and it might be viewed as a problem. This perception combined with the low performance of bilingual students, which may be a result of the lack of reinforcement of the mother tongue forces changes in education. In this chapter, I will answer the research question based on the Findings and further elaborate on the theoretical connections seen with the Findings. I will also reflect on further considerations of the thesis and then discuss Ethical considerations along with a self-assessment of this study.

### 5.1 Answering the research questions.

To answer the question, I thought it appropriate to address my two main themes: Beliefs and Preparedness. I believe that understanding beliefs and my preparation are crucial elements in answering the question posed. This choice is to ensure an understandable analysis of the results.

#### 5.1.1 Beliefs

The findings of the study underline an important aspect regarding the positive attitude of the respondents towards multilingual and multicultural classrooms. It is worth noting that the participants expressed their positive views about students' mother tongue and its possible impact on their academic performance. This idea is complimenting Mitits (2018) work, that highlights that multilingualism has gain supporters due to the positive results of various studies. Specifically, respondents do not believe that bilingual students' incomplete Greek proficiency can be linked to decreased efficiency and poor academic performance. This suggests that they do not exclusively associate language proficiency with academic success. They recognize that bilingual students can perform academically despite incomplete mastery of the dominant language. This view challenges the prevailing view that multilingualism is associated with factors that contribute to the poor academic performance of these students (Atkinson, 1987; Griva & Chostelidou, 2013b; Tsolakidou, 2005). This shift could happen because social attitudes and perceptions can change over time, leading to new insights and knowledge. Age differences in the population studied could also be a reason for this change. Younger generations have grown up



in a diverse environment and have positive attitudes toward multilingualism. The change in perspective can also be attributed to a conscious effort to break away from the stereotypes of the past.

In addition to positive attitudes toward the presence of bilingual students in the classroom, the study underscores the importance of considering students' mother tongue and recognizing its value to their overall development. It underscores that respondents recognize the benefits of linguistic and cultural diversity in education, particularly in early childhood education. As outlined in the literature, it is critical for preschool children's linguistic and communicative development that they grow up in an environment that allows them to interact with different languages, leading to positive outcomes (Boyd & Huss, 2017; Coelho, Andrade, & Portugal, 2018). They also emphasize the importance of preserving the mother tongue. This idea is at odds with the existing literature. As Tsolakidou (2005) stated, having multiple languages is assumed to have negative consequences for students, and multilingualism is presented more as an obstacle to students' education and integration into society (Griva, Kiliari, & Stamou, 2017; Safford & Drury, 2013; Wallen & Kelly-Holmes, 2015).

It is worth highlighting a significant discrepancy regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom. Although all respondents acknowledge the importance of preserving the mother tongue and its vital role in the lives of bilingual students, there appears to be limited use of the mother tongue in the classroom, which is consistent with the findings of the existing literature (Mitits, 2018). Corcoll (2013) highlights the fact that teachers tend to avoid or minimize the use of languages other than the dominant language in the classroom. However, it is important to distinguish between Corcoll's assertion and the findings of this study because they are based on different factors.

Corcoll (2013) suggests that teachers' reluctance to use the mother tongue is based on negative attitudes. In contrast, the results of this study suggest that teachers may choose not to use the mother tongue due to a lack of knowledge, such as a limited understanding of the concept of language awareness. Also, as Premier and Miller (2010) mention teachers' lack of confidence in handling languages other than Greek hinders the promotion of multilingualism in their classrooms. This means that teachers' positive attitudes and willingness to preserve the mother

tongue do not necessarily translate into practical implementation in the classroom. Consequently, the importance of providing training and professional development in this area becomes clear once again.

### 5.1.2 Preparedness

While respondents have this positive attitude, the lack of necessary education leads to a lack of confidence that reduces the positive elements of education. Equality of opportunities in education should translate into specific instructional practices that can positively impact students who do not have Greek as a first language. Therefore, action must be taken to close the gap between attitudes and practices and to promote inclusivity to meet the diverse linguistic needs of bilingual students. Existing literature supports the idea that teachers are underprepared to deal with diversity and cultural issues due to inadequate training (Griva & Chostelidou, 2013b). This deficiency can be attributed to the limited coverage of multilingualism in their undergraduate studies (Atkinson, 1987; Krulatz, Steen-Olsen, & Torgersen, 2017; Safford & Drury, 2013; Tarnanen & Palviainen, 2018; Tsokalidou, 2005; Wang, Lin, Spalding, Odell, & Klecka, 2011).

Our own findings are consistent with this statement, as all respondents emphasized the need for improved training and additional courses to address these shortcomings. This dissatisfaction and the emphasis on support were noted in studies conducted by Atkinson (1987), Björklund (2013), Griva and Chostelidou (2013b), and Tsokalidou (2005). These findings contribute to a broader understanding of fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for multilingual students in which their linguistic and cultural strengths are respected and promoted.

In conclusion, Students showed positive attitudes towards the presence of different languages in the classroom. They also expressed a positive attitude towards the preservation of these languages as part of the cultural and national identity of these children. However, due to their inadequate education, they are not able to use these languages in the school environment. They expressed the view that additional courses should be offered in school. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of teaching in a multilingual classroom and highlights the need for further research and training in this area.

## 5.2 Further considerations

From the responses of the DECE students who participated in this research, it can be inferred that they consider training on issues related to dealing with bilingual students and their mother tongue in the classroom to be essential. They express that they are not able to effectively teach bilingual students in their classes because they are not adequately trained in this area. This idea, combined with the fact that the respondents in the study had not taken any teacher training beyond the program, raises the question of the availability and accessibility of such training. It is possible that teachers do not have the time or resources to seek additional training, or that such training is not widely available. In addition, the negative response to the question about additional training may reflect a general problem of limited opportunities for professional development in the education sector. Teachers may feel that they do not have access to the resources and support needed to improve their teaching skills and knowledge.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of providing training to students of DECE on bilingualism in order to make use of the linguistic diversity of the students in the classroom. With this training, pre-service teachers can be enabled to adopt more bilingual practices that benefit all students, regardless of their language background. That will have as a result the creation of an inclusive learning environment that fosters positive outcomes for all the students. Therefore, it is obvious the need for professional development and training for teachers to effectively manage bilingual students in the classroom and promote inclusivity in the classroom. Training should not be eliminated only to teachers that deal exclusively with teaching Greek to bilingual students. All teachers should gain the appropriate skills and be aware of the needs of bilingual students with the aim of the personal and academic development of those students.

In conclusion, the findings of this study suggest that teacher education and language policies in Greece need to be reformed to better meet the needs of bilingual students and promote inclusion in the classroom. This requires a concerted effort to provide pre-service teacher training, professional development opportunities, and policies that recognize the value of linguistic diversity and promote the use of mother tongue in the classroom.

### **5.3 Limitations and ethical considerations of the research**

In recent years, qualitative research has gained the attention and acceptance of researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2019). According to Golafshani (2015), the goal of qualitative research is to provide insight into complex situations that would otherwise be difficult to understand. However, given this popularity, the evaluation of qualitative research remains a topic of debate. Nowell et al. (2017) suggest that to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative research, criteria such as dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability must be considered. These criteria correspond to validity and reliability commonly used in quantitative research (Nowell et al., 2017).

According to Nowell et al. (2017), dependability is associated with a systematic process that provides transparency about each step taken. To achieve this, the researcher must provide descriptions of data collection and analysis. In this study, all steps and actions taken based on the methodology are detailed to provide transparency. Nowell et al. (2017) suggest a review by another researcher, which in this case was achieved through discussions with my supervisor, who provided additional insight, feedback, and critical evaluation of the study's methodology and findings. Credibility, according to Nowell et al. (2017) is associated with the integration of respondent's perspectives and their representation by the researcher. In order to achieve credibility a strong engagement with the data and the knowledge of the theoretical framework is required (ibid). Personally, even though I used questionnaire and therefore never met the participants, I have experienced similar concerns and feeling about my education, therefore I have enough understanding in order to interpret their responses.

Another criterion is transferability. Transferability is related to generalizability (Nowell et al., 2017). In other words, the findings of the study should be transferable to other contexts. As Nowell et al. (2017) stated, this requires the researcher to provide a detailed description of the research context. A very detailed account of the process and the findings was shown. Finally, confirmability, which is closely related to the objectivity of the research process and findings. It states that the data collection and analysis is not influenced by the researcher's opinion (Nowell et al., 2017). In this research, each decision was thoroughly considered, and no hasty conclusions were drawn. Each action taken was carefully documented and supported with valid arguments. Therefore, as the above criteria are matched, I believe my study is trustworthy.

However, limitations were also revealed in this study. Respondents' opinions were recorded spontaneously, with no questions intended to indicate a predominant perspective leaning toward either the positive or negative effects of bilingualism or the importance of language awareness. This spontaneous collection of opinions aimed to capture a range of perspectives without a predetermined direction. However, the sample represents only a portion of prospective teachers, so the degree to which the study. While the study may provide useful insights into the perspectives of the prospective teachers surveyed, it may not be generalizable to other groups or populations. The limited sample size limits the ability to draw general conclusions about the beliefs of prospective teachers or the general population. Therefore, general conclusions should be drawn with caution. Considering that transferability of a study is a critical factor for trustworthiness, it could be argued that the present study is insufficient in this regard because the sample is limited, and the conclusions may not apply to the general population. However, it can be argued that the trustworthiness of the study depends on the quality of the data rather than the sample size.

To improve the validity and generalizability of future studies, the sample should be increased to include a larger number of respondents. A larger sample would provide a more comprehensive representation of the prospective teacher group and potentially provide more valid results. By increasing the size of the sample, more opinions could be captured, which may improve understanding of the topic and increase the validity in the results of the study.

Adherence to ethical principles is a difficult and complex task, made even more complex in qualitative approaches because of the flexible and often unpredictable research process. The researcher must be aware of various ethical considerations in order to protect participants. In this study, I attempt to remain true to ethical considerations. Some ethical considerations were made when collecting data through questionnaires. One aspect is to respect the participants' responses while always keeping in mind the "costs" that may be incurred by conducting research on these individuals. Another aspect is to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, keeping their personal information private. In addition, participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to terminate their participation if they wished. Finally, only I had access to the data. Therefore, all ethical considerations were taken into account.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This qualitative study aims to answer the main question: What are DECE students' perspectives regarding the use of different languages in their classroom (language awareness) and how well prepared do the students feel to teach in a multilingual classroom? In this way, DECE students' views on bilingualism and the use of another language in the classroom were explored.

From the findings we can conclude that the respondents expressed an openness to the presence of different languages in the classroom, which reflects a positive attitude towards linguistic diversity. Their attitudes indicate that they value the richness that multilingualism brings to their educational environment. However, it became clear that the students' limited education did not enable them to use these languages effectively in the school environment. Despite their enthusiasm, the respondents acknowledged their own limitations and expressed a desire for additional language classes to be offered at the school. They recognized the need for better training and resources to develop their skills so that they could take full advantage of a multilingual classroom.

This study offers insights into the complexities and opportunities associated with teaching in a multilingual classroom. Although the sample size of this study does not allow for generalization of the findings, it can serve as a starting point for a broader discussion about the inclusion of different languages in the classroom and multilingualism in Greek schools in general. The implications of the findings of this study aim to highlight the importance of recognizing and promoting linguistic diversity in education and the urgent need for better training in this area to address the challenges faced by pre-service teachers. The findings of this study may have important implications for the development of strategies for teaching in multilingual classrooms. Therefore, curriculum development and improved teacher education can be considered based on the findings. As this study shows, participants express the need for better training. Policy makers can take as a starting point the development of an inclusive and supportive curriculum that enables preservice teachers to maximize the potential of each student. The above idea is not only for DECE students, but also for pre-service teachers at various levels of education. From early childhood education to high school.

The present study is considered to contribute to some extent to the exploration of teachers' views on the use of the mother tongue in the Greek classroom. Considering the sample size, it

is deemed necessary to conduct a more comprehensive study that would cover the research topic in more detail. In addition, further research could be conducted by examining the opinions of preservice teachers from different levels of education and from different universities in the country. This is because the academic programs of different academic institutions differ. In addition, it is recommended that a similar study with similar questions be conducted in the future because different ideas about the use of the mother tongue in the classroom may have emerged.

In concluding this study, it is important to also offer personal reflections. The most important question that arises is: what would I do differently if I had the opportunity to conduct this study from the beginning? The first answer that comes to mind relates to sample size. I would try to increase the sample size to achieve better generalizability of the findings. A larger sample could provide a more representative picture of preservice teachers views on the subject. The conclusions and recommendations derived from the study would then be applicable in a broader educational context. Probably, I could try to meet the preservice teachers in person and explain them the purpose of the study. Therefore, they might be more interested in participating. In addition, I would seek to conduct interviews to gather more details and gain a deeper understanding of opinions. Another valid question that arises is what I would want the reader to take away from this work. Personally, I want the reader to understand the importance of having different languages in the school setting and the benefits this brings. The goal, of course, is to show the need for additional education and training of students in bilingualism.

In summary, continued and diverse study is critical to gaining a comprehensive understanding of bilingualism and developing effective strategies to support bilingual individuals and communities. By studying bilingualism from multiple perspectives and tracking changes over time, researchers can ensure that their approaches remain relevant and effective and help promote a more positive and inclusive view of bilingualism.

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## APPENDIX

### 1. Appendix 1: Questionnaire

# Exploring Pre-Service Teachers' Perspectives on the use of Bilingual Students' Mother Tongue

Στο πλαίσιο των ερευνητικών αναγκών της διπλωματικής μου εργασίας με θέμα " Exploring Pre- service Teachers' perceptions on the use of Bilingual Students' mother tongue " ζητείται η συμβολή σας με την ανταπόκρισή σας στην παρούσα έρευνα.

Στα πλαίσια του Μεταπτυχιακού Προγράμματος Σπουδών "Education and Globalisation" του Πανεπιστημίου του Όουλο της Φινλανδίας (University of Oulu), εκπονείται η παρούσα διπλωματική εργασία με στόχο να διερευνήσει τις απόψεις των φοιτητών του Τμήματος Εκπαίδευσης και Αγωγής στην Προσχολική Ηλικία (TEΑΠΗ) σχετικά με την ετοιμότητα τους να διδάξουν σε δίγλωσσες-πολυγλωσσικές τάξεις.

Το ερωτηματολόγιο συμπληρώνεται από φοιτητές του Τμήματος Εκπαίδευσης και Αγωγής στην Προσχολική ηλικία του Εθνικού και Καποδιστριακού Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών (Ε.Κ.Π.Α.). Η συμβολή σας στην παρούσα έρευνα με την συμπλήρωση του ερωτηματολογίου είναι σημαντική. Παρακαλούμε να παράσχετε σύντομες αλλά ουσιαστικές απαντήσεις στις ανοικτού τύπου ερωτήσεις. Αποφύγετε τις μονολεκτικές απαντήσεις, καθώς αυτές μπορεί να επηρεάσουν τη διαδικασία ανάλυσης των δεδομένων.

Σε αυτό το σημείο, να αναφέρουμε ότι οι προσωπικές πληροφορίες που θα καταγραφούν είναι απόρρητες και η χρήση τους είναι αποκλειστικά και μόνο για τις ανάγκες της έρευνας. Τέλος, αν σας ενδιαφέρουν τα αποτελέσματα της έρευνας, θα είναι στη διάθεσή σας.

Σας ευχαριστώ εκ των προτέρων.

Κατσανάκη Μαρία

Email: [mekatsanaki@gmail.com](mailto:mekatsanaki@gmail.com)

Translation:

As part of the research needs of my thesis titled "Exploring Pre-service Teachers' perceptions on the use of Bilingual Students' mother tongue," your contribution is requested by participating in this study.

Within the framework of the Master's Degree Program in Education and Globalisation at the University of Oulu in Finland, the present thesis aims to investigate the opinions of students in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education (DEECE) regarding their preparedness to teach in bilingual-multilingual classrooms.



The questionnaire is to be completed by students in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Education at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA). Your contribution to this research by completing the questionnaire is significant. Please provide concise yet substantive answers to open-ended questions. Avoid monosyllabic responses as they may impact the data analysis process.

At this point, it should be mentioned that the personal information recorded will be treated as confidential and will be used exclusively for the purposes of the research. Finally, if you are interested in the results of the study, they will be made available to you.

Thank you in advance.

Maria Katsanaki

Email: mekatsanaki@gmail.com

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**\* Indicates required question**

1. Φύλο (Gender) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Άνδρας  
 Γυναίκα  
 Άλλο

- 
2. Ηλικία (Age) \*

3. Έτος σπουδών (Year of study) \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Α' Έτος  
 Β' Έτος  
 Γ' Έτος  
 Δ' Έτος  
 Ε' Έτος

4. Πιστεύετε ότι με την εκπαίδευση που έχετε λάβει έως τώρα είστε έτοιμοι να υποδεχθείτε στην τάξη σας έναν ή περισσότερους δίγλωσσους μαθητές; Δικαιολογήστε την απάντησή σας.

How do you think your current training prepared you in hosting bilingual students in your future classroom? . \*

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5. Εκτός του Ακαδημαϊκού προγράμματος, έχετε επιμορφωθεί ή παρακολουθήσει σεμινάρια σχετικά με την διδασκαλία της ελληνικής ως Δεύτερης Γλώσσας; Και αν ναι τι είδους ;

Outside the Academic program, what training or seminars on teaching Greek as a second language have you investigated or pursued? \*

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6. Πώς πιστεύετε ότι η εκπαίδευση σας, θα πρέπει να σας βοηθήσει να υποστηρίξετε τους δίγλωσσους μαθητές και για ποιον λόγο; Πιστεύετε ότι είναι απαραίτητη η ύπαρξη μαθημάτων στο ΤΕΑΠΗ που να σχετίζονται με την διγλωσσία, για να ανταποκριθείτε στις ανάγκες διδασκαλίας των δίγλωσσων μαθητών;

How do you think your teacher training should form you to support bilingual students and why? Do you believe it is necessary to have courses on bilingualism at DECE to meet the educational needs of bilingual students? \*

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7. Θεωρείτε ότι η χρήση άλλης γλώσσας στο οικογενειακό και φιλικό περιβάλλον του δίγλωσσου μαθητή επηρεάζει την απόδοσή του στα μαθήματα; Αν ναι γιατί;

How do you think that the use of another language in the family and friendly environment of the bilingual student affects their performance in lessons? \*

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8. Με ποιους τρόπους, κατά την άποψή σας, είναι εφικτή η διατήρηση της μητρικής γλώσσας των δίγλωσσων μαθητών;

What do you think are the special needs (for example: the mother tongue) of bilingual students and how do you think those needs should be met? \*

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9. Πώς η ανάγκη αυτής της διάτηρησης θα πρέπει να αντιμετωπίζεται από το εκπαιδευτικό προσωπικό;

How do you think the need to preserve the mother tongue should be met by teachers?\*

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10. Πιστεύετε ότι με την παρουσία ενός ή παραπάνω δίγλωσσων μαθητών μέσα στην τάξη θα μειώνεται η αποδοτικότητα του συνόλου; Δικαιολογήστε την απάντησή σας.

How do you think the presence of bilingual students would impact your whole classroom? \*

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11. Ποια είναι, κατά τη γνώμη σας, η αντίδραση των εκπαιδευτικών όταν έχουν δίγλωσσους μαθητές στην τάξη τους;

“What do you think is the reaction of teachers faced with bilingual students in their class?\*

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