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In-person and online **drama-based interventions** for emergent **bilingual student populations** The application of a mixed methods research for **reading literacy** and the management of **learning difficulties**

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Keywords: *theatre pedagogy, theatre in education, reading instruction, bilingualism, distance education, learning difficulties*

The educational approach to reading instruction using arts-based methodologies represents an innovative interdisciplinary transfer of distinct theatrical forms from the field of performing arts to the realm of language teaching within the framework of theatre pedagogy. While theatre scripts, readers' theatre and dramatised storytelling are present in Greek education as means of theatrical expression to support the cultural activities of schools, their effectiveness as teaching tools for the development of second/foreign language skills has not been evaluated, as is the case with other artistic events (e.g., process drama, dramatic play, etc.) that have been used in teaching. Therefore, the focus of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of a set of comprehensive theatre pedagogical methodologies for language education and literacy of emergent bilingual student populations aged 10–12 in times of socio-health restrictions. Specifically, the research aims to investigate the impact of urgent remote and in-person instructional interventions of language immersion based on applied theatre and drama for teaching reading in Modern Greek as a second language.

The first part of the dissertation is structured in four chapters that provide a theoretical underpinning to the research. The first two chapters present the scientific basis of theatre pedagogical methodologies for language education and highlight the importance of cultural activities in education for strengthening bilingualism and addressing learning difficulties. Reference is made to scientific views

on reading performance in the second language, covering topics related to literacy, reading practices, cultural integration, reading performance and social constructivism. The third chapter shifts the focus to literacy interventions in the second language in face-to-face or distance education settings. Topics such as reading skills in the second language and urgent remote interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic, literacy interventions for emergent bilingual students and the basic principles for developing and evaluating reading interventions in second language educational settings, whether face-to-face or remote, are discussed. In addition, the role of applied theatre and its techniques in promoting reading skills is presented, and how the use of technological and cultural tools can be used to create reading programmes is explored. The first part of the dissertation concludes with a chapter that addresses issues related to theatrical performance in schools, theatre pedagogy and the acquisition of reading in a second language, as well as the relationship between these fields from an interdisciplinary perspective, examining the use of applied theatre and drama techniques in the second language.

The second part of the doctoral dissertation focuses on the methodological design of the research. Through a mixed-methods nationwide study involving 388 emergent bilingual students and 204 teachers from the last three years of primary school, the holistic impact of theatre pedagogical approaches on improving reading decoding, reading fluency, reading comprehension, reducing reading errors, modifying reading ability and strategies of the reader was investigated. In addition, the contribution of these methods to reading anxiety, the psychosocial adjustment of bilingual students, the management of learning difficulties and the self-efficacy of teachers to teach

reading either face-to-face or remotely during periods of health restrictions were studied. This research used a quasi-experimental design between experimental and control groups of students and teachers. This included pre-testing with a set of standardised scales, face-to-face and remote interventions lasting a total of seven weeks, post-testing and statistical comparison to draw conclusions. The comparison between the two phases was combined with clustering of participants to highlight reading profiles in terms of readers' cross-linguistic characteristics and learning difficulties, as an added value practice for evaluating the interventions. Subsequently, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and from teachers' reflective journals were analysed according to the principles of grounded theory.

In the third part of the dissertation, the sixth chapter summarises the results of the pilot and main studies conducted as part of the dissertation, while the seventh chapter presents the findings. The dissertation concludes by presenting the findings and the main conclusions of the research, which indicate that:

- a) Theatre pedagogy, applied theatre and drama in education can be effective tools for reading literacy and for managing the learning difficulties of emergent bilingual learners.
- b) The use of technology to enhance the educational function of drama can be beneficial in improving the effectiveness of educational interventions in times of health restrictions.

Finally, the dissertation offers educational implications as well as suggestions for further research.

The doctoral dissertation was defended at the Department of Primary Education of the University of the Aegean in April 2023. It can be accessed via the following link: <http://hdl.handle.net/10442/hedi/53805>

Konstantinos Mastrothanasis holds a PhD from the Department of Primary Education at the University of the Aegean, Greece and is a post-doctoral researcher at the Medical School of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. He is an adjunct professor in the postgraduate programmes of the University of the Aegean and the School of Pedagogical and Technological Education (ASPETE). He is an instructor for the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) on the new curricula in Theatre Education. He has participated in European research projects and teacher training/development programmes. He has been recognised for his work by the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences (IAKE) and the Scientific Association for the Promotion of Educational Innovation (EEPEK). His studies have been published in prestigious Greek and international scientific journals, conference proceedings, edited volumes and monographs. He is currently the Director of the Centre for Education for the Environment and Sustainability (KEPEA) of Boeotia.