



European Journal of Educational Research

Volume 12, Issue 3, 1349 - 1361.

ISSN: 2165-8714

<https://www.eu-jer.com/>

Greek Minority Language Instruction in Albania: Education Policy Issues and Prospects

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Received: November 27, 2022 ▪ Revised: March 4, 2023 ▪ Accepted: April 4, 2023

Abstract: The purpose of the present study was to identify current issues related to Greek Minority Education in Albania and its potential as considered from the part of the teachers' and principals' perspective. The current situation of Greek language education was recorded, problems encountered by the educational institutions and the teachers were highlighted and the prospects for teaching the Greek language in Albania were considered. 45 Teachers of Greek language and eight school principals participated in the study. For the purpose of the present study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach was employed. The data from the target groups were collected through two basic research instruments: (a) teacher questionnaires and (b) principal interviews. The findings raised a number of issues related to the Greek language education: the student language level, the need for providing systematic training to teachers who work in bilingual environments, as well as the deficiency of strong incentives for the teacher secondment from Greece to Albania. The data indicated the teachers' concern about the effectiveness of the existing curricula and language textbooks in accomplishing the goals of teaching the Greek language in bilingual contexts.

Keywords: *Albanian context, Greek minority, Greek minority education, language education, teachers' views.*

To cite this article: Sotiroudas, V., & Griva, E. (2023). Greek minority language instruction in Albania: Education policy issues and prospects. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 12(3), 1349-1361. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.12.3.1349>

Introduction

Greek-language education abroad has attracted the interest of a significant number of researchers. Some of those studies examine the Greek-language education abroad on a global basis (Damanakis, 2010), some others approach the issue of Greek-language education in certain geographical regions in Albania, where Greek-language education is provided (Chouliaras, 2014; Rapti, 2014; Sotiroudas et al., 2020; Tsitselikis, 2010), while a number of studies focus their interest either on the areas recognized as minority ones (Barkas, 2015; Barouta-Xerra, 2015; Bouras & Griva, 2022; Vouri & Kapsalis, 2003) or on the area of Korytsa (Sarvanis, 2017).

Previous studies argued for the diachronic evolution of Greek-language education in Albania, which can be divided into three periods. The first period covers the years from the establishment of the Albanian state in 1914 to the end of World War II. The second period covers the years from the establishment of the Hoxha regime (1945 to 1990), and the third period covers the years from 1991 to present. The researchers collected data through various sources, such as historical documents, literature review, as well as information gathered from various organizations.

An in-depth analysis of the legislative framework, curricula, and language textbooks of the Greek minority was conducted by Vouri and Kapsalis (2003) and a less systematic analysis by Barouta-Xerra (2015). Chouliaras (2014) examined the framework of Greek-language education in Albania from a diachronic perspective. Rapti's (2014) study investigated the educational needs of students and teachers in relation to learning and teaching the Greek language in public minority schools in Albania, while Sarvanis's study focused on teaching the Greek language in the Koryca region. Tsitselikis (2010) conducted a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, including interviews, on-site research, and reports from various organizations. He provided an extensive report on the curricula, textbooks, and training of teaching personnel, the diachronic evolution of the number of schools, student enrollment, and the number of educators, as well as the current status of Greek-language education in minority areas. A similar study that focused on minority areas is that conducted by Barkas (2015). The researcher, through distributing questionnaires to all schools in the minority area, as well as by carrying out focus group discussions, and collecting data from relevant bodies, made an attempt to investigate the number of schools, the facilities provision, student enrollment, teacher

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training, the curricula, and the quality of textbooks. This is the only study that attempted to record the existing infrastructure of Greek-language education in minority areas.

A common ground in the above mentioned studies is the fact that, although significant progress has been made recently in relation to the Greek-language education in Albania, some important issues still require urgent action. Previous studies on Greek-language education in Albania did not record the viewpoints of Greek language teachers and the stances of directors in private educational units on problems they face in the specific educational context, as well as their suggestions about improving the level of Greek-language education in Albania.

Literature Review

Defining the Terms "Diaspora" and "Minority"

The term "diaspora" is a relatively recent term in the field of social sciences, while before the 90's there were a few occurrences of the term in the literature (Anteby-Yemini & Berthomière, 2005; Sideri, 2008). Initially, the term referred mainly to Jews and less to Greeks, Armenians and Africans while it was connected with catastrophic events as reasons of the phenomenon. However, many countries have gradually moved away from the idea of assimilating or incorporating their national minorities, while the minorities themselves do not disrupt their bonds with their countries of origin; on the contrary, they obtain dual citizenship and as part of globalisation they maintain and reinforce their bonds with their countries of origin (Cohen, 1996). Safran defines diaspora as the communities of homogeneous minorities that disperse from an initial centre towards at least two peripheral areas, that tend to keep a vision of memory or myth about their home country, that believe they are not - and probably can never be - entirely accepted by their host country, that see their ancestral home as a place of possible return when the time comes and whose sense of solidarity are mainly defined by the ongoing relations with their home country (Safran, 1991). The maintenance of ties with the home country is in accordance with Damanakis (2004), who defines diaspora as: "The geographical dispersion of ethnic groups which are cut off but not necessarily estranged from their source group or their ethnic group, live as ethnic groups or ethnic minorities in the context of a culturally diverse society, moving between two groups and two cultural systems, thus creating their identity under special conditions" (p. 26).

In 1930, the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ) in The Hague, occasioned by the immigrational issue of the Greek-Bulgarian community, ruled that as minority is considered a group of people living in a country or region, having common race, religion, language and traditions, whose members experience a sense of solidarity and which aims at preserving traditions and religion, as well as upbringing of children according to the cultural and religious traditions (Permanent Court of International Justice, 1935). In 1935, while ruling on the issue of minority schools in Albania, the International Court of Justice in The Hague (PCIJ) confirmed the above definition and ruled that since minorities are a realistic issue and not a legal problem, they should enjoy real equality, so as to prevent discrimination in relation to the majority (Papademetriou, 2012). Capotorti (1979) defines minority as a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population, being in a non-dominant state and consisting of citizens of different ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics and whose members present a sense of solidarity aiming to the preservation of those characteristics. Moreover, Petricusic (2005) notes that a minority is a group with linguistic, ethnic or cultural features which differentiate it from the majority. The minority group does not usually aim just to preserve their identity but also to give more expression to this identity. The fact that the criteria distinguishing someone from the majority of the population in order for them to identify as minority can be ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious, is in accordance with other researchers' opinions (Bisogno, 2005; Franco, 2005; Morning, 2008).

The Greek Minority in Albania

In October 2017, the Albanian state approved a legislation about the protection of minorities, recognising the existence of Greek, Vlach, Macedonian, Roma, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Egyptian minorities as ethnic minorities. However, this recognition occurred without the distinction between the minority groups based on their ethnic, linguistic and cultural features (US Department of State, 2018). The term Greek National Minority (GNM) is not based on an official legal act, but it is the result of the current situation and it has developed through time, especially after the end of the Second World War (Barouta-Xerra, 2015).

However, it is worth underlining that the annual report on human rights in Albania by the American Embassy in Tirana in 2018, notes, among other things, that although Albania voted for the Framework Law on minorities in 2017, it has not voted for implementing legislations (US Department of State, 2018). A similar labelling is made by the European Commission in its annual report on Albania in 2019, underlining that although Albania passed the law of 2017 on the protection of the rights of national minorities, it should quickly adopt the set of implementing legislations according to the European standards, in order to ensure the implementation of all principles and rights secured and protected under the law, as the right to free self-identification/determination, the use of minority languages and the right to education in minority languages (European Commission, 2019).

During the period of the communist regime in Albania by Ember Hoxha (1945 - 1999) the minority zones were arbitrarily determined. Ninety-nine (or 101 to 103 according to others) villages of the southern regions of Argirocastro,

Agioi Saranda and Delvinos were included in the minority zones, without the inclusion of the respective cities. The difference in the total number of villages included in the minority zones, results from the different way villages with two settlements are counted. Moreover, the cities of Argyrocastro, Delvinos, Agioi Saranda, Himara and Korytsa were not included (Vouri & Kapsalis, 2003). In essence, it was a repetition of the decision of the Albanian state during 1922, when, it arbitrarily recognised as Greek minority only 105 villages and no urban centre, ignoring regions with pure Greek population (Barkas, 2016). Based on this criterion, the Albanian State includes in the Greek minority only those living within the minority zones.

As a consequence, in Albania it is not permitted to establish a Greek minority school based on the national self-identification of the population outside the minority regions. In order to address the problem of the inability of a public educational unit to offer education in the mother tongue in the areas out of the minority zones, there are various types of private educational units run by various bodies offering education in the Greek language. However, there are private educational institutions providing education in the Greek language, even in the recognised Greek minority areas.

Institutions Providing Greek Language Education in Albania

Greek language education abroad is defined as "that activity abroad related to teaching the Greek language, mostly to individuals of Greek origin, as well as to the enhancement of the Greek cultural identity" (Tigas, 2014, p. 18). Greek language education can also be addressed to non-Greek-speaking individuals (foreigners). The structure of the Greek language education in Albania today, is shown in Figure 1.

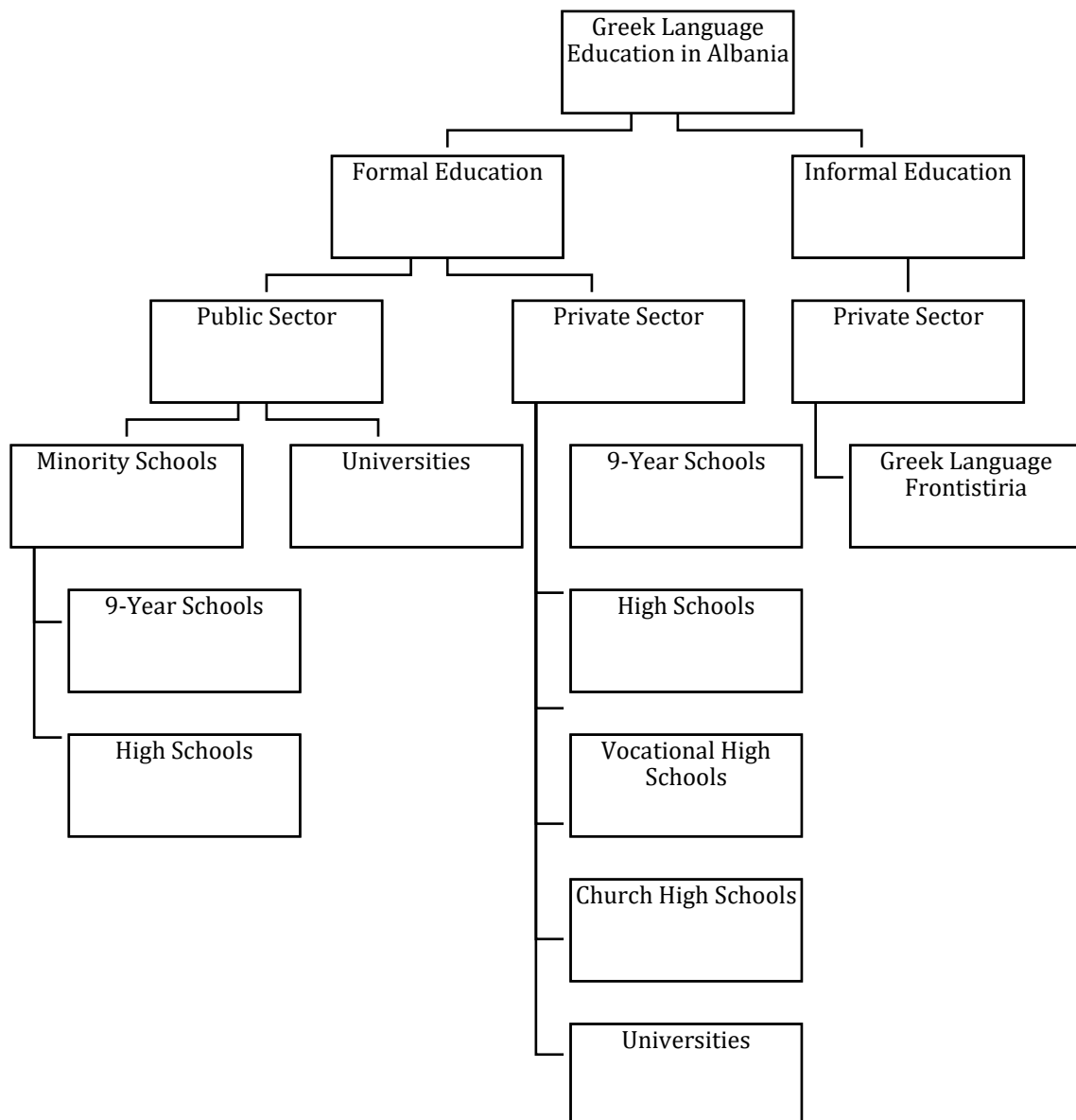


Figure 1. The Structure of the Greek Language Education in Albania

Greek language "frontistiria" (Greek language tuition centres) are part of the field of non-formal education in Albania, they operate under different bodies and cover an extensive geographical area. They appeared immediately after the fall of the communist regime. The institution of frontistiria (Greek language tuition centres), despite any problems, undoubtedly contributes to the enhancement of education in Greek language and the promotion of Greek learning in general in Albania, as it fills a large gap that exists in the education system of the country. First of all, it provides the population outside the minority zones and therefore without access to a formal Greek language educational system, with the opportunity either to learn or to improve their Greek. Access to frontistiria without national or religious restrictions, contributes to the promotion of the Greek language to non-Greeks and to people of a different religion (Sotiroudas, 2020).

As regards the Universities, Greek language courses are offered in the Department of Greek Language, Literature and Culture of the University of Argyrokastró, the Department of Greek Language of the University of Tirana, as well as in the private University College "Logos" in Tirana, where in addition to the departments of Greek Literature and Theology, Greek language is taught as a foreign language in most of the University departments.

There are seven bodies that officially provide education in the Greek language in Albania. More specifically, the Albanian State, the Archbishopric of Albania, the Albanian Cultural Association "Adelfotita", the Greek Cultural Association "Oi Philoi tou Politismou", the Greek Organisation "SFEVA", the Greek company "Philekpaedeftiki Etaireia" and the Greek Diplomatic and Consular Authorities. The Albanian State, as a provider of Greek language education, is responsible for the operation of Greek minority schools (compulsory - 9 years and high schools), in areas considered by the Albanians as minority areas and in the university departments which offer Greek studies (Sotiroudas et al., 2020).

The Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania is responsible for the operation of private 9-year schools and also general, vocational and ecclesiastical high schools, Greek language tuition centres (frontistiria) and university departments that offer either bilingual education or Greek language instruction. The Albanian Cultural Association "Adelfotita" is responsible for the operation of the two bilingual 9-year schools "Homer" in Korytsa and Himara and for the Greek language tuition centre "Aristotle" in Korytsa. The Greek Cultural Association "Oi Philoi tou Politismou" is responsible for the operation of Greek language schools in the wider region of Korytsa, while the Greek organisation "SFEVA" is responsible for the operation of the Greek language school in Bolena, Korytsa. The "Philekpaedeftiki Etaireia" is the body responsible for the operation of the "Arsakeio" 9-year-old school and also the respective high school in Tirana. The Greek Diplomatic and Consular Authorities are responsible for the operation of Greek language tuition centres (frontistiria) in various areas of Albania apart from Korytsa. The type and number of educational units that offer Greek language courses tongue during the three years 2017-2020 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of Educational Units Offering Greek Language Courses During the Three-Year Period of 2017-2020

Institution	Type of educational unit	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
Albanian state	9-year schools	17	14	13
	High schools	4	4	4
	Universities	3	3	3
Individuals	9-year schools	6	5	5
	High schools	11	9	9
	Universities	1	1	1
	Frontistiria	12	13	14
Total		54	49	49

The Albanian state-run schools, in the Greek minority areas, are public Albanian schools and they include 9-year schools and high schools. However, Albanian State's obligations under international treaties to safeguard the rights of national minorities living in the country are limited to providing first language (Greek as a first language) education only during the 9-year compulsory education. As a result, Greek as First Language education is provided only in the minority 9-year schools; however, the Greek language is taught as a second/ foreign language for only two hours per week in the high schools, which operate in the minority areas. The only exception is the General high school in Argyrokastró, where most of the subjects are taught in Greek. Consequently, the term "Minority high schools" is mainly euphemistic, as Greek is taught as an elective course for only two hours per week, according to decision 6045/14-10-2009 of the Albanian Ministry of Education (Barouta-Xerra, 2015).

Student Population

As shown in Table 2, during 2017-2020, almost half of the student population of the educational units providing Greek language education in Albania is concentrated in the educational units that operate under the auspices of the Archbishopric of Albania. The total increase in the number of students recorded in each school year is due to the increase of the number of students in the educational units of the Archbishopric of Albania. On the other hand, there is

a gradual decrease in the schools that operate in the minority areas, despite the temporary recovery in the school year 2018-2019, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Student Population per Education Institution in the Period 2017-2020

Institution	2017-2018		2018-2019		2019-2020	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Albanian state	972	22.3	891	19.9	913	18.5
Albanian Archbishopric	1.861	42.6	1.983	44.3	2.286	46.4
Greek diplomatic and consular authorities	176	4.0	98	2.2	160	3.2
Cultural association "Adelfotita"	819	18.8	798	17.8	804	16.3
Cultural association "Oi Philoi tou Politismou"	88	2.0	129	2.9	161	3.3
SFEVA	12	0.3	10	0.2	6	0.1
Philekpaedeftiki Etaireia	438	10.0	570	12.7	600	12.2
Total	4.366	100	4.479	100	4.930	100

Methodology

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the present study, which is part of a broader research on Greek Minority language education in Albania, was to identify current issues related to Greek language education in Albania and its potential as considered from the part of the teachers' and principals' perspectives. Specifically, the following objectives were set:

- To record the issues in relation to the operation of the various educational institutions that offer Greek language education in Albania.
- To make proposals to address the recorded issues.
- To highlight the Greek language education prospects in Albania.

Sample 1: Teachers

A total of 45 Teachers (30 women and 15 men), who taught Greek language courses in private schools, participated in the study. Thirty-four teachers (75.6%) were seconded from Greece in order to teach the Greek language to those schools in Albania, for a period of 3-5 years, and 11 teachers (24.4%) were appointed under contract to teach courses. During that period, the total number of seconded teachers in Greek language schools in Albania was 39, while the total number of the appointed teachers in the respective schools was 17. Therefore, the 90% of seconded teachers and the 65% of the appointed teachers (local teachers) participated in the study. Twenty-five participants (55.6%) were kindergarten or Primary Education teachers and 20 of them (44.6%) were Secondary Education teachers.

Sample 2: Directors

For the purpose of the study, eight school principals (five women and three men) of Greek-language schools in Albania were included in the sample. Three of them (37.5%) were seconded from Greece and five of them (62.5%) were local personnel. Two of them (25.0%) were principals in private schools of the Albanian Association "Adelfotita", three of them (37.5%) were principals in schools supervised by the Archbishopric of Albania and three (37.5%) were principals in public minority schools. The first interviewee had 18 years of teaching experience and eight years of experience as a director, the second 10 and five years, the third 30 and six years, the fourth 20 and six years, the fifth 38 and 17 years, the sixth 20 and 12 years, the seventh 20 years of teaching experience and one year of experience as a director and the eighth 11 and two years respectively.

Research Design

For the purpose of the present study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach was employed. The data from the target groups were collected through two basic research instruments: (a) teacher questionnaires and (b) principal interviews.

The questionnaire, which was administered to the teachers, consisted of 32 closed-ended questions and six open-ended questions. The questionnaire included "Likert-type" questions which asked the teachers to choose from the following response options "much, fairly, little, not at all" or they were also asked to: (a) choose from the response options "agree-disagree-don't know" or (b) rank certain items related to educational policies and practices. The answers from the six open-ended questions were grouped into relevant thematic axes that included the respective thematic categories. In this paper the data collected from the open-ended questions are presented.

Semi-structured interviews were used as the basic instrument to collect data from the principals of Greek language schools, which comprised the following sections: a) conceptualisation of Bilingualism, b) methods and ways of

developing bilingualism in the context of Greek language education, c) conditions in duty performance, d) suggestions for the improvement of Greek language education. In this study, we present the data collected from the third and fourth interview that included questions as follows:

Conditions in duty performance

- How do you estimate the working conditions in schools in Albania?
- How do you evaluate the workplace conditions in the school you work?
- What are the main challenges and problems you come with at the workplace?
- How do you overcome these challenges and problems?

Suggestions for the improvement of Greek language education

- What are your suggestions for overcoming the challenges and problems you encounter at the workplace?
- What are your suggestions for improving the conditions of Greek-language education across Albania (in various school categories)?

The interviews were conducted individually, tape recorded, transcribed and analysed qualitatively. The interviewees' responses were primarily analysed through a qualitative thematic analysis, which involved the "data reduction" procedures suggested by Miles and Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thematic analysis consists of identifying, organising and understanding semantic patterns that are repeated within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data were analyzed by the two researchers and a third independent researcher through two basic phases: a) first and second level coding as well as pattern coding. Codes resulted in groups of sub-categories, "labeled" by a specific name, which were grouped into major categories. Then, similar concepts with common characteristics were clustered into basic "themes". b) data display. The data were displayed on individual tables and in crosschecking formats including the categories and codes of the interviewees (Griva & Stamou, 2014).

Results

Teacher Questionnaire Results

In one of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to refer to the most important issues the Greek language education faces in Albania. In another open-ended question of the questionnaire, teachers were asked to refer their suggestions for the improvement of the provided Greek language education in Albania.

Greek Language Education in Albania: Problems Encountered

The answers of the teachers were categorised into seven major categories. The problems encountered by the teachers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Greek Language Education in Albania: Problems Encountered

Categories	References
1. Student population	
1.1 Greek language proficiency level	12
1.2 Student attitude and behaviour	6
1.3 Bilingualism	4
1.4 Cognitive level	3
1.5 Lack of motivation for learning Greek	2
2. Educational personnel	
2.1 Limited number of seconded educators	3
2.2 Teacher suitability	3
2.3 Lack of motives for secondments	2
2.4 Teacher training	2
3. Greek language program	
3.1 Text books	5
3.2 Greek language teaching hours	4
4. Organisational issues	6
5. Building facilities and equipment	3
6. Parents' mentality	2
7. Conditions in Albania	5
Total references	62

According to the teachers' views, the issues related to the student population seemed to be the most important issues related to the Greek language education in Albania, followed by issues related to the teaching staff and those related to the Greek language curriculum.

The level of students' Greek language skills claimed to be the most important issue for the teachers. Very limited skills in the Greek language, or students with different levels of Greek language proficiency emerged as an important issue for teachers to encounter, especially if we take into account the limited teacher training provision in bilingual educational environments described above. Moreover, speculations were marked on general student behavior, and also on their attitude to the Greek language courses in particular, in combination with issues of educational culture such as grade-grubbing.

The limited number of seconded teachers from Greece, but also the quality of teachers for managing teaching in bilingual environments were mentioned as the most problematic issues related to the teaching staff. In particular, it was mentioned that the seconded teachers do not stay long enough in Albania, while it was pointed out that the assignments of the courses are not related to the teachers' specialties. In addition, the limited number of seconded teachers in Albania inevitably leads to the appointment of courses beyond the ones these teachers are educated to handle. The lack of providing teachers with special training on the curricula implemented in bilingual educational contexts in Albania, as well as the fact that there are a few incentives for a teacher from Greece to be seconded in such a school, were identified as particularly problematic factors.

Lack of textbooks appropriate for the "specific educational and socio-cultural context", as mentioned, in combination with the limited Greek language teaching hours were a major issue for the Greek Education, according to a significant part of teachers.

In relation to the organisation, a teacher mentioned that in a bilingual environment, it is not possible to apply the teaching hours scheduled for the teachers in Greece. Also, a teacher commented on the assessment not being performed in the learning and teaching procedure as a significant problem in the educational process. This is a thorny issue that plagues the field of education both in Greece and abroad. The lack of compensatory classes for students who do not know the Greek language was also mentioned as an organisational issue. The establishment of compensatory classes, although being suggested as a quick way to develop language skills of those students who do not know the Greek language, was usually hindered by the limited number of seconded teachers. Another organisational issue was the non-existence of a Greek high school in Albania as mentioned by a teacher. This is a realistic issue as education in the Greek language is actually provided during the 9-year compulsory education. Finally, a teacher stated generally to lack of organisation, without mentioning any further details.

School building facilities and equipment, parents' attitudes and mentality and the conditions in Albania were marked as three additional factors that can cause problems into Greek language education in Albania.

Suggestions for the Improvement of the Provided Greek Language Education in Albania

The suggestions for the improvement of the provided Greek language education in Albania are shown in Table 4. It is pointed out that the participants came from different areas where the schools implement/adopt different curricula for the subjects taught in Greek.

Table 4. Suggestions for the Improvement of the Provided Greek Language Education in Albania

Categories	References
1. Educational process	
1.1 Greek language program	
1.1.1 Increase of teaching hours allocated to the Greek language	12
1.1.2 Curricula	7
1.1.3 Appropriate textbooks	7
1.2 Organisational issues	4
1.3 Parent training	3
1.4 Student population	2
2. Educational personnel	
2.1 Training	11
2.2 Providing incentives	
2.2.1 Incentives to seconded teachers	7
2.2.2 Incentives to local teachers	2
2.3 Teacher support	3
3. Building facilities and equipment	4
4. Establishment of a Greek high school	6
Total references	68

The majority of the teachers' suggestions concerned the teaching process. The increase of teaching hours in the Greek language is emerging as the most important factor as to the improvement of Greek language education level provided in Albania. For this purpose, an increase of the Greek language teaching hours was proposed by a significant part of the teachers. However, it should be highlighted that their suggestions varied, since both the intensive teaching of the Greek language in the first grades and the increase of the teaching hours of the Greek language in the upper grades and high school were proposed as an alternative solution. In addition, it was proposed to increase the teaching hours of all subject-matters taught in Greek language.

Greek language curricula emerge as another point in relation to teachers' suggestions. Teachers suggest appropriate and tailored curricula to the needs of the specific groups of bilingual students. At the same time, they suggest the introduction of more courses about ancient Greece and Greek history, as well as teaching music and theatre in the Greek language. In addition, the introduction of Greek language teaching in high school is also suggested.

In addition, the teachers suggested appropriate textbooks for bilingual students that will concern not only the subject of the Greek language, but also the rest of the subject matters taught in Greek.

Teachers' suggestions concerning organisational issues included a systematic evaluation and a clear definition of teacher responsibilities, cooperation between educators and higher education institutions, as well as cooperation between local and seconded teachers in order to facilitate students in learning the Greek language.

Parents' training provision, in general, but the provision of information to parents about the role of the school and the possibilities it offers to the students, in particular, as well as the enrolment of students in these schools by their selection based on specific criteria or on their Greek language level, were voted of high priority factors. Although the issues related to students' mentality-behavior and their low level of Greek language emerged as the most important problems that Greek language education faces in Albania, only two teachers suggested that students attending the bilingual schools should be selected for their enrolment according to certain criteria.

Teacher training provision, even before taking up their duties in Albania, accumulated most of the teachers' suggestions regarding the teaching staff. Moreover, offering incentives that includes both an extension of teachers' secondment in Albania and an increase in the remuneration for the seconded teachers, as well as providing motives to expatriate teachers to return to Albania as on-site (local) staff were suggested highly as basic factors for the improvement of Greek Education in Albania. On the other hand, some teachers suggested that the Greek Ministry of Education show a greater response to the problems they face and consider of their needs, whether they are seconded or are local teachers.

The improvement of building facilities and material equipment, the construction of new schools with the right standards and the need for the establishment of a Greek high school, are among the suggestions made by the teachers for the improvement of the quality of the Greek language education provided in Albania.

School Principals' Interviews Results

The interview data, after being analysed qualitatively, resulted into 112 codes, classified into 11 categories, which were then grouped into the following thematic strands:

1. Definition of Bilingualism.
2. Development of Bilingualism in the context of Greek Language Education.
3. Conditions in the Performance of Duties.
4. Suggestions for the Improvement of Greek Language Education.

It is pointed out that the principals who participated in the interviews exercised their duties in schools where the Greek language is the first language (L1) in some cases and the second (L2) or the foreign language (FL) in others. In addition, out of the eight principals, three were seconded teachers from Greece, while the remaining five were local teachers. In this paper, only some part of the qualitative data from principals' interviews are presented.

Conditions in the Performance of Duties

In the third thematic axis the answers of the principals of the schools present a remarkable dispersion as shown in Table 5. The specific axis concerns the identified issues of performance of duties.

Table 5. Categories and Codes Related to the Thematic Strand "Conditions in the Performance of Duties"

Categories	Codes - operational definitions	Occurrences
Issues related to textbooks	NAEDMA = non-appropriate educational material	3
	DDTMT = delay in the delivery of textbooks in the mother tongue	2
Issues related to students	RENSPO = reduction the number of student population	3
	DITRSTU = difficulties in transporting students	1
Bureaucratic Issues related to the status of principals	NREDSE = non-recognition of director's previous service	2
	NPAMAL = non-payment of managerial allowance	2
	PRAEDA = problems with Albanian educational authorities	2
	OJETIM = overtime	3
	PROBES = problematic building establishments	2
	PROLEG = problems of legislation	1
	DETES = delay in teachers' secondments	1
Issues related to the function of schools	COSLOG = competition of schools with a language other than Greek	1
	DAROPS = difficulties due to area of operation of the school	1
	CALGCA = coexistence of Albanian and Greek classes	1
	LAPAC = lack of participation by the parents' council	1
	NISIGME = non-inclusion of the school in the Directorate of Greek Minority Education	1

Almost all principals believed that of inappropriate educational materials and the decrease of student population are discouraging factors. Regarding the educational material in the Greek language, although it has been renewed and improved a lot recently, it still requires further amelioration. One principal stated: "It is about the genres in the textbooks, basically. Although many efforts have been made to improve school textbooks, they still need improvement... they still need continuous improvement" (interviewee 2), while another principal declared: "The most important thing is the textbooks. There are no appropriate textbooks" (interviewee 5). The reduction of the number of students population was pointed out as an important issue from the part of the principals: "Because for better or for worse the schools have shrunk, closed, the percentage of students attending these schools is small.... This is because of the people who migrate.... but also, from fewer births..." (interviewee 3).

Speculations were recorded, by a number of principals, on delays in the delivery of Greek language text books from Greek State. One of them commented: "Apart from that, there are other problems... we always have the problem with the books which never come on time, in the right time. So, this makes it difficult for us" (interviewee 8).

In relation to the performance of their duties, two principals- seconded teachers from Greece- also claimed that a) the non-payment of the position allowance according to the standards of their home country, as well as b) the non-recognition of their previous service for principal when they return to their home countries are two major issues to consider. Specifically, one of them stated that: "There is something else to add... It may seem personal, but the principal's allowance, where neither their previous service is recognized nor the allowance exists, does not help the smooth running of the school and they need to 'self-sacrifice'..." (interviewee 1).

Bureaucratic issues with Albanian educational bodies were mentioned as issues of concern by two principals: "Mainly in terms of the administrative side, that is, in terms of the Ministry of Education, the Directorate of Education, mainly the bureaucratic matters. I think those create difficulties and cause problems" (interviewee 5).

In relation to the problematic building facilities, certain comments were made by two principals: "Concerning the infrastructure, some applications have been submitted for the improvement of the conditions, but up to now nothing has been done. Our school building was built in 1957 and ever since nobody has landed a hand... It is an old building it is a very old building" (interviewee 4).

Finally, two participants-teachers seconded from Greece- reported issues in relation to the extension of the working hours in order to respond effectively to their duties: "Also, all this takes time, spending additional working hours per day, much more time ...", (interviewee 7) "Yes, in terms of distances, with patience, with dedication of free time and okay in terms of..." (interviewee 3).

The school principals pointed out a number of other issues that they face in performing their duties, which concern a) the need to maintain balance between the Greek and the Albanian side, b) the removal of the role and the responsibilities from the Department of Greek Language, Literature and Greek Culture of the University of Argyrokastrò, c) the difficulties that arise from the school's location, d) the difficulty in transporting students to and from the school as well as the lack of participation of the parents and guardians' association. Some principals referred to the delays in the secondment of teachers from Greece and the non-inclusion of the school in the Directorate of Greek

Minority Education (due to the fact that the school does not belong to the recognised minority areas), as well as to reduction in the bonuses awarded for teaching in those areas and also various legislative problems. Moreover, speculations were recorded, by the majority of the principals, on the teaching conditions in the schools, referring to issues raised, because of the coexistence of Albanian and Greek classes and the co-teaching in classes with the small number of students in each class.

Suggestions for the Improvement of Greek Language Education

The fourth thematic axis concerns the suggestions for the improvement of the conditions of the Greek language education in Albania. The principals' suggestions are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Categories and Codes Related to the Thematic Strand "Suggestions About the Improvement of Greek Language Education"

Categories	Codes - operational definitions	Occurrences
Suggestions about teachers	TTSTSGL = trained teaching staff in teaching subjects in the Greek language	5
	TESEG = teachers' secondment from Greece	2
	SUTWOES = support to the teachers working in the expatriate schools	2
	INTSE = increase in the time of the secondment	1
	PITOTSE = providing incentives towards the teachers' secondment	1
	PIREXTE = providing incentives for the return of expatriate teachers	1
Suggestions about the curriculum and textbooks	GLAPCH = Greek language study programs by those in charge	1
	APEDMA = appropriate educational material	3
	TIDTEGL = timely delivery of textbooks in the Greek language	3
	INEDLED = increase in expenditures for Greek language education	1
Support from the Greek Ministry of Education and/or Foreign Affairs	SUGNMA = support for the Greek national minority to remain in Albania	3
	PRAMTTE= provision of appropriate material and trained teachers	3
	APDEGUA = adoption of the proposals of the Department of Greek of the University of Argyrokastro	1

Most of the principals, five out of eight, referred to the importance of the teacher training in issues related to teaching the Greek language in bilingual contexts. Therefore, this proposal stands out as the most important of all the suggestions made. They stated among others: "... to be taught by well trained teachers who know the language well and are trained to teach it by using the appropriate methods and techniques. I think this is very important" (interviewee 6), "Because there is a problem, too. We haven't got teachers any more for the subjects of biology, history, teachers with these specialties in Greek do not graduate here in Albania. So, systematic training is needed" (interviewee 7).

Developing specialised educational materials which are tailed to the particularities of the schools was also reported: "Also, it would be nice for every country, let me speak about Albania, to be provided with appropriate educational material specialized on this country Specialized educational material" (interviewee 1). Also, three school units principals are asking for more support by the Greek Ministry of Education or/and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "... and the Greek State should, at least the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign affairs, they should support Greek language learning a lot more here in Albania..." (interviewee 8), "There should be specific politics by the Ministry of Education and they should give a lot more attention to and care about the Greek language education abroad and especially about Albania where we have an important community of national Greek minority" (interviewee 4).

In relation to the teaching staff, teachers' secondment from Greece was considered as an important factor that contributes to the improvement of the conditions of the Greek language education offered in Albania: "We don't have teachers.... We need teachers" (interviewee 2). Two school principals declared that there is a strong relation between the quality of Greek language education offered in Albania and the timely delivery of the Greek textbooks: "So, some people should take on their responsibilities and we should have the textbooks on time. To be supported" (interviewee 5). Support to the teachers in the diaspora was estimated by two principals as a factor that could contribute to the improvement of the Greek language education: "...that is why we need to have specific policies to support the teachers who work in the schools of diaspora" (interviewee 3).

Among the suggestions made by the school principals about the improvement of the conditions of the Greek language education provided in Albania are included the following: the increase of expenses for the Greek language teaching, the deletion of other interests from the Greek minority education and the supply of extra educational material, the provision of incentives for the secondment of teachers from Greece, the provision of incentives for the return of expatriate teachers to Albania and the support of the Greek minority so as to remain in Albania.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to record teachers' and the school principals' views on current issues related to the Greek language education in Albania. The findings raised a number of issues related to the Greek language education, such as the student language level, the need for providing systematic training to teachers who work in bilingual environments, as well as the deficiency of strong incentives for the teacher secondment from Greece to schools in Albania. The concerns and speculations arisen from the students' bilingual skills as well as the teachers' insufficient training were also revealed in the findings of previous studies (Bouras & Griva, 2022; Chouliaras, 2014; Rapti (2014; Sarvanis, 2017).

It was also indicated the teachers were concerned about the effectiveness of the existing curricula and language textbooks in accomplishing the goals of teaching the Greek language in bilingual contexts. A few of the study participants considered the existing organisation of the Greek language education and the facilities provision to the schools as important factors affecting and "hindering" the Greek language teaching. The issues related to teachers' evaluation and the cooperation between schools and higher education institutions were also identified in previous studies (Bouras & Griva, 2021; Tsitselikis, 2010). The importance of the cooperation of seconded teachers with local teachers that were recorded in the present study was not revealed in previous ones. On the contrary, the difficulties encountered due to the inappropriate building facilities were also mentioned in Barkas' (2015) research.

In the same vein, the principals of the Greek language schools in Albania placed strong emphasis on underlining the lack of educational materials, the delay in the delivery of Greek language textbooks from Greece, as well as the general decrease of the number of the student population who attend Greek language classes. The decrease of the Greek origin student population was also recorded in previous studies as a main issue that should be considered and resolved in order to achieve the improvement of the quality of first language instruction (Barkas, 2015; Chouliaras, 2014; Tsitselikis, 2010; Vouri & Kapsalis, 2003;).

Both the teachers and the principals suggested that initiatives should be taken in developing appropriate materials, textbooks and curricula, training appropriate teaching personnel, and promoting organisational changes. Damanakis (2010), having conducted an overall evaluation of Greek education abroad until 2010, made a number of suggestions. Considering those suggestions and taking for granted the fact that the implementation of language educational changes and innovations are required, we suggest the following points to be considered: a) development of textbooks tailored to the local educational needs, b) the timely secondment of teachers from Greece to schools in Albania, c) training provision to both the local and seconded teachers on modern teaching methods and techniques in bilingual educational environments, d) the provision of incentives for the teacher secondment from Greece to Greek language schools in Albania, and also the support of the bilingual Greek-Albanian schools from the part of the Greek State.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrated that the issues related to the Greek-language education in Albania, which had been identified in earlier studies, still persist. Some additional issues have been revealed through recording the views of seconded and local teachers as well as the aspects of school principals. The resolution of these issues is considered of major importance for enhancing the prospects of Greek-language education in Albania.

Taking into consideration the afore-mentioned issues, it can be concluded that Greek Education in Albania does not seem to be a simple matter, as any initiatives on educational policies presuppose the intervention and the positive disposition of both parties/sides: the Albanian and the Greek one. As a result, it is necessary that both parties should establish a harmonious cooperation in order to promote a quality in language education in bilingual contexts and achieve effective outcomes.

Recommendations

In the present study, a number of pertinent issues have emerged highlighting potential areas for future research. One area of interest is related to the development of Greek language curricula and textbooks tailored to the specific needs of the educational context within the Greek minority area. As language plays a critical role in shaping cultural identity, it is necessary to ensure that educational materials are tailored to meet the unique requirements of this region. Building upon the data of our research, another suggestion for future research is made about identifying the professional needs of teachers working in Greek language schools in Albania. Through a systematic record of their needs, specialists have useful data to consider for designing and delivering particularly targeted in-service programs that could strengthen teachers' competences and could effectively support teachers in their efforts to provide quality education to their students who study the Greek language in the specific area.

Limitations

The present study is part of a larger research project on Greek minority education in Albania. Therefore, only a portion of the quantitative research is presented that concerns the descriptive data gathered through the open-ended questions included in the teacher questionnaire. In addition, we present a part of the findings of the qualitative research collected from the interviews conducted with the school directors of Greek language education in Albania.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Sotiroudas: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing. Griva: Critical revision, supervision.

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