



## TURKISH-LANGUAGE EDUCATORS AS LANGUAGE MANAGERS: BILINGUALISM IN PRACTICE

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### Abstract:

Minority education has a long-standing presence in the region of Thrace, Greece. The bilingual curriculum followed in minority schools is of particular interest, as some subjects are taught in Turkish while others are taught in Greek. However, to what extent can one speak of substantial bilingual education when the two languages do not interact either in teaching practices or within the curriculum itself? This study aims to explore the perceptions and practices of teachers involved in the Turkish-language curriculum of minority elementary schools regarding their students' bilingualism. The research was conducted through interviews with nine teachers, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The main findings reveal a strong paradox: although educators generally adopt a more monolingual perspective on bilingualism, they nonetheless inevitably employ translanguaging teaching approaches to address their learners' needs. However, due to the intense ideological conflicts in the region of Thrace, they appear reluctant to acknowledge these practices openly.

**Keywords:** minority education, bilingualism, bilingual education, teachers' attitudes and practices

### 1. Introduction

The minority of Thrace remains, to this day, the only officially recognized religious minority in Greece (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019), asserting specific language rights, mainly related to the right to education in the Turkish language (Tsitselikis, 2022). More specifically, minority schools follow a bilingual curriculum, which is divided into two separate programs: the Turkish-language curriculum and the Greek-language curriculum (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019). In the Turkish-language program, certain subjects are taught in Turkish by educators from the Muslim minority of Thrace, who are graduates of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki (SPATH), while in the

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Greek-language program, the remaining subjects are taught in Greek by Greek-speaking teachers, whose training is equivalent to that of other teachers in the country (Maligkoudi & Mavrommatis, 2025).

In the relevant literature, Moschonas (2019) uses Heller's (1999) definitions to describe the policies adopted regarding bilingualism in the region of Thrace. According to him, the monolingualisms in Greek and Turkish, which were in conflict for years in Thrace, became associated with policies that invoked bilingualism (Moschonas, 2019). These policies characterize bilingualism as "*double monolingualism*" or as two "*parallel monolingualisms*" (Heller, 1999, as cited in Moschonas, 2019). This type of bilingualism (model of parallel monolingualisms). Students who study in these schools have multiple identities that often conflict with each other, if we also take into consideration the strong political and ideological framework in the specific area. Both Greek and Turkish nationalism, each pursuing its own objectives, attempted at times to win over the minority (Mavrommatis, 2008). The competition between the two nationalisms at the level of the minority resulted in its marginalization (Askouni, 2006). Since the existence of the minority seriously challenged the doctrine of national homogeneity of the Greek nation, while at the same time policy toward it was determined by the state of Greek-Turkish relations, the Greek state in many cases adopted discriminatory policies against it (Sapountzis & Hatzopoulou, 2019).

At the same time, societal power relations express themselves in the classroom through the process of identity negotiation (Cummins, 2001). The ways in which teachers negotiate identities with students can exert a significant impact on the extent to which students will engage academically or withdraw from academic effort (Cummins & Early, 2011). In this context, the present paper focuses specifically on the extent to which teachers in the Turkish-language program adopt heteroglossic approaches in both their pedagogical practices and the management of students' bilingualism (García & Wei, 2014; Cummins, 2021). Thus, the main research questions of our study are the following ones:

- 1) How do teachers in the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools perceive their own bilingualism?
- 2) How do teachers in the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools perceive their students' bilingualism?
- 3) In what ways do teachers in the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools manage their students' bilingualism, and what bilingualism management practices do they implement?

The paper is structured as follows: first, we provide an overview of the education of Greek Muslim students in the Greek context as well of heteroglossic approaches to bilingual education, before moving on to the research methodology of the study and the findings, which are structured on the basis of the research questions: teachers' bilingual development, perceptions of the teachers in the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools regarding the developing bilingualism of their students and, finally, their management practices of their students' bilingualism.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Education of the students of the Greek Muslim minority in Thrace

The education of the Muslim minority in Thrace plays a decisive role for its members (Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2006), as it aims to protect their rights concerning the preservation of their "mother" tongue and religious identity (Askouni, 2006). The minority has the opportunity to attend schools intended exclusively for its members (the 'so-called' minority schools, however, only in primary education), which operate based on a bilingual program equally divided between two languages: Greek and Turkish (Askouni, 2006). A similar type of bilingual school is not observed elsewhere in Greece, with the exception of foreign language schools, such as American, German, etc. (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019). In addition to the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the education provided to the Muslim minority is also shaped by bilateral agreements between Greece and Turkey (Androussou *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the minority's education across all educational levels in which it is offered, and consequently the teaching of the Turkish language, largely aligns with the state of existing relations between the two aforementioned countries (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019). It should also be noted that minority students, as citizens with Greek nationality, have the right to choose between attending minority schools or public Greek-language schools (Askouni, 2006; Chatzidaki & Maligkoudi, 2023).

The provisions of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) related to the language of the minority can be found in sections that primarily safeguard its educational rights (Tsitselikis, 2022). Within the framework of the Treaty, the language of education for the minority is not explicitly defined (Moschonas, 2019). However, the right to attend bilingual education is ensured for population groups who, at the time of the Treaty's signing, mostly had Turkish as their first language, while others spoke Pomak as their first language and others Romani (Adamou, 2012). Granting language rights based on religion does not imply, on the part of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), the denial or rejection of the presence or acceptance of different identity traits (linguistic, ethnic, or national) within the minority (Tsitselikis, 2022). Regarding the survival of these special minority regimes, Tsitselikis (2022) takes a critical stance: "*The survival of such institutions is not due to a modern tendency toward legal pluralism, but rather results from a convenient inertia stemming from the rivalry between Greece and Turkey.*" (Tsitselikis, 2022: 105).

By the late 2000s, minority schools were facing a significant dropout rate. This situation was reversed through "positive discrimination" measures for members of the minority (support for their access to higher education / 0.5% quota), the contribution of the "Education of Muslim Children Program" (1997–2019), and the improvement in Greek-Turkish relations after 1999 (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019). At the same time, the dropout rate in minority schools decreased significantly, while there was a notable increase in the number of minority students attending public Greek schools (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019).

In particular, the "Education of Muslim Children Program" (PEM) was a long-term educational intervention aimed at enhancing the social integration of minority children

by reducing the high rates of school dropout (Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2020). Some of its specific goals included teaching Greek as a second language, developing educational materials, training teachers, and creating structures for non-formal education, such as mobile units, among others (Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2020). This particular intervention addressed only one side of the bilingual learning environment—namely, the Greek-language program—a condition that acted as a limitation for the PEM. Nevertheless, the program contributed to the processes involved in the delivery of new school textbooks from Turkey, which were exclusively intended for the minority population (Dragonas & Frangoudaki, 2006).

Moreover, in an effort to facilitate the enrollment of minority students in Greek universities, the Greek state instituted measures in 1996 that included a special quota (0.5%) in Higher Education in their favor (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019). In practice, this measure aimed to offset the linguistic disadvantage in Greek faced by Muslim students, although it did not include specific provisions to achieve this goal (Tsitselikis & Mavrommatis, 2019).

In 2015, a non-compulsory simulation program was introduced for the first time, which was implemented by the Department of Primary Education at the Democritus University of Thrace (Sakonidis & Klothou, 2024). The aim of the program was to upgrade the studies of graduates from the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki through participation in and successful completion of courses lasting 1–2 years, which were designed to meet their professional needs (Sakonidis & Klothou, 2024). The program is structured into three main parts: attending courses, completing a thesis, and participating in a practicum for teachers without prior teaching experience. Upon successful completion of the program, graduates of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki obtain a degree from the Department of Primary Education of the Democritus University of Thrace, enabling them to be employed as primary school teachers in the PE70 sector. Since the launch of the simulation program (2015–2016), nearly 200 graduates of the Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki have enrolled, including active teachers with prior teaching experience (Sakonidis & Klothou, 2024). Approximately two-thirds of the aforementioned group have already completed the program (Sakonidis & Klothou, 2024).

The participants in our study are nine SPATH graduates who are currently attending or have completed the simulation program at the Democritus University of Thrace. They were selected as part of this research to discuss how they adopt heteroglossic approaches in their teaching and in managing their students' bilingualism.

## **2.2 Heteroglossic approaches to bilingual education**

Traditional approaches to language and, correspondingly, to multilingualism (or bilingualism) treat all kinds of linguistic codes as independent language systems, with clear and distinct boundaries between them. From this perspective, bilingual speakers are considered to draw from their various autonomous language systems (distinct languages) in order to achieve their communicative goals. On the other hand, contemporary approaches in the field of Sociolinguistics highlight the concept of

translanguaging, which seeks to overcome what Cummins (2007) refers to as the "*two solitudes*" (García *et al.*, 2012) or "*double monolingualism*." These issues are considered of crucial importance, as there is a noticeable redefinition of bilingual education within the framework of a dynamic approach to bilingualism (García *et al.*, 2012).

In particular, the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has recently undergone what scholars describe as a bi/multilingual turn. Within this shift, the concept of plurilingual and pluricultural competence is understood as "*the ability to call flexibly upon an inter-related, uneven, plurilinguistic repertoire*" (CEFR-CV, 2020, p. 28). This encompasses a variety of language practices such as code-switching and mediation, often facilitated through translanguaging and translanguaging strategies. These approaches treat individual language repertoires as dynamic, holistic, and interconnected, always taking into account a learner's first language(s). Garcia (2017) emphasizes that translanguaging by language educators can empower minority/minoritized groups to fully recognize and utilize their complete linguistic resources, integrating new linguistic elements into their existing systems rather than merely acquiring a separate "second" language. However, recent research (e.g., Faloppa *et al.*, 2022; Bosch *et al.*, 2024) shows that teachers' perspectives on multilingualism and the use of students' first languages in the classroom vary widely. While translanguaging stems from bilingualism research in both U.S. and global contexts, it seeks to challenge traditional, monolingual, and structuralist interpretations that fall short of capturing the full complexity of bi/multilingual individuals and communities (Leung & Valdes, 2019). The recent "trans-" orientation in scholarly work offers fresh insights and directions for addressing longstanding questions in SLA (Leung & Valdes, 2019). In educational settings, translanguaging extends beyond simple code-switching or translation; it refers to the fluid and multimodal ways bilingual students engage with language in classroom contexts (Garcia, 2017).

Translanguaging questions the traditional, modernist, and colonial notion of stable, national languages by emphasizing how individuals—especially migrants—draw on a wide range of linguistic tools and practices to make meaning beyond the confines of clearly defined language boundaries. While doing so, it also acknowledges the real and lasting influence that national languages continue to have on people's lives. As a result, migrants are often required to interact with and adapt to linguistic elements associated with so-called "other" languages (García, 2017). In this framework, knowledge creation is viewed as a dynamic, imaginative act initiated by individuals, rather than a response to a static or divided world. It is a continual process of becoming and engaging with language (García & Leiva, 2014). Translanguaging arises from a rich mix of semiotic resources (Canagarajah, 2017), functioning as a flexible and mobile set of tools crafted through, and suited for, movement across various contexts (Blackledge & Creese, 2017).

Translanguaging is a pedagogical approach that leverages the whole linguistic repertoire of multilingual learners, and for educators, the broader goal is to create learning environments where multilingualism is viewed as an asset that enhances understanding, participation, and educational equity. The main focus of the present research is how the educators who participated in our study perceive their students' bilingual identities and the extent to which they promote heteroglossic approaches in

their teaching practices, according to their own accounts. The research design is presented in the following section.

### 3. Research design

#### 3.1 Research aims, research tool, data analysis, researcher's positionality

The present research is a qualitative study, within the framework of which "*researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). More specifically, in order to highlight the views and perceptions of the research participants, the interview was used as a research tool. This method aims at the direct collection of information regarding the participants' thoughts and feelings about language, as well as the underlying reasons behind these (Karatsareas, 2022). In this study, the semi-structured interview was employed, in which the researcher prepares an interview guide that allows, on the one hand, control over the course of the interview, but also provides the opportunity to deviate from it and pose new questions prompted by significant issues arising from the participants' responses. Semi-structured interviews most often include open-ended questions, which give respondents the opportunity to fully develop their ideas and thoughts, and the chance to express their personal opinions in their own terms (Bryman, 2017; Karatsareas, 2022).

Bryman (2017) particularly emphasizes the direct relationship between the interview questions—that is, those included in the interview guide—and the research questions that have been posed. The interview guide for the present study is based on the research questions and is structured around the following five thematic areas: demographic information, teachers' bilingualism, the bilingualism of their students, the management and practices related to students' bilingualism, and the institution of minority education.

- 1) The main research questions of the present study have been formulated as follows:  
What are the perceptions of teachers in the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools regarding their own bilingualism?
- 2) What are the perceptions of teachers in the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools regarding their students' bilingualism?
- 3) How do teachers in the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools manage their students' bilingualism? What bilingualism management practices do they adopt?

Initially, certain personal information about the participants (demographic data) was collected: age, gender, origin, educational background, studies, years of prior teaching experience, and finally, the regions where they have most frequently served (rural areas and/or cities). Then, the questions related to the teachers' bilingualism aimed, in the initial stage, to gather information regarding the development of the teachers' own bilingualism throughout their lives and any potential challenges they faced either as bilingual individuals or as educators. Next, concerning the bilingualism of their students, teachers were expected to respond to questions about how they perceive the relationship

and interaction between the two languages (Turkish and Greek) as experienced by their students. Additionally, this section included questions about possible scenarios for the education of both languages for bilingual students, as well as the treatment of the first language of Roma and/or Pomak students whom the teachers may have taught during their years of service. Regarding the management and practical handling of their students' bilingualism, teachers were asked to reflect on and report any practices—either direct or indirect—that they employ to purposefully connect the two languages during their lessons. Finally, in relation to the institution of minority education, teachers were required to critically express their views on issues that directly affect them in their daily professional life within the context of minority education.

The interviews were conducted in February 2024, via telephone. Initially, the contact details of all participants were collected, and following communication with each participant, the date and time of the telephone interview were scheduled. During this first conversation, the researcher provided all the necessary information about the study (purpose of the research, method of conducting the interview, recording, anonymity, expected duration of the interview), as this information would help participants make an informed decision about whether they wished to participate (Bryman, 2017). The data collected during the interviews were subsequently processed and analyzed by the researcher using the method of thematic analysis. The analysis of the data through a specific method, such as thematic analysis, aims to interpret the findings with the ultimate goal of providing answers to the research questions (Tsiolis, 2018).

In particular, the process of data analysis began with the transcription of the interviews. Subsequently, specific excerpts were identified and collected, which served as responses to each research question, followed by the creation of the corresponding codes. During the coding process, the researchers sought to focus on the data that reflected the participants' positions regarding issues of bilingualism and the factors surrounding them. Afterwards, the codes were processed and organized into themes.

### **3.2 Participants' profiles**

The sample of this particular study consisted exclusively of men, with a mean age of 48 years, the youngest being 40 years old (E2) and the oldest 53 (E3). The rest fell within this age range. All interviewees originated from rural areas and had attended, as students, minority schools; specifically, they were graduates of the Islamic Seminary. In one case (E2), there was one year of attendance at a public junior high school. Furthermore, all participants graduated from SPATH (Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki), and in two cases (E3 and E6), they held a second degree, while E3 also possessed a postgraduate degree. The majority of the sample (7/9) had either completed or were attending the equivalency program of the Department of Primary Education at Democritus University of Thrace, except for two participants (E1 and E3), who had not participated in this program. Likewise, the majority of the sample (8/9) reported that, at the time of the interviews, they were working in a minority primary school. E2 was not working as a teacher in minority education during that period, and the last time he worked in a minority primary school, it was in a small town. Of the others (5/8), most

reported working at that time in a minority primary school in a rural area, while E4 and E7 were working in a city, and E1 in a small town. Regarding the participants' years of service, these ranged from 3 (E2) to 29 (E3) years. In most cases, however (7/9), the average length of service in the profession was around 19 years. Finally, 8 out of the 9 participants (8/9) stated that, during their professional careers, they had worked both in rural areas and in cities.

These demographic data are also presented in the following table (Table 1), in order to provide a more detailed overview.

**Table 1: Participants' profiles**

Participant	Age	Educational background	Tertiary education	Attendance of equivalence program	Current teaching position	Years of teaching experience	Areas of teaching experience
E1	46	Minority school & Islamic Religious School	SPATH <sup>ii</sup>	No	Yes (rural area)	20	Rural and urban areas
E2	40	Minority school & Islamic Religious School & 1 year Public Secondary School	SPATH	Yes	No (last year of teaching was 2011)	3	Rural and semi-rural areas
E3	53	Minority school & Islamic Religious School	SPATH & BA in Turkish Philology & MA in Visual Culture	No	Yes (rural area)	29	Rural areas
E4	47	Minority school & Islamic Religious School	SPATH	Yes	Yes (urban area)	17	Rural and urban areas
E5	50	Minority school & Islamic Religious School	SPATH	Yes	Yes (rural area)	22	Rural and urban areas
E6	45	Minority school & Islamic Religious School	SPATH & BA in Sociology	Yes	Yes (rural area)	17	Rural and urban areas
E7	50	Minority school & Islamic	SPATH	Yes	Yes (urban area)	22	Rural and urban areas

<sup>ii</sup> Special Pedagogical Academy of Thessaloniki

		Religious School					
E8	49	Minority school & Islamic Religious School	SPATH	Yes	Yes (rural area)	18	Rural and urban areas
E9	49	Minority school & Islamic Religious School	SPATH	Yes	Yes (rural area)	20	Rural and urban areas

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Educators' Bilingual Profiles

The teachers' assessments of their linguistic proficiency in Turkish and Greek, in some cases, reflect an adequate level in both languages (3/9), while in other cases they highlight differences in their language levels, with Turkish being more favored (5/9). Some attribute this difference to the position Turkish holds in their linguistic repertoire ("mother tongue"/first language) (E1, E4 & E9) or to the frequency of its use in their profession (E8). Notably, one teacher (E5) mentions insufficient language proficiency in both Turkish and Greek, emphasizing the interconnection between the two languages when it comes to learning them.

*E5: "I don't think it's that adequate, because we have gaps since we grew up in the countryside, we didn't have... [...] Well, of course, for both languages. If you don't know one well, you can't learn the other that well either."*

The entire group of participating teachers reports having faced — either in previous or current stages of their lives — greater difficulties in using the Greek language, particularly in written expression. Some teachers highlight grammatical, syntactic, and lexical features of Greek (E3, E5, & E6) that differ from the corresponding features of Turkish. However, their responses also include remarks about the comparatively limited use of Greek within their family settings (E3 & E7) as well as in their professional environments (E3, E7, & E8). Notably, E3 emphasizes the importance of continuous engagement with a language in order to develop it. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that E8, despite his Pomak origin, considers Turkish to now hold a position in his linguistic repertoire equivalent to that of his first language (Pomak), thereby confirming research findings on language shift among Pomak speakers toward either Greek or Turkish<sup>iii</sup>.

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<sup>iii</sup> The use of the Pomak language is mainly restricted to the family environment and close relatives and friends. In the school setting, official schools are either Turkish or Greek. Families who choose minority schools for their children's education receive bilingual instruction—some subjects are taught in Greek and others in Turkish. Alternatively, if families opt for public mainstream schools, the language of instruction is exclusively Greek. Among members of the minority community, Turkish is the primary language of

Regarding the limitation or resolution of the aforementioned problems, some teachers highlight investing their personal time in reading books and scientific sources (E2 & E7), searching through dictionaries (E5), watching television (D2), as well as relying on external factors, such as social interactions with Greek-speaking friends (E2), the school (E4), and SPATH (E4 & E6).

The family environment of the teachers, in the majority of cases (7 out of 9), seems to have contributed exclusively to the development of the Turkish language, as some teachers report that the use of the Greek language was not considered a necessity within their families (E3), while the villages in which they lived were entirely Turkish-speaking (E5, E6 & E9). In the other two cases, E7 points out the use of both Greek and Turkish within the family, but without consistency, while in E8's family environment, the Pomak language was also used alongside with Greek.

E5: *"Not so much within the family, because in the villages where we lived it was the only one, meaning they only spoke Turkish... [...]"*

E7: *"[...] I mean, my parents knew both Greek and the other language [...] But within the family, we didn't really have anything specific when it came to the languages."*

The majority of the teachers participating in this study (8 out of 9) attended only minority primary and secondary schools, with participant E2 having also spent one school year in a public Greek junior high school. Most of them (7 out of 9) state that minority schools significantly contributed to the development of their bilingualism (Turkish and Greek) through the lessons they attended as well as the overall bilingual school curriculum. In contrast, participant E8 argues that the Greek language was not developed to a significant extent within the framework of the minority primary school and also notes that the school did not contribute to the promotion of his first language, Pomak. Diverging from the above perspectives, participant E9 believes that Greek was not developed within the school context at all, while Turkish was, mainly due to the absence of a teacher for the Greek-language curriculum and the lack of exposure to the Greek language in his broader social environment.

E8: *"In primary school, it was mostly Turkish, because, as I mentioned earlier... [...] but for a few years we had Greek-language instruction as well, due to the remoteness of the area from the cities, etc.... Those were difficult times back then... [...] and at school, we didn't really use [Pomak] much. We tried there to... and also because... since the lessons were taught in Turkish... So, that language [Pomak] remained mostly at home, as we said, the mother tongue. Mostly with my mom, with my grandparents... Something like that"*

Consequently, we observe that the logic of parallel monolingualism within the educational and, therefore, institutional framework (minority primary schools and

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communication, while Greek is used in interactions with the public sector. As a result, the use of the Pomak language is largely confined to the domains of family and close friends (Sella-Mazi, 2015).

SPATH) has influenced teachers' perceptions regarding bilingualism and its management. For example, they consider it reasonable to separate the languages within or across educational contexts, as this is believed to *"bring about balance."*

#### **4.2 Perceptions of the Teachers in the Turkish-Language Program of Minority Primary Schools Regarding the Developing Bilingualism of Their Students**

Five teachers who participated in our study advocate for the interaction between the two educational pathways in the two programs (Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking), highlighting the contribution of learning one language (implicitly or explicitly referring to Turkish, the students' "mother tongue," respectively) to the acquisition/learning of another "foreign" or "second" language (primarily Greek). On the other hand, E8 and E9 focus on the knowledge students acquire regardless of language (E8), while showing particular interest in their progress in Greek (specifically in the language course – E9) at this stage, as well as in the long term.

E6: *«[...] That is, this — because I've also seen it in the theories — I notice that, indeed, when children acquire knowledge in one language, they transfer it... They acquire it as knowledge, and you can see that they transfer it to the other language as well, to the second one.. [...]*»

The attendance of Roma and/or Pomak students in the minority primary school classes where the teachers of this specific study worked or are currently working appears to have occurred in 7 out of 9 cases. Nevertheless, despite acknowledging their students' diverse backgrounds — and more specifically their linguistic profiles (E2, E6 & E8) — the teachers did not seem to approach or incorporate the students' first languages in any way. In fact, E2 explicitly expressed a lack of interest regarding how the students communicated among themselves:

*"[...] I didn't consider it necessary to mention it at all. I assumed that they only knew Turkish and a little Greek. As for how they speak among themselves, I have no knowledge of that. I wasn't interested in this matter."*

More specifically, the aforementioned teachers reported that these students only used Turkish within the school context, with E6 emphasizing:

*"[...] Because, in areas where there are, let's say, minority schools, it's understood that there is also a population from the minority group, so they speak Turkish."*

The avoidance of making distinctions or discriminations among their minority students acted as an inhibiting factor that prevented the teachers from engaging more deeply with the students' different linguistic profiles (E4, E6 & E7). Additionally, the institutional organization and functioning of minority primary schools, as well as the

content of school textbooks (E9), were also identified as discouraging factors for incorporating the students' first languages.

A potential restructuring of the way minority primary schools operate, such as conducting all lessons in both languages of instruction (Greek–Turkish), raises various reactions from teachers, who generally appear uncertain about the outcome of such an initiative. More specifically, some teachers point to practical difficulties in implementing this scenario, for example, the lack of instructional time (E8) or the challenge of co-teaching by two teachers with the aim of teaching a linguistic feature in both languages (E3). In contrast, E5 believes that students would be offered the opportunity to become familiar with subject-specific terminology in both languages, supporting this view with the argument for the crucial cooperation between the two programs. Finally, it is worth noting once again the opinions of teachers (E1, E3 & E6) who consider the learning of students' "mother"/first language as a fundamental priority for the subsequent acquisition of the other language (e.g., Greek).

*E5: "If the two languages collaborated ... of course, the children would learn the terminology — what they knew in one language, they would also learn in the other. I believe that collaboration is very important... The two programs should work together."*

*E6: "I think this would have practical problems... It wouldn't be possible. If something was presented showing how this could be done, maybe I would express a different opinion. Umm... I mean, I don't believe the issue is which language is used, but rather how the child perceives it, because the child has a minority background and speaks this mother tongue. When this language is included in education, especially in core subjects like mathematics and so on, the child acquires it, sees it as more friendly, becomes more fluent, and this helps them. The knowledge they gain transfers to the other language as well, as I mentioned before, and later they can continue their studies entirely in Greek universities, that's... as we've seen."*

However, in the case of students attending a public Greek school where, hypothetically, Turkish would also be taught as an additional language, teachers' views on the matter vary. On the one hand, teaching the Turkish language would serve as support for a deeper understanding of concepts not fully acquired during instruction in Greek (E1). On the other hand, teaching in Greek would act as a significant obstacle for minority students who lack the required language proficiency (E5), with E3 clarifying that: "[...] if a child does not learn to speak their own language well, they cannot learn the second language [Greek]." Furthermore, there are also viewpoints suggesting that, under this scenario, the acquisition of Greek would actually be strengthened (E1 & E8), as the Greek language requires special emphasis (E2), given that Turkish, being the "mother tongue" of minority students, has already been acquired through their family environment (E2 & E8). In contrast to the above positions, E4 argues that students' proficiency in their "mother tongue" (Turkish) would be disadvantaged in such an environment due to the

monolingual nature of the Greek school compared to the bilingual program of the minority school.

#### **6.4 Managing Students' Bilingualism within the Framework of a Bilingual Curriculum: The Management Practices of Teachers in the Turkish-speaking Program of Minority Primary Schools**

The collaboration between the teachers of the Turkish-speaking and the Greek-speaking curriculum is real and manifests itself in various issues that concern both the students' learning progress and the overall functioning of the school. More specifically, the issues highlighted relate to the communication established between the teachers of the two programs regarding the topics addressed in the respective language classes (E1, E4 & E6), as well as the contribution of the teachers participating in the research as "translators" or "mediators" for their students, in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the knowledge provided through the Greek-speaking curriculum—knowledge that is not immediately accessible to the students (E5, E6 & E9). As E9 clarifies: "[...] *They may not understand because their mother tongue is not like that... Because it's Turkish. You see? They come to me and I explain it to them, let's say. They immediately understand.*"

Regarding the connection of courses in the Turkish-language program with those in the Greek-language program, E3, E4, and E8 refer to the language course, each of them following a different way of linking the two. E3 and E4 recognize the usefulness of coordinating the two programs in terms of thematic units, either with the aim of teaching linguistic phenomena simultaneously (E4) or by giving priority to their teaching in the Turkish language (E3). On the other hand, E8 highlights the collaboration between the two programs, which their advisors also recommend, on the basis of common issues addressed in the classroom language courses.

*E3: "We try to keep in step with some thematic units so that the children can better understand certain concepts, terminology, and so on... [...] In a grammatical phenomenon, let's say the adverb, if I have taught it, the child will have understood it; since the adverb is difficult both in Greek and in Turkish, the child will be able to handle it in a better way... But if I have taught the adverb and the child has understood how the adverb is formed... then in Greek as well, when my colleague teaches it, the children will definitely understand the subject better."*

*E8: "[...] in the Turkish language class, we might have an environmental topic in the language textbook, and for the same grade to also have it in the Greek language textbook, so that we can make a combination, a... collaboration. And this is necessary. Our advisors also recommend this to us."*

The integration of the Greek language into the Turkish-language curriculum elicits various reactions from the teachers participating in the study. From the interview analysis, there are cases of teachers who consciously choose to use Greek during Mathematics lessons in order to establish equivalence of key mathematical terms in both

languages (Turkish–Greek) (E1, E4, E5 & E8). On the other hand, some teachers consciously avoid incorporating Greek into their program and do not connect it with Turkish; however, they are willing to make such connections if a child needs clarification on something not understood in Greek (E2 & E9), or if interest is observed from the student himself and sometimes from his parents in using Greek terminology during the learning process (E7). Educator E6, despite drawing equivalences between certain terms in the two languages, sets clear boundaries regarding his role as a teacher, emphasizing that his responsibility lies in teaching the Turkish language, while responsibility for Greek rests with his colleagues who teach in the Greek-language program. Similar boundaries are set by E3, who, from the outset, clearly states his position against using Greek in his teaching.

*E6: “Now, as I said, the subjects are differentiated... I teach the subjects that are in Turkish, and the other colleague teaches the subjects that are in Greek. In cases where we use, let’s say, the other language—me, Greek, and the other colleague, if they know, or some who know, they can say a word, how it’s said in Turkish, or sometimes, or many times, I explain, for example, the terms, the terminology and such, and I say: in Greek this is like that, it is called like that. That’s what I do, but I don’t speak to them all the time in Greek about something. I just give an explanation. [...] I shouldn’t go beyond that either, because, as we said, the two programs are different.”*

*E3: “My role is to teach the children or to teach the subjects in the Turkish language, that is, in their mother tongue, and to help them cultivate their mother tongue better. That is my role.”*

The use of teaching materials and activities designed for the simultaneous development and connection of the two languages (Turkish–Greek) is not included in the educational practices adopted by the teachers. Some of them justify this choice by referring to the limited scope of their role as instructors in the Turkish-language program (E1, E2, E6 & E7). Specifically, E1 points out the adequacy of the curriculum taught in the Greek-language program, acknowledging the limited possibilities for carrying out additional activities due to the already extensive teaching content, while E6 highlights the separation of the programs in the minority school, emphasizing the development of each language independently within its respective program. Nevertheless, E1 mentions the presence of various posters in the classroom that use both languages (Turkish/Greek), such as verb conjugations and classroom rules (signs of a translingual schoolscape, Karafylli & Maligkoudi, 2023). The creation of these materials resulted from coordination with the teacher of the Greek-language program, but E1 does not indicate any specific use of them in the Turkish-language curriculum.

*E1: “Maybe some posters that we use together, that is, in Greek. [...] For example, verb conjugations, you know... both in Greek, which we have in the classroom, and in Turkish, which we also have in the classroom. Endings and such. [...] I haven’t chosen them myself.”*

*I've chosen them together with my colleagues. [...] We are obliged as well to... we have to cover the curriculum, I mean, not obliged, but we have to cover it in order to move forward. We don't really have that much time... since they are bilingual anyway, the hours are scarce. [...] Only the things that are absolutely necessary for them to learn, we teach them; otherwise, we don't have the time to deal with other things."*

## 5. Discussion

Regarding the first axis (Educators' bilingual profiles), it appears that several teachers (5/9) consider their language proficiency to be stronger in Turkish. Moreover, all of the teachers (9/9) stated that they have encountered difficulties with the Greek language at some point in their lives. In the study by Maligkoudi & Mavrommatis (2023), with a research sample of teachers from the Turkish-language program, the majority (17/21) reported the need for further support in Greek. In the second axis, regarding teachers' perceptions of students' bilingualism, there is a tendency among educators to create distinctions between the two languages (Turkish–Greek), viewed through the lens of monolingualism. More specifically, quite a few teachers emphasize the importance of first learning the “mother tongue”/first language (Turkish) as a prerequisite for learning another language (such as Greek). Such responses are particularly evident in questions concerning the interaction of learning trajectories in the two programs (Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking), as well as in relation to the alternative scenario of teaching all subjects in both languages. Furthermore, the separation between the two languages is also reflected in their responses to the alternative scenario of attending classes in the public Greek school with additional instruction in Turkish. Some teachers perceive this as an opportunity to strengthen Greek, others as an obstacle due to insufficient proficiency in Greek, while others refer to the inadequate learning of the “mother tongue” caused by the monolingual nature of the public school. All the above perceptions seem to focus on each language separately, treating them as two autonomous systems, thereby pointing to more monolingual approaches and policies regarding bilingualism (García, 2009).

With regard to the third axis, cooperation between the two programs is supported by the teachers, mainly in the form of communication between the teachers of each program on issues concerning language courses, or through the role of the teachers of the Turkish-language program as “translators”/“mediators” for the acquisition of knowledge that was not attained within the framework of the Greek-language program. As for the coordination of language courses, some teachers clarify that they aim either at the simultaneous teaching of linguistic phenomena in each program or at their prioritized teaching in the Turkish language. In the study by Sakonidis & Klothou (2024), the observation is supported that there is limited interconnection between the teaching tasks developed in the courses of the two programs, due to the insufficient communication between the teachers of the Greek-language and the Turkish-language programs.

The deliberate use of the Greek language within the framework of the Turkish-speaking program is observed in some cases, with these teachers stating that they use

Greek to align the basic terminology in mathematics lessons. The teachers report that in this way they aim to facilitate their students' transition to secondary school. Similar findings are reported in the study by Maligkoudi & Mavrommatis (2023), who, although they do not systematically employ translanguaging practices, when they do choose to, these mainly concern mathematics and physics classes. However, their study also identifies a numerically significant group of teachers who report employing translanguaging practices with the intention of facilitating the teaching and learning process. As for encouraging their students to make connections between the two languages, some teachers state that they support such encouragement. Nevertheless, the use of teaching materials or activities aimed at linking the two languages does not appear to be part of the teaching practices of the overall sample in the study. Some of them justify this choice by referring to their limited role as teachers within the Turkish-speaking program.

Overall, the findings of the present study align with contemporary sociolinguistic and bilingual education theories that critique monolingual orientations in multilingual educational contexts. The tendency of teachers to conceptualize Turkish and Greek as separate and hierarchically ordered linguistic systems reflects what García and Wei describe as the "two solitudes" approach to bilingualism, in which languages are treated as autonomous entities rather than as interconnected communicative resources (García & Wei, 2014). Nevertheless, the participants' emphasis on the prioritization of the "mother tongue" before the acquisition of Greek also resonates with Cummins' interdependence hypothesis, according to which strong development of the first language may facilitate additional language learning. At the same time, the limited use of pedagogical practices aimed at connecting the two languages demonstrates the persistence of monoglossic educational ideologies, despite growing international support for translanguaging pedagogies that value the dynamic and flexible use of bilingual learners' full linguistic repertoires (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García, 2009). Therefore, the findings suggest that although some teachers recognize the practical benefits of cross-linguistic mediation and translanguaging practices, bilingual education within the specific context continues to operate largely within monolingual institutional frameworks.

This study seeks to contribute to the strengthening of the research field concerning issues related to minority education in Thrace, and more specifically, to highlight the perceptions and practices of teachers in the Turkish-language program. The literature and research on the Turkish-language program of minority primary schools, its teachers, and the practical issues concerning it, acted as a limiting factor for this study, since although there is an abundance of bibliography on the institutional and legal framework of minority education, on this particular issue, it remains rather limited. Another limitation of this qualitative study is the exclusive use of interviews as the data collection tool, as data from classroom observations would also have made a substantial contribution.

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