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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Greek Preschool Teachers' Professional Features and Their Knowledge and Views of the Official Standards of Early Writing Teaching

Filippos Tentolouris

Background/purpose – The purpose of this study was to explore three null hypotheses regarding the association between Greek preschool teachers' professional features with their knowledge and views of the official standards of early writing teaching which emphasize real communicative purposes.

Materials/methods – 494 teachers participated in an Internet-based survey and their answers to a 21-item digital questionnaire were analyzed through descriptive (calculation of frequencies) and inferential statistics (chi-squared tests).

Results – Two of the three null hypotheses cannot be supported and two statistically significant associations emerged: (a) teachers' education level was associated with a comprehensive knowledge and use of the official standards, and (b) teachers with lower level academic qualifications and teaching experience of more than 10 years seem to reproduce a "phonics" approach.

Conclusion – It is argued that the introduction of curricula per se cannot alter teachers' implementation of the phonics method, which is contrary to the official curriculum standards. It is suggested that redesigning writing practices to make them more compatible with the official standards should be a long-term and reciprocal project among teachers and policymakers.

Keywords – Early writing, emergent literacy, phonics method, inservice training

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, the Greek educational system has witnessed a reform take place (e.g., the introduction of project work as a compulsory classroom activity), since the two authorities involved in coordinating school practices –the Greek Ministry of Education and the Greek Institution of Educational Policy (former Pedagogical Institute)– have worked towards aligning it with the educational policies of the European Union (Traianou, 2019, 2021).

One of the means, co-financed by the European Union, which signaled a major shift in early writing teaching, was the introduction of new curricula (accompanied by corresponding teaching guides). Specifically, in the preschool education curricula (compulsory for children aged 4-6 years) up until 2003 (Official Gazette of the Greek Government, 1962, 1989), only goals of oral discourse production, e.g., students' production and comprehension of oral narratives, and prewriting goals such as children's control of their pencils by following dotted lines, were included.

Since 2003, however, two curricula have been introduced in the area of preschool education. The first was introduced in 2003 (Pedagogical Institute, 2003), along with an accompanying teachers' guide in 2006 (Dafermou et al., 2006) which adopted the viewpoint of language as a medium for communication and writing as a mode to fulfilling purpose-driven goals. The 2003 writing approach was based on the framework of "emergent literacy" (Bingham et al., 2018; Peterson et al., 2018), meaning that children are motivated to write any kind of text they like in any way they can, even if they use scribbles and marks instead of recognized lettering. Specifically, the correspondence between letters and phonemes (sounds) is not taught explicitly but emphasis is given on children's "discovery" of this correspondence –the development of their "phonological awareness"– through their attempt to use writing for social purposes, e.g., they write a letter to a friend.

The second curriculum and an accompanying teachers' guide were published in 2014 (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, 2014b), and included not only the "emergent literacy approach" and its primary concept of "phonological awareness" but also the following concepts and approaches:

1. "Communicative competence" and "Communicative language teaching" (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, pp. 9-12): Communicative competence is used to emphasize that effective communication is not based solely on people's linguistic knowledge (i.e., grammatical and syntactic rules) but also on their appropriate application of this knowledge in specific cultural-laden communicative events (Whyte, 2019), e.g., situations in which a polite style of speaking is deemed necessary. Communicative language teaching (Richards, 2006) was introduced as a loose teaching framework aimed at promoting this form of competence by situating grammatical rules within real communicative situations. One of the suggested communicative activities within the curriculum involves students writing an invitation to an event taking place at their kindergarten (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, p. 132). Students are tasked with reflecting on various parameters such as the person to whom the invitation is addressed and the spatiotemporal setting of the event (where and what time).

2. "Multimodality" and "Multiliteracies" (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, pp. 97-102): The former refers to how meaning in contemporary communication does not necessarily rely upon writing but on a mix of different modes, e.g., written discourse that also includes images and sound (Kress, 2015), while the latter (Kalantzis et al., 2016) concerns students' reflections on how different semiotic features contribute to the mutual

construction of meaning, e.g., in an illustrated text, images may be used to add information on written discourse, which may signal an equivalent meaning or show something completely different. One of the proposed multimodal activities within the 2014 curriculum was associated with how children make "designing" decisions, e.g., in a poster they decide on the font size in relation to the physical distance from which the posters will likely be read (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, p. 131).

3. "Text-type" and "Text-based approach" (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, pp. 98-101): The concept concerns the textual function in the social context; specifically, how language features fit to the conventions specific to certain types of text (Simon-Vandenbergen, 2014), e.g., fairytales and personal narratives as example specific text-types of the abstract narrative language form (the narrative genre). In the "text-based approach" (Rose, 2015), students attempt to use the appropriate linguistic features in the writing of a fairytale, e.g., use of words and phrases which signal the spatiotemporal setting in the beginning of the story. One of the suggested activities for such an approach within the 2014 curriculum concerns students' understanding the conventions of the text-type "poster," i.e., it should be divided into different areas such as a header, title, and the main informational area (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, p. 130).

4. "Critical literacy" and "Critical literacy approach" (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, pp. 99-101): The concept emphasizes how language features signal ideological positions (Kubota & Miller, 2017) and specific identities for participants within texts (Archakis & Tsakona, 2013; Moore & Schleppegrell, 2020). Through the "critical literacy approach," teachers can encourage students to deconstruct "given" ways of thinking about social, political, and economic issues. An example of early writing of this kind would be a student's reflection on possible stereotypical gender-relations in texts such as fairytales, which in turn can lead to their rewriting them from an alternative non-gender-biased perspective. One of the proposed activities of this approach within the 2014 curriculum concerns students' exploration of how specific strategies are used in advertising aimed at children (e.g., the appearance of popular cartoon characters) to foster their desire to buy the advertised product (Institute of Educational Policy, 2014a, p. 100).

However, in Greek preschool teachers' practices a structural view of language (language as grammatical rules) has been traced (Stellakis, 2012, 2015) which at the level of early writing teaching is signaled through a "phonics method" (Graham et al., 2002; Ritchey, 2008); explicit teaching of the alphabetic code for the purpose of the formation of words and sentences with an emphasis on correct spelling and punctuation. This method –which can also be traced in teachers' practices of other countries (e.g., Peterson et al., 2018; Ure & Raban, 2001)– has yet to be officially adopted in any of the Greek preschool curricula.

Although it is unclear how the phonics method was established as a "correct" method for helping children learn how to read and write, its continued presence in Greek teaching practices was interpreted by Stellakis (2012, 2017) as being due to a lack of inservice literacy seminars having been organized for preschool teachers by the Greek educational authorities. Furthermore, there is some evidence that over time Greek preschool teachers tend to standardize their classroom practices, resist attempts to alter their practices and suffer from professional burnout (Birbili, 2017; Birbili & Myrovali, 2020; Rentzou, 2015).

Taking into account that almost 20 years have already passed since the introduction of new communicative-based curriculum standards and the relation between Greek teachers'

knowledge and use of these standards has yet to be examined, the purpose of the current study is to test the following three null hypotheses:

H_0 1. Teachers who hold a master's or doctoral degree with an explicit dimension on language teaching and teachers who attended academic lifelong learning courses on writing teaching do not know or use the official curriculum standards of early writing teaching more than holders of other, lesser, degrees.

H_0 2. "Newer" teachers (substitute teachers and teachers with teaching experience of less than 10 years) do not know or use the official standards to a greater degree compared to "older" teachers (those with more than 10 years of teaching experience).

H_0 3. Teachers who attended inservice seminars on writing teaching according to either the 2003 or 2014 curricula, do not know or use the official standards to a greater degree than those who did not attend.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Model

To answer the study's three null hypotheses, a web-based survey (Aarons, 2021; Crawford et al., 2005) was conducted through a digital questionnaire.

2.2. Study Group

In total, 494 preschool teachers, approximately 5% of the 10,000 teachers working in Greek preschool education according to the latest data of the Hellenic Statistical Authority (2019), completed the digital questionnaire.

2.3. Instrument

The developed questionnaire consisted of 21 items separated into three sections. The first section consisted of six compulsory closed-ended items that sought information about the participants' professional features; (a) education level, (b) job status, (c) time working as a teacher, (d) attendance of lifelong learning course/s on writing teaching, (e) attendance of inservice seminar/s on writing teaching based on the 2003 curriculum, and (f) the 2014 curriculum.

The second section consisted of 10 compulsory Likert-type items in relation to the participants' knowledge of the concepts and approaches to writing teaching, based on the 2003 and 2014 curricula; phonological awareness, communicative competence, text-types, multimodality, critical literacy, emergent literacy approach, communicative language teaching, text-based approach, multiliteracies, and critical literacy approach. These items were followed by an optional open-ended item, where participants could mention their knowledge of other concepts of and approaches to writing teaching.

The third section consisted of items aimed at exploring the participants' views about what should be ideally and is actually taught in relation to the official approaches to early writing teaching, as well as the phonics approach which has dominated preschool teaching practices. (a) Two compulsory multiple-choice items required the participants to select which writing goals should be ideally promoted in classroom activities, and to select which writing goals were similar to those actually promoted in their classrooms (actual writing goals). (b) A close-ended item questioned the participants' position on the relationship between writing and spelling, which was followed by an optional open-ended item for the participants to mention any other alternative answers.

2.4. Procedures

First, the email addresses of all public kindergartens –almost 4,500– were collected from the webpage of the Greek Ministry of Education (https://maps.sch.gr/main.html), and then a random selection of 2,000 kindergartens was made. The link of a digital anonymous questionnaire (see Appendix) was sent within the first 3 days of October 2021 to the school e-mail address of each of the selected kindergartens (all school e-mails are then forwarded by the person responsible for the school's digital communication to each teacher's individual email address). The kindergarten teachers (between one and three per school) were asked to spend approximately 10 minutes completing the digital questionnaire on a voluntarily basis. A follow-up e-mail was then issued in the middle of October 2021 in order to encourage non-respondents to participate in the web-based survey and emphasizing its importance (the last day of October 2021 was defined as the deadline for participants to respond).

2.5. Data analysis

After formation of the study's three null hypotheses, the level of alpha was determined as $a = .050$. All items (returned questionnaires) were then calculated descriptively (in terms of frequencies) in order to create an overview of the dataset. The items of the first and second sections were calculated directly, whilst those of the third section were first corresponded with each writing teaching approach (see Appendix for details) and then calculated as emerging groups. For example, the writing goals "to write words without missing letters" and "to write short texts to inform others outside of the school about classroom events" signal a mixed view between the phonics approach (an emphasis on spelling) and the communicative language teaching approach (an emphasis on how language should be used for real communicative purposes).

After that, the participant teachers' professional features were associated with: (a) their knowledge of each concept (phonological awareness); (b) their knowledge of each approach (multiliteracies); and, (c) their views on writing and spelling and their views in relation to ideal and actual writing goals.

To examine if the study's three null hypotheses were or were not able to be supported, Pearson's chi-squared tests were conducted in three steps. First, the aforementioned variables (a/b/c) were associated with two groups, teachers with a master's or a doctoral degree with an explicit dimension on language teaching and teachers who hold other types of degrees. In the second step, a similar association was conducted between teachers who had attended academic lifelong learning courses on writing teaching and those who had not. From this association the teachers from the first step were excluded in order to avoid any overlap between the two variables. In the third step, teachers from the first and second steps were excluded in order to avoid confusion about what is precisely associated with what, and then the remaining professional variables were associated with the three variables (a/b/c).

2.6. Securing content validity

To ensure content validity, e.g., to facilitate participants' comprehension, the questions should not be overly complex or vague. To this end, a pilot survey was applied 1 month prior to the main study application. Completed draft questionnaires were collected from a volunteer convenient sample of 43 teachers known personally to the researcher. Next, a discussion was held regarding which items they found confusing (mostly items from the third section concerning the goals of early writing teaching). In order to increase the internal consistency of the multi-item scale (survey reliability), Cronbach alpha inter-item correlations

(correlating each item with the sum of all the other relevant items) were calculated. The Cronbach alpha value was calculated as .814, which exceeds .80 and therefore deemed a satisfactory score for a highly reliable level of internal consistency (Taber, 2018).

2.7 Limitations of the study

The findings that emerged from the applied digital questionnaire are framed by three main limitations. First, participant responses may not be accurate in relation to the teachers' knowledge or use of the official curriculum standards of early writing, e.g., although the participant teachers were asked to rate their understanding in relation to the official standards, some may have interpreted the official concepts of and approaches to early writing in different ways. Therefore, in order to examine the complexities of what teachers understanding from these standards, alternative research methods such as case study and interview should be considered. Second, the digital questionnaire did not include demographic questions (e.g., to assess if teachers from a specific region of the country responded to questions at a higher frequency) since this would presuppose a detailed account of teachers' transfers from schools in one area to another, or from one school to another within the same transfer area. Third, private kindergartens and those serving children with severe special needs were excluded from the study since private kindergartens have the flexibility to use alternative curricula while the latter use simplified curricula that focus primarily on basic oral communicative skills.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Participants' professional features

Table 1 details findings on the participants' professional features, with two thirds of respondents (69.00%, *n* = 341) holding a bachelor's degree, one fifth (19.00%, *n* = 123) having obtained a master's degree, a few (5.90%, *n* = 20) with a master's degree with an explicit dimension on writing teaching, and even fewer (4.50%, *n* = 22) having gained a doctoral degree or a doctoral degree with an explicit dimension on writing teaching. In total, 87.40% (*n* = 432) of the participants were employed as teachers on a permanent contract, whilst 12.60% (*n* = 432) were substitute teachers. In terms of teaching experience, 32.00% (*n* = 158) of the participants had been teaching for up to 10 years, 42.50% (*n* = 210) between 11 and 20 years, and 25.50% (*n* = 126) for more than 20 years. Of the participants, 11.90% (*n* = 59) had attended an academic lifelong training course on writing teaching, whilst nearly half (56.70%, *n* = 280) had attended inservice seminars according to the 2003 curriculum and one third (33.40%, *n* = 165) had attended inservice seminars according to the 2014 curriculum.

Table 1. Participants' Professional Features

Feature	*% (n)*
1. Education level:	
Bachelor's degree	69.00 (341)
Master's degree	19.00 (94)
Master's degree with explicit dimension on writing teaching	5.90 (29)
Doctoral degree	4.50 (22)
Doctoral degree with explicit dimension on writing teaching	1.60 (8)
2. Job status:	
Permanent teacher	87.40 (52)
Substitute teacher	12.60 (432)

Feature	*% (n)*
3. Years working as a teacher:	
0 to 10 years	32.00 (158)
11 to 20 years	42.50 (210)
More than 20 years	25.50 (126)
4. Academic lifelong courses on writing teaching:	
Yes	11.90 (59)
No	88.10 (435)
5. Inservice seminars on writing teaching (2003 curriculum):	
Yes	56.70 (280)
No	27.30 (135)
6. Inservice seminars on writing teaching (2014 curriculum):	
Yes	33.40 (165)
No	52.40 (259)

Note: Totals of features 1-4 (n = 494), 5 (n = 421), and 6 (n = 424) are unequal since for 5 and 6 answers of "I cannot remember" were excluded.

3.2 Teachers' knowledge of official early writing teaching standards' concepts and approaches in relation to professional features

Table 2 refers to the participant teachers' knowledge on the key-concepts included in the 2003 and 2014 curricula, and portrays a significant divide. Overall, 82.00% (n = 405) of the participants (aggregate of Likert-type scale selections 4 and 5) had conceptual knowledge of phonological awareness, as included in the 2003 curriculum, with great adequacy or an in-depth level. Conversely, only one fourth knew the concepts of the 2014 curriculum with great adequacy or in depth (communicative competence: 25.00%, n = 123; text types: 27.10%, n = 129; multimodality: 27.80%, n = 177; critical literacy: 25.50%, n = 126).

Table 2. Participants' Knowledge of Official Early Writing Teaching Concepts

	Phonological awareness	Communicative competence	Text types	Multimodality	Critical literacy
L. Sc.	*% (n)*	*% (n)*	*% (n)*	*% (n)*	*% (n)*
1	2.00 (10)	24.70 (122)	20.40 (101)	15.40 (76)	17.20 (85)
2	2.20 (11)	20.60 (111)	25.90 (128)	24.90 (123)	33.40 (165)
3	13.80 (68)	29.70 (138)	27.50 (136)	23.90 (118)	23.90 (118)
4	33.60 (166)	12.40 (61)	17.20 (85)	19.40 (96)	14.60 (72)
5	48.40 (239)	12.60 (62)	09.90 (44)	16.40 (81)	10.90 (54)
Total	100 (494)	100 (494)	100 (494)	100 (494)	100 (494)

In relation to the teachers' knowledge of the writing approaches included in the 2003 and 2014 curricula (see Table 3), a similar divide as in Table 2 can be seen between emergent literacy and the other approaches. In total, 81.60% (n = 403) of the respondents had knowledge of the 2003 approach with great adequacy or in depth compared to almost one fourth who had knowledge in relation to other approaches included in both curricula: communicative language teaching (27.50%, n = 136), text-based approach (23.30%, n = 113), multiliteracies (23.10%, n = 118), and critical literacy approach (21.50%, n = 106).

Table 3. Teachers' Knowledge of the Official Early Writing Teaching Approaches

	Emergent literacy	Communicative language teaching	Text-based	Multiliteracies	Critical literacy
L.Sc.	*% (n)*	*% (n)*	*% (n)*	*% (n)*	*% (n)*
1	2.20 (11)	26.10 (129)	28.10 (139)	29.80 (147)	31.60 (156)
2	2.40 (12)	28.60 (141)	27.10 (134)	28.00 (138)	30.10 (149)
3	13.80 (68)	17.80 (88)	21.50 (106)	18.40 (91)	16.80 (83)
4	31.80 (157)	15.20 (75)	16.00 (79)	14.70 (73)	14.00 (69)
5	49.80 (246)	12.30 (61)	7.30 (36)	9.10 (45)	7.50 (37)
Total	100 (494)	100 (494)	100 (494)	100 (494)	100 (494)

Looking further at the participant teachers' knowledge of the curricula concepts and approaches together with their professional features (see Table 1), chi-square tests of independence showed that a significant difference existed between teachers who hold a master's or doctoral degree with an explicit dimension on writing teaching and those who hold other types of degree. Specifically, these teachers appear to have knowledge of great adequacy or in-depth knowledge of all concepts and approaches introduced in the 2014 curriculum ($p < .001$ for all except text-based approach, $p < .020$). Similarly, teachers who attended academic lifelong courses on writing teaching appeared to have the same level of knowledge compared with those who had not attended such courses ($p < .001$ for all concepts and approaches except communicative competence and text-based approach, $p < .020$).

Furthermore, the type of employment (permanent or substitute teacher) was found to be significantly associated with the teachers' knowledge of the concept of critical literacy and critical literacy approach since the permanent teachers did not have great adequacy or deep knowledge of these compared to substitute teachers (concept, $p < .007$; approach, $p < .036$). Finally, a significant relationship was shown to exist between teachers' experience and their knowledge of the critical literacy concept ($p < .043$) and the approaches of multiliteracies ($p < .020$) and critical approach ($p < .016$). Teachers with experience of up to 10 years strongly appeared to have great adequacy or deep knowledge of the concept and approach, compared to that of the other two groups, i.e., teachers with between 11 and 20 years or more than 20 years' experience.

3.3 Teachers' views on writing and spelling in relation to professional features

As shown in Table 4, almost three fifths of the participant teachers (61.40%, $n = 303$) argued that writing should be taught without emphasis on spelling, signaling one of the main positions of the emergent literacy approach, whilst almost one fifth (22.10%, $n = 28$) supported the opposing view that reflected the phonics approach. Almost 5% of the participants expressed a different view: (a) that children should memorize specific words, e.g., their names, favorite animals, without explicit correspondence between the sounds and letters (4.20%, $n = 21$); (b) writing should not be taught at all (6.70%, $n = 33$), and (c) the relationship between writing and spelling teaching should be decided upon by the teachers themselves in relation to specific factors (5.60%, $n = 28$), e.g., student learning level.

Table 4. Teachers' Views on Writing and Spelling Teaching

	View on writing and spelling	*% (n)*
1.	In kindergarten, children should not be taught writing and spelling but engaged only through oral activities.	6.70 (33)
2.	In kindergarten, children should be taught writing but emphasis should not be given to spelling.	61.40 (303)
3.	In kindergarten, children should be taught writing and spelling.	22.10 (109)
4.	The issue of writing and spelling should not be defined in curricula documentation, but left to teachers' judgment, e.g., decisions based on student learning level.	5.60 (28)
5.	Other [open-ended question]: memorizing specific words, e.g., names, favorite animals.	4.20 (21)
Total		100 (494)

Concerning the association between teachers' views on writing and spelling teaching in relation to their professional features, the following pattern emerged through the chi-square tests of independence. Teachers with more than 20 years' experience ($p < .002$), those who did not attend inservice seminars for the 2003 ($p < .001$) or 2014 ($p < .001$) curricula, as well as those who did not attend academic lifelong training courses on writing teaching appeared to agree that kindergarten children should be taught writing and spelling, which signals a phonics approach, compared with other relative groups of teachers.

3.4 Teachers' views on ideal and actual writing goals in relation to professional features

Referring to the goals of writing that should be and are actually promoted in classroom activities which reflect specific writing approaches, an important difference was noted in the participant teachers' views (see Table 5). Ideal writing goals were mentioned by 16.40% ($n = 81$) of the teachers which signals the phonics approach, but this percentage doubled in relation to actual writing goals applied in the classroom (32.00%, $n = 158$). Almost one fourth of the participants situated the ideal (28.90%, $n = 143$) and actual writing goals (24.70%, $n = 122$) within the curricular approach or within one which combines phonics with another curriculum approach (ideal writing goals: 26.90%, $n = 133$; actual writing goals: 23.10%, $n = 114$). A shift can be noticed in the phonics approach when mixed with other curricula approaches since the 25.10% ($n = 124$) of participant teachers who indicated this reduced to 15.60% ($n = 77$) when referring to actual writing goals.

Table 5. Teachers' Views in Relation to Ideal and Actual Writing Goals

	Writing approach	*Ideal writing goals*	*Actual writing goals*
		% (n)	*% (n)*
1.	Phonics	16.40 (81)	32.00 (158)
2.	Curricula approaches: Emergent literacy Approach + Communicative language Teaching + Text-based + Multiliteracies + Critical literacy	28.90 (143)	24.70 (122)
3.	Mixed: Phonics + another curricula	26.90 (133)	23.10 (114)

	Writing approach	*Ideal writing goals*	*Actual writing goals*
	approach		
4.	Mixed: Phonics + Curricula approaches	25.10 (124)	15.60 (77)
5.	Emergent Literacy + Multiliteracies	2.60 (13)	4.60 (23)
	Total	100 (494)	100 (464)

Focusing on these two types of writing goals in association with the teachers' professional features, chi-squared tests indicated two reverse patterns. Those who selected ideal writing goals compatible with curriculum approaches were found to be teachers holding a master's or doctoral degree with an explicit dimension on writing teaching ($p < .001$), teachers who attended academic lifelong courses on this type of teaching ($p < .001$), as well as those with a teaching experience up to 10 years ($p < .020$). On the contrary, in relation to actual writing goals of classroom written activities, teachers with a bachelor's degree ($p < .007$) or teaching experience of more than 20 years ($p < .001$) selected writing goals that are associated with the phonics approach, or a mix between that and a curricular approach, or all of these.

To summarize, the three null hypotheses presented in this article cannot be supported:

H_0 1: Teachers with a master's or a doctoral degree with an explicit dimension on language teaching and those who attended lifelong courses on writing teaching appear to have great adequacy or deep knowledge of the official curriculum standards compared with those holding other types of degree as well as promoting writing goals (actual and ideal) within classroom activities which are compatible with these standards to a great degree.

H_0 2: "Older" teachers (i.e., those with a bachelor's degree and more than 20 years' teaching experience) believe that writing and spelling should be taught at the kindergarten level, a belief which signals the phonics approach, as well as promoting actual goals related to this approach. However, "newer" teachers (substitute teachers and those with up to 10 years' teaching experience) seem to have great adequacy or deep knowledge only of critical literacy and the critical literacy approach, while older teachers have an additional deep knowledge of multiliteracies along with selecting ideal writing goals compatible with standards in the official curricula.

H_0 3: Only teachers who did not attend inservice seminars on the 2003 curriculum appear to agree with the basic position of the phonics approach, i.e., writing and spelling should be taught at the kindergarten level.

4. DISCUSSION

The concepts of and approaches to writing teaching, introduced in the 2003 and 2014 curricula in Greece, signaled a step towards the development of a complex and comprehensive writing pedagogy, as described by Ivanič (2004), but which has yet to be conducted decisively at the international level, in which the phonics method seems dominant (for a comparative study, see Peterson et al., 2018). This pedagogy recontextualizes various concepts (e.g., emergent literacy) and approaches (e.g., multiliteracies) from different theoretical traditions (e.g., the Systemic Functional Grammar [Kress, 2015]).

However, although the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (2011) requires that all teachers receive systematic inservice training in support of curricular reforms (as financed by the agency) and address the conceptual complexities described in the current study, the introduction of such a comprehensive pedagogy has yet to be accompanied by

corresponding innovations regarding teacher inservice training (e.g., minimizing gaps in their knowledge or motivating them to engage in change), which seems to be a key factor in the success of such reforms (Mihai et al., 2017; Olkishoo et al., 2019). This training falls to the responsibility of school advisors (teachers with a high level of qualification such as a master's or doctoral degree who have been selected by the Greek Ministry of Education), yet many times these advisors may not have proven effective, especially if they lacked specialized knowledge of the content of these inservice training seminars (Saiti & Saitis, 2006; Stamelos & Bartzaki, 2013).

The importance of these seminars was demonstrated in the current study with teachers who had not attended inservice seminars on writing teaching at the time of the 2003 curriculum, and which was the first to introduce a view of early writing from the perspective of the emergent literacy approach. Teachers who had not attended these seminars were found to still apply the phonics approach, which reaffirms Stellakis' (2012, 2017) argument that a lack of inservice training seminars is a crucial factor leading to this position.

Finally, only teachers with specialized academic training, which is based on personal choice (i.e., a master's or doctoral degree as an optional professional qualification, or an academic lifelong training course with fees paid by the teacher themselves), appear equipped to cope with the conceptual complexity of the official curricular standards. Therefore, although such training may positively impact certain teachers, it may end up, from an individualistic and technocratic perspective (Bingham & Bunch, 2017; Kerr, 2018), to form a means of shaping two cohorts of teachers: those who do not understand conceptual complexity and resist any changes that attempt to alter the practice of early writing, and those who are open to change since they are able to function as experts on curricular matters.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The introduction of new curricula in Greek preschool education was considered necessary for the modernization of teaching practices, and signaled a move to align with the educational policy of the European Union. The main objective was to equip teachers with a working knowledge of a variety of concepts and methods used to help children develop phonological awareness through real-world, purpose-driven communicative activities reflecting simultaneously on multimodal and ideological issues.

However, curriculum early writing standards, irrespective of whether modern or comprehensive, cannot fundamentally change teachers' alternative views and practices. There is a potential here that some teachers may believe such a comprehensive pedagogy is inherently unachievable and, thus, the only way forwards in finding an effective means of teaching early writing is to go back to the basics (for further information, see Katsarou & Tsafos, 2010).

Therefore, academic policymakers should realize that any reform of the curricula standards for early writing should be founded upon strong foundations (Delaney et al., 2020; File, 2020) and is likely to fail if not accompanied with a comprehensive strategy of how teachers' professional roles should be further developed (Magos, 2012; Tatto, 2019; Theodorou et al., 2017). These roles are not only as practitioners, with a focus on practical ways of applying these standards, but also as practitioners who comprehend complex issues of writing teaching and who are able to reflect on the relationship between their teaching practices and the official curriculum standards (Comber & Kamler, 2004).

DECLARATIONS

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire on Teachers' Knowledge and Views of the Official Standards of Early Writing Teaching

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for dedicating personal time to answering this questionnaire. Your knowledge of the concepts and approaches related to writing, as well as the selection of specific writing goals, are the topics examined here, and which can help make important contributions to curriculum changes.

The goal of the questionnaire is to investigative but not evaluative. Your answers will remain confidential and anonymous, and will be strictly used only for academic purposes (e.g., conference presentations, journal articles).

By answering the questions (estimated time, 10 minutes), it is understood that you have provided your consent. For any questions or criticisms regarding the questionnaire, please contact me direct via email [*email address added here*].

Best wishes,

[researcher's name]

A. Professional features: Choose the answer that represents yourself.

1. Job status:
   a. Permanent teacher
   b. Substitute teacher
2. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
   a. 0 to 10 years
   b. 11 to 20 years
   c. More than 20 years
3. What is your education level?
   a. Bachelor's degree
   b. Master's degree
   c. Master's degree with explicit dimension on writing teaching (e.g., courses and seminars on literacy education)
   d. Doctoral degree
   e. Doctoral degree with explicit dimension on writing teaching (e.g., research on literacy education)

4. Have you received academic lifelong training on language teaching?
   a. Yes
   b. No
5. Did you attend an inservice seminar on language teaching based on the 2003 curriculum (organized by school advisors)?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Do not remember
6. Did you attend an inservice seminar on language teaching based on the 2014 curriculum (organized by school advisors)?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. Do not remember

B. Knowledge of Writing Concepts and Approaches: Choose the answer that applies to you.

7. Do you have knowledge of the phonological awareness concept?
   a. I don't know the concept.
   b. I know the concept but not adequately.
   c. I know the concept with relative adequacy.
   d. I know the concept with great adequacy.
   e. I know the concept in depth.

[same Likert-type scale is repeated in questions 8-16]

8. Do you have knowledge of the communicative competence concept?
9. Do you have knowledge of the text-types concept?
10. Do you have knowledge of the multimodality concept?
11. Do you have knowledge of the critical literacy concept?
12. Do you have knowledge of the emergent literacy approach?
13. Do you have knowledge of the communicative language teaching approach?
14. Do you have knowledge of the text-based approach?
15. Do you have knowledge of the multiliteracies approach?
16. Do you have knowledge of the critical literacy approach?
17. Do you have knowledge of another concept or approach about writing teaching? If yes, please describe below, irrespective of if you use it or not.

    .....

C. Selection of Writing Goals

18. In your opinion, which writing goals should be promoted in classroom writing activities, irrespective of if you have attempted to promote them or not?

Students should learn:

- To write words without missing letters (e.g., giraffe instead of girff). [phonics approach]
- To use different styles (e.g., formal-informal invitation) in relation to situations and recipients. [communicative language teaching]
- To produce digital texts (e.g., a video) using different semiotic modes (e.g., images and sound). [multiliteracies]
- To write about something they find personally meaningful. [emergent literacy approach]
- To express their emotions and ideas as orthographically correct as they can in short texts. [phonics approach]
- To structure correctly a text-type (e.g., an invitation) and use the appropriate language features (e.g., mentioning the space and time of the event). [text-based approach]
- To show how vocabulary many times constructs different views as given and indisputable (e.g., wolves are "bad," deer are "good"). [critical literacy approach]
- To write short texts to inform others outside of the school about classroom events. [communicative language teaching]
- To write texts (e.g., grocery lists) within role-playing (e.g., buying and selling products in a grocery store). [emergent literacy approach]
- To produce texts (e.g., a poster) using semiotic modes such as written discourse and images. [multiliteracies]
- To use discourse which does not make social distinctions (e.g., use of masculine and feminine grammatical genders in making general references; such as [to start a letter] "Dear Sir" / "Dear Madam"). [critical literacy approach]
- To use different textual conventions for different text types (e.g., invitations usually begin with invitees' names). [text-based approach]

19. Select which of the following writing goals [or similar] you promote in your classroom writing activities:

Students should learn:

- To write texts for classroom communicative purposes (e.g., fairytales that can be read at any time to different audiences). [communicative language teaching]
- To complete simple exercises in worksheets (e.g., children fill in gaps with missing letters). [phonics approach]
- To write texts focusing on the features appropriate for specific texts (e.g., description requires the use of adjectives). [text-based approach]
- To use different tools (e.g., pencils, pens, computers) in the production of texts. [multiliteracies]

- To write words in any way they can, even if they use unconventional letters such as pseudograms. [emergent literacy approach]
- To form letters (capital [uppercase] or small [lowercase] letters, or both) in worksheets. [phonics approach]
- To select and use various semiotic features (e.g., writing a poster headline in bold or colored letters for denoting its content). [multiliteracies]
- To write texts focusing on incorporating all the necessary parts (e.g., resolution of a problem in a fairytale). [text-based approach]
- To write texts focusing on their critical dimension (e.g., wolves are an important link in the food chain). [critical literacy approach]
- To participate in meaningful classroom writing routines (e.g., adding their names to the classroom register). [emergent literacy approach]
- To write texts focusing on real addressees (e.g., writing to the local council to request a recycle bin). [communicative language teaching]
- To write texts focusing on the pros and cons of a specific topic (e.g., if it is healthy for a child to stay outside in the sun unprotected). [critical literacy approach]

20. Select which perception about the relationship between writing and spelling you agree with:
    1. In kindergarten, children should not be taught writing and spelling but should be engaged only with oral activities.
    2. In kindergarten, children should be taught writing but emphasis should not be given to spelling.
    3. In kindergarten, children should be taught both writing and spelling.
    4. The issue of spelling should not be defined in the curriculum, but should be left to the teachers' own judgment (e.g., depending on each students' learning level).

21. Do you have a different perception of the relationship between writing and spelling? If yes, please describe it below.

……

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