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A comparison of the educational performance of students attending IPS and MPS on abilities crucial for school learning and adaptation

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Abstract

The most important achievement in Intercultural education, in Greece, was the establishment of Intercultural Primary Schools (IPS) for the education of students with special training, social, cultural or educational needs. Nowadays, there are many Intercultural Primary Schools, which have been converted into schools for foreigners, because in most of the cases Greek parents hesitate to send their children to these schools due to the students’ cultural differentiation and linguistic diversity. As a result, Intercultural Primary Schools are largely schools for children of lower social classes and are associated with low performance and school failure of the foreign students.

The goal of the present study was the examination and comparison of students’ performance in an IPS with those of students’ in a Mainstream Primary School (MPS). It emerges that students of Intercultural Primary Schools have lower performance in skills which are related with linguistic ability.

Keywords: Intercultural education, Intercultural Primary School, Mainstream Primary School, School performance

Introduction

The main challenge the multicultural societies are facing in our days is primarily the organization of the relations between natives and foreigners in such a way, so that meeting each other does not lead in conflicts, but in a creative interaction of their cultures. The educational system, the institution of supporting those who are subjected to social inclusion processes and cultural interaction par excellence, must play an important role on the acceptance and recognition of the otherness and pluralism as hallmarks of the social status (Govaris, 2001).

In Greece, many years before migration was exploded, there was a small – but not a negligible – presence of foreign students. They were the children of few foreign workers in Greece, who usually were having a high social, financial and educational level. Those students were attending private or foreign primary schools that were placed in the huge urban centers of Athens and Thessaloniki (Damanakis, 1997; Nikolaou 2000). Since the beginning of the ‘90s, due to the collapse of the Albanian political system and the massive immigration to Greece, the majority of the foreign students attending in the Education are of Albanian origin, since they represent a large proportion of all the foreign students in Primary Education. The remaining percentage allocated among students coming from the former Soviet Union, other Europeans and Asians (Gotovos & Markou, 2003).

The care of the official Greek state for the foreign students’ education starts at 1970, but essential steps have been made since the beginning of the ‘80s until 1996, by passing legislation for the formation of Special Purpose Classes and Tutorial Classes (Greek Ministry of Education N 1404/83). This regulation initially indicated the teaching of language and culture of the origin country for 2 or 3 hours weekly in the Special Purpose...
Classes. However, in practice the Special Purpose Classes functioned and still functions at a direction of high adaptation and absorption of different cultural students (Nikolaou, 2000).

In 1996 a new law (2413/96) is passing that establishes schools of Primary and Secondary Education to provide education for young people with special training, social, cultural or educational needs. Based on this law the Intercultural Schools are formed initially having an experimental character. Their goal is to provide pedagogical example to be used throughout the educational system. In practice, however, it works totally different. In some IPS no native students are attending, as it was supposed to be, in order to be considered as Intercultural Schools, while in others, the configuration is truly multicultural but the majority of the native students are coming from low social classes (Nikolaou, 2000). This is because many Greek parents do not feel like sending their children in schools were foreign students are attending and furthermore they believe that these schools provide low quality education (Unicef, 2001).

Data collected from the Directorate of Studies of Greek Ministry of Education claim that a large proportion of foreign students quit school, mostly during the transition from Primary to Secondary Education (Gotovos & Markou, 2003). Previous findings have also indicated an important decrease of the foreign students moving from fourth to fifth and from fifth to sixth class of Primary school (Greek Ministry of Education: Directorate of Studies, 1997). This leakage of students, when it is not due to family prohibition for social or financial purposes, it is almost exclusively caused by educational failure. This is an important issue which concerns not only the groups of students we have already mentioned, but concerns the total number of the students’ population as well.

In Greece educational failure is tied with the Syllabus and the success or not on scheduled exams that are held at regular intervals. The School Curriculum demands linguistic skills of higher level so that a student can face the cognitive and academic demands of the class (Karatzia-Stavlioti & Spinthouraki, 2006). According to Cummins (1984, 2003) the distinction in Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) helps us to explain the relative failure, within the education system, of many children who do not speak the native language.

The linguistic skills of children must be sufficiently developed so that the children can be able to face the demands of the timetable. However, in most cases the children’s native language is different from the language the National Curriculum requires and their cognitive, academic and linguistic skills are not sufficiently developed to allow them to correspond to the challenges encountered. As a result, many of the bilingual students present low performances or even educational failure (Baker, 2001).

Low performances must not be attributed exclusively to ethnic diversity. Many times foreign and native students fail due to the same reasons. According to Bernstein (1971) school uses the language and the culture of the upper social classes to evaluate the performance and thus condemns children from lower social classes to failure.

Bourdieu (1984) developed the theory of “cultural capital” to interpret class differentiated school performance. Cultural capital contains knowledge and skills that children acquire through the procedure that is the daily, imperceptible and subconscious learning by living into their domestic environment, were they come across different cultural occupations and activities. Consequently, the knowledge and the familiarization with the culture the school is teaching, are what kids coming from upper classes acquire.
through their families. On the other hand, children from lower classes acquire knowledge and familiarity with the folk culture which, however, is not to be acknowledged by the school. Thus, they perform low or even fail.

Nowadays, in Greece the IPS attend students from lower social classes (Gotovos & Markou, 2003; Nikolaou, 2005). Greek parents are reluctant to let their children attend them as they are afraid that the students’ cultural differentiation and linguistic diversity may negatively affect the quality of education provided. As a result, the IPS become second choice schools as well as schools for students coming from lower classes.

**Research – Methodology**

This study examines students’ performance in an IPS and compares them with the respective performances of students in a MPS. The aim of this study is to examine the performance of IPS students and compare it with that of MPS students, in tasks involving cognitive and linguistic abilities, which are considered to be crucial for school learning and adaptation.

This study also examines the sociological thesis that the educational failure of foreign and minority students is similar as the causes with the educational failure of lower social classes students (Dragona, Skourtou & Fragoudaki, 2001)

The study took place in May 2009 in Ioannina, Greece. The sample is composed of 25 students in fourth and fifth grade of an IPS and 25 students of a MPS. The MPS is also placed on the countryside and the majority of students are coming from rural population. The choice of the particular school is based mainly on the students’ social origins (natives and foreigners coming from labor classes).

At this point it is important to make clear that the size of the study’s sample is too small to lead us on reliable results. Therefore, our findings should be taken mostly as a starting point for a more extensive study.

We used “Athena Test – Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities” (Paraskevopoulos, Kalantziz-Azizi & Giannitsas, 1999) to investigate the students’ performances. Athena Test is an interdisciplinary test of internal assessment of individuals that presents the detailed current condition of a child in crucial sections of education. It has been created according to the prototype of diagnostic tests Aston Index and Illinois Test of Psycholinguistic Abilities – ITPA and includes 14 scales.

In the current study six scales of the test have been used in order to evaluate memory and linguistic abilities. The scales that have been used as tool to evaluate the students were: Memory of images, Completion of words, Completion of proposals, Distinction of graphs, Distinction of phonemes and Composition of phonemes. The total score that a child succeeds on the tests’ scales is transformed into two developmental indexes: the developmental age, that illustrate the level of a child’s development at the current time and the developmental quotient that indicates the rate of development and is expressed by an integer (single-digit or double-digit), with average price (10) (Paraskevopoulos, Kalantziz-Azizi & Giannitsas, 1999). For the comparison of the students’ performances this study uses the developmental quotient that the students have illustrated in each scale.

The type of the school class (Intercultural and Mainstream Primary School) has been considered as an independent variable. As dependent variables we considered the performances of students on the looking through scales of the Athena Test. The elaboration
of the data has been done by the statistical package SPSS 15.

Findings

Analyzing the results of the study we take the following data: At first, the scale “Memory of images” evaluates the capability of students to reproduce by memory, series of symbols – depictions, without a logical connection. The average of students’ developmental quotients is illustrated in figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The graph of the average developmental quotient for the scale Memory of Images for the students of Intercultural and the Mainstream School

By using the average scores of the above developmental quotients we can determine students’ level of development as well as the diagnostic category, in which students’ performance on the particular scale belongs. So, the students of the IPS with an average of 7.6 ± 1.7 have a lower – showing in deficit level of development and are placed among the diagnostic scale of students with marginally low performances. On the other hand, the students of the MPS with an average score of 8.6 ± 2.5 present a mean – normal level of development and a mean – lower performance.

The two following scales are referring to the ability of a child to utilize his linguistic experience as well as his surplus of language in completing blanks on linguistic material. This completion is an automatic procedure, which often takes place during the human communications. For instance in the occasions of faulty articulation, unclear telephone conversation, understand exotic pronunciation and so on.

Figure 2 below demonstrates the average of the developmental quotients for the scale “Completion of proposals” where the students must complete deficient linguistic types of proposals.
In this case, the difference of the average scores of the developmental quotient that the students have illustrated is very important. Specifically, the students of the IPS present lower – showing in deficit level of development and according to the average of the developmental quotients $7.6 \pm 2.0$ their performance can be characterized marginally low. On the other hand, the students of the MPS demonstrate an average developmental quotients $9.5 \pm 1.0$ which means that they have mean – normal level of development and their performances can be characterized as mean – mean performance.

Someone could easily claim that this difference was expected as long as this scale too is based on tests that demand a very good semantic and syntactic knowledge of language.

On the second scale “Completion of words” students are once again called to complete deficient linguistic types, but this time at word level. It is obvious for someone to understand from figure 3 that there is no statistically significant difference.

Figure 2. The graph of the average developmental quotient for the scale Completion of Proposals for the students of Intercultural and the Mainstream School

Figure 3. The graph of the average developmental quotient for the scale Completion of Words for the students of Intercultural and the Mainstream School
The average of students’ developmental quotients of the IPS reaches the level of 8.4 ± 2.8, while the students of the MPS illustrate an average 9.6 ± 2.4. The average of developmental quotients of students of the MPS on this scale is almost the same with the average that this group has presented on the sub-scale “Completion of sentences”. Students have the same mean –normal level of development, while their performance is again at mean level. However, students of IPS are falling short of students of MPS again. The average 8.4 ± 2.8 that they concentrate place them for another time among the diagnostic category that characterizes their performance marginal low and their level of development as lower – showing in deficit.

The next scale to be examined is the “Read – phonological awareness” scale. This scale concerns the level of awareness children have that speech – oral and written – can be broken down into individual acoustic and optical units: speech sounds – phonemes and graphs – letters. Three sub-scales have been comprehended: Distinction of graphs, Distinction of phonemes and Composition of phonemes.

On the “Distinction of graphs” scale children must observe carefully pairs of fake words and indicate the differences between the two words. They must either find the one or two letters that are different or the two letter that shift positions.

The findings of this scale show changes on the average scores (see figure 4). Students of IPS have an average of developmental quotient 10.4 ± 1.6 and students of MPS 10.7 ± 1.3. Taking in concern the standard deviations it is obvious that the small difference between the two groups is not statically significant.

**Figure 4. The graph of the average developmental quotient for the scale Distinction of Graphs for the students of Intercultural and the Mainstream School**
Using the average of the developmental quotients we can characterize both groups’ level of development as mean – normal and their performance as mean – higher performance. Students of IPS illustrate rather a mean than a lower performance on this scale.

The next sub-scale “Distinction of phonemes” present similar results. Now the children must not observe but hear different pairs of fake words and state whether the two words are the same or not. The child is facing on different direction so that is impossible to see examiners’ lips, excluding thus the possibility of reading lips.

The average scores of the developmental quotients are 9.6 ± 1.9 for the Mainstream and 9.2 ± 2 for the Intercultural Primary School and they have no statistically significant differences. Students of both groups belong on the mean performance category and their level of development is mean – normal.

As figure 5 illustrates both groups move one step downwards from mean – mean to mean – lower performance category.

**Figure 5. The graph of the average developmental quotient for the scale Distinction of Phonemes for the students of Intercultural and the Mainstream School**
Figure 6 shows the performances of students of both types of Primary Schools on the last scale “Composition of phonemes”.

**Figure 6. The graph of the average developmental quotient for the scale Composition of Phonemes for the students of Intercultural and the Mainstream School**

On this scale examiner successively pronounces phonemes of a word using natural pronunciation and keeping steady pace of two phonemes per second. Student must combine these phonemes and eventually find and state the seeking word. On the last evaluation scale students of MPS are still having a mean – normal level of development.
and their performance is mean – lower, according to their average of developmental quotients 9.1 ± 1.8. On the other hand students of IPS with average of developmental quotients 8.7 ± 1.8 have also mean – lower performance.

Conclusions

The statistical analyses revealed that the general performance of students of IPS is lower than the performance of students of MPS, in sections that are considered to be crucial for school learning and adaptation. Specifically, the performance of students of IPS varies between marginally low to mean – lower, in contrast with the performance of students of MPS who present mean performance in all the scales of evaluation.

More specific, on the scale “Memory of images”, that measures the ability of children to reproduce, by memory, series of images, the performance of students of Intercultural School is marginally low while students of Mainstream School have mean – lower. Even though the images are the same and make the semantic codification easier (that is they can name them easily) students of IPS could not properly use it on their advantage.

By examining the results of this scale we conclude that students of IPS present low levels of mnemonics development, which are crucial for the learning procedure and thus many questionings are emerged. However, in our days, Analytical Schedules in Greece focus mainly on boosting the critical abilities with the mnemonics development coming second (Voros, 2003; Grollios, 2003). That is a matter that the Greek educational system must take under consideration, regarding its effectiveness.

On the scales that evaluate students’ linguistic experience, IPS students have marginal low performances. In contrast, MPS students illustrate mean performance. Specifically, on both scales, “Completion of proposals” and “Completion of words”, where children must complete deficient linguistic types, proposals or words, the level of development of students of IPS can be characterized as lower – showing in deficit, while students of MPS have a mean – normal level of development. We can connect the low performances of students of Intercultural Primary School with the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), since these scales are directly connected with various semantics and syntactic abilities, and mostly with the understanding of difficult words.

The phonological / phonemic awareness obtained by children during their development (Chard & Dikson, 1999). It is a complicated procedure and many students have difficulties while trying obtain it. However, on the scale Read – phonological awareness of the Athena Test, the performance of both student groups is of mean level.

On the first scale, “Distinction of graphs”, both groups have mean performance. This can be explained by taking into consideration that the distinction of graphs can be done by using “physiognomic” – external characteristics rather than semantic. This, in connection with the fact that the given words are fake words, that is words without meaning, and so the students point out the differences on letters and phonemes without reading but only by observing and listening the words, may explain the good performance the students have illustrated.

However, a reasonable question has emerged: since this scale is based rather on external characteristics than on semantic elements, the students’ performances should have been over the mean performance. Nonetheless, the small size of the sample suggests more caution about this questioning.
On the last two scales, “Distinction of phonemes” and “Composition of phonemes”, we observe that both groups move down one step from mean – mean to mean – lower performance. The fact that the examiners pronounce the words to the students, in combination to the usage of many phonemes combinations, especially of acoustic related ones, like dental (τ, δ, θ) and palatal (κ, γ, χ) make these scales more difficult than the previous one.

Through the comparative possibilities the Athena Test give us, we find out that there is no difference between the students of the sample, regardless the class they are into, as far as the channel of communication is concerned. They use “acoustic – vocal” channel as well as “visual – kinetic” channel. That means that they can take information both visual and acoustic with the same facility.

We also found out that students of MPS record mean performance on the evaluation scales of the “automatic – holistic” mental level, which is the ability to perform mental operations subconsciously. On the other hand, all students of IPS were not able to organize their experiences on automatic level and thus they illustrate low performance. Both findings can be used to choose the appropriate teaching methods to educate foreign and native students.

The general conclusion that we came up analyzing this study’s findings is that students of IPS illustrated lower performances than the students of MPS. However, students of Mypical School did not manage to succeed higher than mean level performances. What these two groups of students have in common is that they come from families of lower social levels, and as many sociological studies claimed so far, that is a characteristic that connects the folk language and culture with low educational performances.

All findings considered, we argue that the advisability of IPS must be reconsidered, since, according to the present study, they have turned out to be low level schools and have failed to provide educational opportunities to their students. Furthermore, decision makers need to understand that Greek school must be adapted to the continuously shifting demographic and social conditions. More specifically, the school staff must be taught how to teach a type of student that differs from the “general type” of student, who comes from a middle class knowing one language and one culture, and for whom the educational system has been planed so far.

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