PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ORAL AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT IN THE GREEK EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract:

In this paper, we aim to investigate the attitudes of primary school teachers in Greece as far as oral and written language assessment is concerned. More specifically, the objectives of the research are to investigate a) the criteria according to which teachers assess their students' oral and written language, b) the emphasis they place on assessment and the errors they detect, c) the frequency with which they correct their students' oral errors and d) the frequency with which they correct the mistakes their students make in their writing. Quantitative questionnaire data were initially collected from teachers. Additionally, the qualitative data which were further collected via interviews allowed teachers to justify their questionnaire responses. Based on the research findings, the majority of the teachers claimed that, when they assess their students' work, the most important criterion is language effectiveness, that is how well their students use language to achieve specific communicative purposes, followed by acceptability. Moreover, it was found that they place greater weight on written language and take errors in their students' writings more seriously than oral errors. As far as error correction frequency is concerned, most participants stated that they often or always correct mistakes students make in language exercises more frequently than mistakes they identify in their students' oral or written responses to the teacher's questions or during their students' spontaneous oral language use and writing.

Keywords: oral errors, written errors, assessment, primary school teachers, attitudes

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1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, in the modern educational reality, oral and written language are the two main pillars on which a language lesson is structured. According to the current analytical curriculum for Primary Education in Greece (DEPPS & APS, 2003), the main purpose of a language lesson is to equip students with the necessary skills which will enable them to produce oral and written language efficiently and in a competent manner in various communicative contexts. Oral and written language should be assessed on the basis of the following criteria: the criterion of effectiveness –that is, if the communicative goals are achieved– and the criterion of acceptability –namely, the content's appropriateness in terms of form and structure (DEPPS & APS, 2003). Nevertheless, it is reasonable to wonder whether teachers' attitudes and the teaching practices they adopt are consistent with the fundamental principles that govern the curriculum. The present study is oriented towards this direction, as its main purpose is to investigate the attitudes of primary school teachers in Greece as far as oral and written language assessment is concerned.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Skills and Assessment: Speaking

In most educational systems, a text-centered/communicative approach is adopted in the design of school curricula. Oral and written language are at the core of language teaching. In line with the fundamental principles of the communicative approach, speech education –that is, the systematic and methodical development of oral language– enables students to present their daily experiences in class and to develop strategies which allow them to cope with various communicative situations and demands, both inside and outside the school environment (Schober, 2006). Cultivating students' oral language skills is also important for the development of their writing ones. Papadopoulou and Egglezou (2013) demonstrated that familiarising students –through discussions, dialogues and even fruitful debates– with oral language, and more specifically with the art of rhetoric, from an early age in primary school helps them to develop their critical thinking, to present their arguments persuasively and to produce correct and comprehensive written texts, according to the requirements and demands of various communicative settings.

Since 1982, in the Greek Analytical Curricula for the subject of language, emphasis has been placed on the development of students' oral skills –through activities which include announcements, narratives, descriptions, dialogues, discussions and dramatisations. Moreover, the aim is to engage students in text analysis. During the implementation of such activities students should be able to express themselves effortlessly and spontaneously as well as to participate in dialogues with their fellow-students and their teacher. After all, the development of an honest and democratic dialogue forms the basis for building a climate of trust and cooperation between the teacher and the students (Vougioukas, 1994). By the end of primary education, students

can handle oral language competently if they can: a) narrate an event or a personal experience, b) describe a person, object or situation, c) participate in a discussion or a dialogue and support their views and arguments, d) complete an assignment and present it to an audience (Baslis, 2006). Modern language textbooks contribute to the achievement of the afore-mentioned goals, as they include appropriate and relevant oral language activities with a clear and specific communicative purpose which is further in line with the genres covered in each textbook unit (Diakogiorgi *et al.*, 2019; Intzidis *et al.*, 2019; Iordanidou *et al.*, 2019).

Taking into account the objectives set in the Greek Analytical Curriculum for the subject of language, it would have been expected that oral and written language would occupy an equal place in the learning process. Nevertheless, the principles and aims of the curriculum are not fully met in practice, as oral language does not receive due attention. Indicatively, about 70-75% of the overall teaching time is taken up by teacher talk, while 80% of the oral language use in class is spent on questions, answers and comments on the students' answers (Vougioukas, 1994). This means that, out of the minimal time available to the students, its majority is spent on answering the teacher's questions. Moreover, it should be noted that the time teachers allocate to their students to provide their answers is also minimal and, in fact, if they do not respond immediately, teachers usually give the floor to a classmate (Vougioukas, 1994). However, and based on the findings of Dinas *et al.* (2006), teachers do not seem to agree with the priority given to written –over oral– language, as the majority of them do not believe that written language should be cultivated to a greater extent during language classes. On the other hand, they state that written language should be taught within the context of an autonomous teaching subject, a view which is in line with the principles of the traditional language teaching model, though.

There are many reasons for which oral language does not receive a more adequate treatment in class. First of all, children have already developed their oral language skills prior to attending school and, therefore, oral language is not systematically taught like written, which dominates the language lessons (Athanasiou, 1998). Another factor is the limited instructional/teaching time; teachers quite often resort to traditional teaching methods and focus on written language, as they are under pressure to cover the material outlined in the curriculum, a difficult task if one further considers the large number of students in a class (Vougioukas, 1994). Even when they attempt to focus on oral language use, this usually turns out to be occasional and superficial. Moreover, teachers' lack of experience, or even knowledge, in developing their students' oral language skills hinders their efforts to make them capable to cope with the demands of oral communication. Consequently, it is up to the teachers' discretion and their teaching skills to train their students in oral language education (Athanasiou, 1998). Finally, and despite any efforts that have been made to rationalise language didactics, the educational system itself seems to hinder the use of oral language. As early as first grade all the way through to students' admission to higher education, assessment is almost exclusively based on their performance on written tasks. Even for students who participate in the lessons and

express their opinions and knowledge orally, a low score in a written test/exam may determine and affect their overall progress and development (Baslis, 2006).

The greater weight which is generally placed on written language also explains the corresponding emphasis on the correction of writing –over oral– errors. During oral communication, any mistakes speakers make are rarely corrected by the interlocutors, especially if these do not affect comprehension (Valero *et al.*, 2008). Even if there are any misunderstandings, these can be easily resolved through clarifications or explanations. After all, the pace of oral language does not usually allow interruptions during which grammatical or expressive errors can be corrected. Even if the interlocutors observe any mistakes, it is highly unlikely that they will correct them either out of politeness or in order to avoid interruptions in speech.

In class, teachers are particularly flexible when they correct their students' spoken errors. Most of the time, though, the students' answers are almost exclusively assessed based on their content and very rarely on their structure and form. However, a shift towards modern methods and approaches is noticed among teachers recently as far as oral error correction is concerned. More specifically, teachers tend to be selective of the type of errors they correct for which they adopt implicit error correction techniques (Marmouta *et al.*, 2025). Despite the fact that teachers observe and correct spoken errors, they do not point them out or correct them to the same degree as writing ones (Athanasiou, 2000) which can be identified and recorded more easily. Data on writing errors could also create more favourable conditions for research. This may also be one of the reasons for which studies on students' spoken errors are limited in the Greek literature. Finally, we would like to note that the majority of the studies which examine students' spoken errors mainly refer to second/foreign language learning (Doughty & Long, 2003).

2.2 Language Skills and Assessment: Writing

Writing is undoubtedly a multidimensional and more demanding process than speaking, since it requires the activation of various mechanisms and skills, several of which are not innate but are acquired. For this reason, learning how to write primarily takes place in school. When children enter primary school, they only know how to handle oral language. The transition from oral to written language is often a difficult process. As soon as students are taught writing and reading –that is, literacy (Athanasiou, 1998)– they then move onto writing composition. According to the current Analytical Curriculum in Greece (DEPPS & APS, 2003), writing composition takes place in three stages: a) the pre-writing stage (during which the students organise their thoughts and arguments), b) the writing stage (during which they compose their texts) and finally c) the post-writing stage (during which they make all the necessary checks, modifications and improvements, so that the final product is considered effective and acceptable) (Fterniati, 2007). According to Spantidakis (2009) –while writing composition takes place– a primary school student has two interrelated but distinct roles; that of the secretary and that of the writer/author. As a secretary, the student should be able to handle efficiently all the motor-mechanical

functions of writing which are related to neat and well-presented handwriting, to keeping the proper spacing between words and to following any punctuation, accentuation and grammatical/syntactic rules. On the other hand, when students act as writers/authors, this role is more closely related to the content of the produced text. In such cases, cognitive and metacognitive skills are activated by the students who need to clarify the purpose for which they are writing the text and adapt their writing style according to the requirements and the type of readers to whom their text is addressed.

It is undeniable that writing skills are not acquired simply by following specific steps and instructions. When students practice writing, they need to be constantly, and not occasionally, exposed to various communicative situations. In other words, writing should be an integral part of the learning process and not an isolated and uncontextualised hourly assignment which is completed in school or set as homework. It must be clear that writing is, first of all, a spontaneous and effortless expression which always goes hand-in-hand with the respective communicative conventions (Kostouli, 1999; Minas, 2003). Writing should be perceived by the child as a natural extension of speaking. After all, the communicative approach stipulates that motivation for writing should arise from the students' real interests and needs (Schober, 2006).

Written language assessment, as promoted in the guides for the teaching of the subject of language, aligns with the principles of modern teaching and learning theories. In these guides, assessment is defined as "*a dialectical relationship*" which holds between "*the child*" and "*the object of*" their "*learning*" as well as between "*the educator*" and "*their pedagogical work*" (Karantzola *et al.*, 2019: 11). According to the current Analytical Curriculum in Greece DEPPS & APS, 2003), language assessment has drifted away from traditional methods, since it aims to improve –and not to control– the produced text (Iordanidou *et al.*, 2019). As far as the assessment criteria are concerned, the focus is on the language's effectiveness and acceptability. The effectiveness criterion refers to how well a student's language serves the communicative purpose for which it is uttered. The acceptability criterion, on the other hand, includes several levels, such as the content's appropriateness in terms of structure, wording, vocabulary, style, syntax, morphology, spelling and the overall appearance of the text (Diakogiorgi *et al.*, 2019; Iordanidou *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, when teachers tend to associate language errors mainly with spelling and grammatical-syntactic mistakes –and less frequently with lexical, semantic and systemic ones– (Oikonomakou, 2018; Marmouta, 2025), this also affects the view they take on writing error correction. In such cases, an utterance's grammaticality is based on the criterion of acceptability rather than the criterion of effectiveness.

Any difficulties and/or mistakes which are observed in students' writings are related to the form and content of the produced texts. These errors have been extensively investigated and are still under examination in several studies, as their identification and evaluation offer useful insights for the ways students compose their texts. Finally, writing errors should not only be treated as indicators of the students' language proficiency; rather they should be analysed as they often influence students' attitudes towards writing (Karakoli, 2016).

3. Material and Methods

In our study, we aim to investigate a) the criteria according to which primary school teachers in Greece assess their students' oral and written language, b) the emphasis they place on assessment and the errors they detect, c) the frequency with which they correct their students' oral errors and d) the frequency with which they correct the mistakes their students make in their writing.

3.1 Research Tools

Initially, an attitudinal structured questionnaire (Athanasiou, 2007) was designed and distributed to primary school teachers in Greece to investigate their attitudes a) towards oral and written language assessment as well as b) towards the mistakes their students make in their speaking and writing. The possible answers to each question were mainly presented in a Likert-scale format. Moreover, semi-structured interviews –with open and closed-ended questions– also served as a qualitative data collection tool in our study, as we aimed to invite the participating teachers to justify their questionnaire responses.

3.2 Sampling

As far as the quantitative research is concerned, the sample size was determined on the basis of a pilot study that had been previously conducted. After random sampling, 516 (N=516) teachers participated in the present study.

Although there are no strict rules that define the appropriate number of participants in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2019), in our case, two key indicators were utilised to determine the suitability of the sample size: the sample's degree of representativeness and the degree of data saturation (Creswell, 2016). Therefore, based on these two indicators and by using convenience sampling, 20 subjects (N=20) –out of the population of primary school teachers in Greece– were selected to participate in the interviews conducted. The teachers had also participated in the quantitative part of the study.

3.3 Data Analysis

The quantitative data –collected via the questionnaire– were extracted and organised using Microsoft Excel 2019. They were then coded and analysed with the statistical package SPSS ver. 26.0. On the basis of the statistical data processing and analysis, frequency tables –in which the descriptive statistical results of the research are shown– were constructed.

For the analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the method of thematic analysis was adopted. Thematic analysis includes the systematic identification, organisation and understanding of recurring patterns of meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Criteria in Oral and Written Language Assessment

The majority of the participants (71,79%) stated that, when they correct their students' language errors, effectiveness –that is, how well their students achieve the communicative goals– is the most important criterion, followed by acceptability (28,21%) (see Table 1).[ii]

Table 1: The most important criterion in oral and written language assessment

		Number	Percentage (%)
According to your opinion, what is the most important criterion in oral and written language assessment?	Acceptability, i.e., the appropriateness of the content in terms of form and structure.	145,00	28,21%
	Effectiveness, i.e., the achievement of the communicative goals.	369,00	71,79%

The teachers' preference over the criterion of effectiveness is mirrored in their interview claims, according to which the fundamental purpose for which either oral or written language is produced is to meet the needs of a specific communicative situation.

"I probably lean towards the second option –that is, how much it (language) achieves certain communicative purposes, that is, (how much it) is within the communicative situation and (how much) it can deal with it, so that the sender and the receiver understand the meanings, grasp the meanings and there is clear communication. (This applies) more so to the ages I teach." (Participant 3)

"I consider the communicative (criterion) more important. And this is because this is the goal of speech, (that is) the one who utters speech to (be able to) communicative correctly. That is why I believe this should also be our goal. Generally, (we should) focus more on conveying a right (clear) meaning, so that the student can use it for their communication… Even if mistakes are made in syntax or structure, if the meaning satisfies the goal of the use of language… For example, you use a sentence to say something. Even if the structure is incorrect, I believe, but you manage to achieve your goal –to ask, for instance, for something from someone and you succeed it– that is what matters. I think this should be the goal, even if there are errors in structure or syntax." (Participant 10)

Therefore, the quality and success of the produced outcome depend on whether it serves the communication purposes set each time. After all, students' language should be functional; first and foremost, they should be able to convey their messages and to

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[ii] Please note that any discrepancies between the number/percentage of participants presented in the tables and the sample's total number are due to the fact that not all participants answered all questions.

respond to various communicative situations, instead of simply producing utterances which meet all the criteria of form and structure.

4.2 Students' Errors in Speaking and Writing and the Teachers' Emphasis on Oral and Written Language

Despite the fact that the participants observe more mistakes in their students' oral language use (at a rate of 55,08%), the vast majority of them place greater weight on written language. They also take mistakes in their students' writings more seriously than their oral errors (Table 2).

Table 2: Students' errors in speaking/writing and
the teachers' emphasis on oral/written language

		Number	Percentage (%)
Do students make more speaking or writing errors?	Speaking errors	282,00	55,08%
	Writing errors	230,00	44,92%
Do you place greater weight on and take more seriously mistakes in your students' oral or written language?	Oral language	81,00	15,85%
	Written language	430,00	84,15%

In the qualitative part of the study, the participants were invited to justify their questionnaire responses. More specifically, they were asked whether and why they give greater weight on oral or written language errors. In what follows, we present some indicative responses.

"Both. But the ones that remain are the written ones. […] That is, in the flow of speech, we may make some oral mistakes but these disappear. Those that remain are the written ones because "scripta manent". When speaking, it is possible that we ourselves might not use the structure "Subject-Verb-Object" or we might make some slips of the tongue, some small mistakes." (Participant 6)

"Well. I give more weight on writing because speaking also involves spontaneity –it is a living organism. A child may hear something, something may distract their attention and so we ourselves, the educators, also make these mistakes. They are easier to be made anyway. Writing is what we give more importance to because, supposedly, the other (person) is sitting in the quiet of their home, writing, thinking, composing, correcting and deleting, so this mistake there carries more weight." (Participant 15)

"[…] Personally, as an educator, I also place greater weight on speaking and try to cultivate it but I know that children, in life, will mostly be assessed on their written language and for that reason, I place greater weight there (to writing). […]" (Participant 16)

"More so to the writing (errors). OK, in speaking, children have more freedom to express themselves and say something that is not conveyed, let's say, with such a big accuracy.

And I have also told them that speaking is more casual whereas writing carries the meaning of formal." (Participant 18)

Based on the participants responses, it seems that, first of all, it is easier to detect errors in students' writings, as these are recorded on paper and, therefore, they should be corrected immediately. Additionally, students have more time to process the text they produce and to correct their mistakes; hence writing errors are of greater significance. Furthermore, the teachers noted that written language is generally more difficult to be acquired than oral which is innate. Thus, written language needs to be taught systematically and any errors should be corrected. Another major reason for which the teachers claimed to prioritise the assessment of written over oral language is the overall nature of the learning process and that of assessment. According to the current educational system, students are assessed –almost exclusively– on the basis of their performance in written, rather than oral, tasks. Many teachers also mentioned in their responses that the pressure of both teaching time and curriculum content deprive them of the opportunity to dedicate time to the processing and management of oral errors. Finally, some teachers consider that written language is of greater importance and should be, therefore, treated with greater strictness. They further suggested that written error correction is more impersonal and distanced. On the other hand, they claim that, in oral language correction, teachers have to interrupt students, while they talk, to correct any errors. This might further bring students in a difficult and embarrassing position.

When the teachers were asked if the insufficient emphasis that is placed on the students' oral errors should change as a tactic and an attitude in the educational reality, they responded positively, as can be seen in the following excerpts.

"Yes, yes, I believe this thing. And already, let's say, I myself have been trying to do this in the last couple of years by collecting some of the mistakes that children make as a whole and by highlighting them in class. Because I see that, in the end, the opportunities children have to express themselves in writing are only found in a school setting, either in an exam or later in their adulthood when they have to fill out an application or write a document, etc. Whereas speaking, which we use daily and more frequently, is ultimately not cultivated as much as it should be. So definitely. This is my opinion, that we should focus on both, equally." (Participant 4)

"Yes, of course. Because the student must become a good listener but also a good speaker. If there isn't a great theoretical background, if there is a lack of vocabulary, if there isn't also enrichment in speaking, they cannot express themselves." (Participant 6)

"Yes, my opinion is that, yes, it should change but it is very difficult to change. It requires a lot of things to change. We, as educators, need to be convinced and informed through seminars or other means by experts about what we should do and what is correct. Because we cannot change this on our own." (Participant 7)

"Yes, yes. It should definitely change. But for this to change, some things in the structure of the curriculum and the overall learning process would also need to change. That is, when we are pressured by the amount of material, the management of time… Whereas if these things changed, then perhaps our engagement with oral language would also change. It would become more equal, I would say, to written language." (Participant 8)

As a matter of fact, teachers suggested that it is imperative for students to practice producing comprehensive oral language. However, despite their positive attitude towards the equal treatment of oral and written language, they still consider it a difficult task in the reality of the classroom. It would require several radical changes in the way the subject of language is currently taught; changes in the management of the curriculum content and the teaching time as well as in the structure and the content of the textbooks. Teachers would also have to receive the necessary training in oral language education and oral error management.

4.3 Correcting Students' Oral Errors

As far as error correction is concerned (Table 3), most of the subjects responded that they frequently correct mistakes students make when they provide an oral answer to a language exercise (50,68%). Moreover, they often correct mistakes found in their students' oral responses to a question asked by the teacher (46,6%). Finally, at a rate of 37,74%, they correct mistakes students make in spontaneous oral language use.

Table 3: Correcting students' oral errors

How often do you correct the following spoken errors?		Number	Percentage (%)
Errors in students' oral answers to a language exercise.	Never	3,00	0,58%
	Rarely	11,00	2,14%
	Sometimes	116,00	22,52%
	Often	261,00	50,68%
	Always	124,00	24,08%
Errors in students' replies to the teacher's questions.	Never	2,00	0,39%
	Rarely	35,00	6,80%
	Sometimes	158,00	30,68%
	Often	240,00	46,60%
	Always	80,00	15,53%
Errors in students' spontaneous oral language use.	Never	9,00	1,75%
	Rarely	67,00	13,04%
	Sometimes	183,00	35,60%
	Often	194,00	37,74%
	Always	61,00	11,87%

During the interviews that were carried out in our research, participants justified their tendency to correct –more frequently– the errors they observe in their students' oral answers to a language exercise or a question; in those cases, students respond to something very specific.

"I think I approach the last area (mistakes that are related to the oral answers students give to a language exercise/to students' replies to the teacher's questions/to students' spontaneous oral language use) with more leniency or flexibility and I place greater weight on the first two. And this because I try to emphasise, especially when it comes to answering a question, that we need to be more precise and specific. It depends on how detailed (we should be) because it is very important that the person asking the question understands from our answer that we have fully grasped the question. If we expand, let's say, too much or speak with difficulties, I believe that is an indication that we have not fully understood the conversation's objectives." (Participant 5)

"Perhaps when it comes to answering exercises, I give greater weight on mistakes because we want children to solidify a rule or a syntactic phenomenon, so in that case, I am stricter. In oral expression, I am not as strict." (Participant 8)

"The second, to the questions. Because I am telling you again. I'll give you an example. In history, when I ask something, unfortunately, the answers I receive are not the appropriate ones and I see that these same answers are also written down. And they do not constitute complete spoken or written language, so oral expression is lacking and this is also reflected in writing. So, there (in writing), that is... I focus more on the second." (Participant 2)

"Certainly not to spontaneous oral language, perhaps more to the questions I ask and the way children respond to me. There (On the answers) I think that I focus on more, there (on the answers). And I particularly insist –let me tell you more specifically– on some mistakes that children make with regard to the use of prepositions, for example: "anaferome ya (refer for) – anaferome se (refer in)". These (mistakes), that is, I pay more attention to, as children speak: syntactic, expressive mistakes while they are giving an answer. This is, I think, what I focus on more, there. To this (to mistakes). In spontaneous oral language, I do not intervene, to be honest." (Participant 4)

Consequently, teachers can focus more easily and judge in a rather objective manner what is right or wrong, compared to spontaneous oral language use which is more general and abstract. Furthermore, the students' answers offer valuable information to teachers with regard to the students' understanding of the grammatical phenomenon under examination or of the question that is being asked. Finally, many teachers noted that they observe serious errors (most commonly expressive, syntactical and content-related ones) in their students' oral responses. If these errors are not corrected, they could be potentially transferred to the students' spontaneous oral and written language use and, by extension, to the language they generally produce and also use in other school subjects.

4.4 Correcting Students' Errors in Written Language

With respect to writing errors, the participants responded in the following way, as shown in the results presented in Table 4. At a rate of 44,85%, the teachers always correct the mistakes students make when they provide written answers to a language exercise. Similarly, at a rate of 44,85%, they often correct mistakes they observe in their students' written responses to a critical question/text comprehension question. Finally, at a rate of 42,91%, they often correct mistakes they find in their students' free writings.

Table 4: Correcting students' errors in written language

How often do you correct the following errors in your students' written language?		Number	Percentage (%)
Errors in students' written answers to a language exercise.	Never	2,00	0,39%
	Rarely	3,00	0,58%
	Sometimes	52,00	10,10%
	Often	227,00	44,08%
	Always	231,00	44,85%
Errors in students' written answers to responses to a critical question/text comprehension question.	Never	3,00	0,58%
	Rarely	25,00	4,85%
	Sometimes	113,00	21,94%
	Often	231,00	44,85%
	Always	143,00	27,77%
Errors in students' spontaneous writing.	Never	5,00	0,97%
	Rarely	36,00	6,99%
	Sometimes	121,00	23,50%
	Often	221,00	42,91%
	Always	132,00	25,63%

According to the qualitative research findings, the participants explained that it is necessary to correct errors in language exercises, as reference is usually made to a specific grammatical phenomenon that has been taught, and, therefore, their students' answers reflect their understanding. For this reason, teachers should insist on correcting such exercises. Additionally, this type of exercises is assigned to students almost on a daily basis, so naturally mistakes are corrected with greater frequency, as revealed from the participants' interview responses.

> *"Errors should be also corrected in the exercises but in written texts, let's say, I wouldn't sit and mark the whole exercise book in red… […] But I focus more on the exercises. Because the exercise, when, let's say, I have to teach the past tense, yes that's where I will correct the mistake in the verb conjugation. Because they need to learn it. They must learn, for example, that the passive past tense in "-ika" must be written with "-i-" (eta) and so, if my student writes it to me with "-oi-" or "-i-" (yota), it must be necessarily corrected because through this specific exercise they must learn something specific. […]"*
> (Participant 12)

"When it comes to corrections, I insist more on exercises because they are more mechanical. It is an exercise, the student must provide an answer to specific things, choose their words and their answers... When we have more spontaneous language use, I don't want to restrict the children too much, because there are some who, afterwards, are afraid and they don't write. They think: "I'll make a mistake, I'll make a mistake, I'll make a mistake" and their expression is limited a lot, let's say. That's why. So, there, I encourage them to write or to ask anything they want, for example: "How is this written?". I encourage them, that is, to ask directly without thinking at that time. But I am stricter when we have exercises." (Participant 17)

However, the participants considered it equally imperative to correct the mistakes they observe in the students' written answers to various questions. This is due to the fact that it is often observed that students struggle to structure their speech and arguments and to provide a comprehensive answer that meets a question's requirements.

"I also give great importance to the questions. Because the fact that the children, after all, don't know, can't write in a complete meaningful way and make many mistakes make me wonder." (Participant 2)

"To answer a question correctly and to stay on topic and answer exactly what they should, (these) are, I think, very important. In free writing, a child starts somewhere and expresses their thoughts. But I've seen that children struggle a lot to give a precise answer to the question I make and to write exactly what they should write, without redundancies or without omissions. This, I pay more attention to this. And to writing but to a lesser extent, because there they don't face as many difficulties, this is easier for them. Although in the questions, many times, the child either goes off track or doesn't give a complete answer. There is a bit of a problem with that. And I place greater weight on it. That is, if you give them a paragraph and ask them something specific from it, the children can't express this thing. For example, when they write something extra (redundant), this is a mistake. You should answer the question precisely and they haven't learnt to read the question and to keep the question in mind at all times, they don't even read the prompt most of the times because they expect you to say it or to explain it to them. I say: "You will read the question and you will always have your minds there so that you don't go off track..." But they usually go off track, that is, they write extra (unnecessary things). This. This is at least what I've seen most of the times." (Participant 18)

Finally, the participants also emphasised the importance of correcting their students' spontaneous writings.

"I mainly place greater weight on the child's free writing. There (in free writing), many weaknesses that the child has in oral language are also evident. Through writing, you can also see the causes for which a child may or may not express themselves, many times, orally.

There are many problems that you can see through free writing and I mainly pay attention there (to free writing). There (On free writing), I also try to insist on from a teaching perspective. Because grammatical phenomena are more like norms, processes, that is, that children can absorb a rule and learn it, whereas in free writing –to be well-structured and a satisfactory result to be produced– a lot of work is needed and I believe that this is why I place greater attention there (to free writing)." (Participant 3)

"Look. I can say that I put greater weight on (writing) composition, when the child expresses themselves, because this is where their thought is expressed in a complete way. In an exercise again, they still provide a written response but there they will do something specific. Of course, I place greater weight on free writing because the subject of writing composition is written expression and at the same time there you can see the knowledge the student possesses, their language skills as well as their grammatical, syntactic skills and so on. Everything can be seen (become evident) there… And it is also shown whether their vocabulary is rich or not, there you can see if they engage with reading, if they have read books… All the above are shown. So that's where you place greater weight on." (Participant 13)

In those cases, teachers have the opportunity not only to evaluate the acceptability and the effectiveness of the students' produced work but also to discover various elements –i.e., language skills, lexical richness, deficiencies and weaknesses in linguistic expression– as far as their students' learning and development are concerned.

5. Conclusion

The first research question was related to the criterion according to which primary school teachers in Greece assess their students' language. In the quantitative study, the majority of the participants stated that the primary criterion is language effectiveness, that is, the degree to which specific communicative objectives are achieved, rather than language acceptability, the appropriateness of its form and structure, in other words. As a matter of fact, it is worth noting that the arguments the participants put forward in the interviews to justify their preference for the effectiveness criterion align completely with the principles of modern theories on language teaching as well as with the requirements of the current Analytical Curriculum (DEPPS & APS, 2003) which stipulates that student language assessment should be based on both its acceptability and effectiveness.

The purpose of the second research question was to examine a) whether teachers place greater weight on oral or written language and b) the mistakes they tend to correct more frequently. The findings of the quantitative study revealed that the vast majority of the participants place greater emphasis on and take more seriously students' written errors. Moreover, the qualitative results justified that written mistakes are corrected with greater frequency than oral ones, as the first can be spotted more easily by teachers. Additionally, the fact that priority is given to written language assessment is directly

linked to the general nature of assessment, according to which students' academic progress is primarily based on their performance in written tests. This is also supported in the literature (Baslis, 2006; Zarkogianni, 2016). Furthermore, several participants attributed their difficulty in processing and managing oral errors to the pressure of both the teaching time and the curriculum demands, a finding which is also confirmed in Vougioukas (1994). Finally, some participants expressed a tendency to place greater weight on written language and they also take written errors more seriously, as written language correction is more impersonal –compared to oral language correction during which teachers have to interrupt the students' mid-speech, something which might also potentially place them in an uncomfortable or awkward position. On the other hand, teachers were responded positively to the question of whether the lack of emphasis on oral errors should be reconsidered as an educational practice. This aligns with the findings of Dinas *et al.* (2006) who reported that, in their study, the majority of teachers disagreed with the view that written language should be cultivated more than spoken language in language teaching. Nevertheless, teachers described this shift as particularly challenging, as it would require radical changes in multiple aspects of language education and, crucially, in teacher training on oral language education. Teachers' lack of experience –or even lack of knowledge– in teaching and managing students' oral language has also been highlighted in Athanasiou (1998).

The third research question aimed to shed light on the frequency with which teachers correct oral errors identified in students' oral answers to a language exercise, oral responses to a teacher's question or spontaneous oral language use. Based on the questionnaire responses, it was found that the majority of the subjects tend to correct errors in exercises or responses to questions more frequently than errors in students' spontaneous oral language use. More specifically, the percentage of teachers who stated that they frequently correct errors in students' oral answers to exercises or to the teacher's questions was higher than the percentage of those who reported that they frequently correct errors in spontaneous oral language use. This result aligns with the findings reported in Alamri and Fawzi's (2016) study, in which most teachers stated that they usually correct students' oral errors. However, at the same time, a significant percentage admitted that they rarely do so, suggesting that teachers may either lack familiarity with oral language correction techniques or be unaware of the pedagogical significance and value of oral feedback.

Finally, we aimed to explore the emphasis on and the frequency with which teachers correct written language errors found in answers to language exercises, responses to questions and free writing. The results of the quantitative study revealed that teachers prioritise the correction of errors in language exercises, as the majority stated that they always correct such mistakes. Most participants reported that they frequently correct errors they identify in students' their written responses to questions and spontaneous writings.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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