



## L1 LESSON PLANNING: INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCES, PRACTICES, AND PERSPECTIVES OF GREEK TEACHERS

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### Abstract:

The aim of this research is to investigate the extent to which Greek primary school teachers plan the L1 (first language) lesson, the teaching approaches they use as well as the teachers' opinions regarding ways to strengthen the students' interest in the lesson. For this purpose, an individual questionnaire was created and distributed to teachers at primary schools in order to research the way in which they plan the L1 lesson and the criteria they use for the selection of the teaching objectives and teaching content. The analysis of the data obtained shows that teachers plan their lessons based on the everyday life and the needs of their students and, to a lesser extent, on the teaching objectives of the Curriculum. The inclusion of both their teaching identities and those of their students is considered an important factor in lesson planning. Digital literacy, constructive collaboration, interdisciplinarity and experiential learning emerge as crucial aspects that contribute to strengthening the students' involvement in language learning.

**Keywords:** lesson planning, language teaching, powerful teaching

### 1. Introduction

Within the framework of the subject area of the L1 (first language), teachers as lesson planners are called on to continually update and re-think their lesson preparation in a critical and creative way, delving ever more deeply into the principles of the pedagogies of literacies, the aim of which is to encourage the students' active participation in the

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teaching act and to prepare them for a future as well-informed citizens, with linguistic and meta-linguistic awareness (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2019).

Lesson planning, as a dynamic process, moves in parallel with the dominant pedagogical traditions. In the modern, multisemiotic world where students' socialization takes place beyond the narrow confines of the school and family, through their utilization of digital means, the act of teaching can function as both a springboard and a safety net for the individuals' desire for free, critical thought, autonomy, respect for democratic procedures, individual differentiations and, ultimately, the students' self-motivation (Biesta, 2015b). This, however, implies a continual redefining of lesson planning and educational practice as a whole. In this framework, the role of the teachers could bestow essential advantages on the whole endeavour, given their proximity to the school space, classroom discourse, and the functional variety of the school (Koutsogiannis, 2011). Teachers' views can make a constructive contribution to the dialogue on educational policy and lesson planning in general since their direct, lived experience, together with scientific research interests, constitute the foundation for the formation of democratic, reliable and composite forms of educational design (Haug & Mork, 2021; Hornberger & McKay, 2010; Koutsogiannis, 2017).

From this perspective, the main objectives of this study are the investigation of the extent to which Greek primary school teachers are involved in the planning process for the first L1 lesson, the design methodology they select and their views regarding the activation of the students' interest in language teaching in school.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Lesson Planning

Planning involves outlining a learning activity before its onset. Wherever the need arises to orchestrate a number of different resources for a class of students (e.g. teaching goals in the form of expected outcomes, teaching material, activities, teaching and assessment methods), lesson planning is always essential (Sanchez & Valcarcel, 1999). In other words, the planning is determined by the teachers' decisions regarding language teaching, specifically for a particular (hour-long or two hour) lesson or number of lessons in a given period of time and refers to the sum of the teacher's actions prior to teaching the lesson.

The importance of lesson planning had already been highlighted a number of decades ago since teaching is a composite and cognitively demanding activity that is based on the teachers' decision-making processes (Westerman, 1991; Wolff *et al.*, 2021), in order to realize the teaching goals without wasting time and effort, in an appropriate, controlled pedagogical environment that provides safety (Krepf & Kronig, 2022; Sardo-Brown, 1996).

In addition, planning is an essential aspect of the teaching process as the thoughts and decisions of the teacher (from either a short, mid-, or long-term perspective) determine the outcome of the lesson. For this reason, planning can be understood as a process of reshaping teaching through which the teacher shapes the students' learning

load in the form of objectives (e.g. knowledge, skills, attitudes), creates ideas for the educational content, plans the way the teaching will proceed in a particular lesson or period, selects the teaching material and corresponding activities, and comes up with ways to deal with potential problems (Richard & Renandya, 2002).

In addition, when different types of students meet in a learning environment, they are highly likely to shape the knowledge and skills that will determine the experience and the course of the teaching, a parameter teachers should consider during lesson preparation (Deocampo, 2020).

## **2.2 Fundamentals and Prerequisites of Language Teaching Design**

In every kind of lesson planning, the Curriculum constitutes one of the bases on which decisions regarding language teaching design rest. The L1 Curricula, as the base of short-term and mid-term language teaching design, is classified according to theoretical and epistemological approaches, the objectives of language teaching, the teaching methodology, and the evaluation of the factors contributing to the teaching process.

In the same way, the teacher's educational ideology and teaching identity also constitute foundations supporting decisions concerning language teaching design. If we consider language as a code and as bearing the load of social behaviour that represents norms regarding which linguistic behaviours are appropriate, then the policy that will determine educational design takes into account the political, economic, educational, historical and socio-cultural contexts of the social groups that determine the use of the language.

## **2.3 Problems in the Implementation of Planning for Language Teaching**

Teaching design, as mentioned above, is an essential and inextricable element of the teaching process. However, as a number of pieces of research have shown, a significant proportion of teachers do not implement systematic lesson planning prior to the lessons themselves, believing that lesson planning concerns trainee teachers or the teaching practice of new teachers conducting their teaching practice in professorial schools (Konig *et al.*, Richards & Renandya, 2002).

In addition, many Greek teachers rely on informal, unrecorded, limited, and incomplete planning in the form of fragmentary thoughts and ideas for some activities that will take place in a particular lesson in a specific class. At the same time, a significant number of teachers plan L1 lesson in a technocratic way, in other words, relying exclusively on the official Curriculum and the school textbooks, despite the essential steps that have been taken in recent years towards the adoption of teaching practices based on constructivist and communicative approaches, as well as on the principles of the text-centred approach and critical literacy: this tactic results in a) the restriction of the teacher's autonomy, and his/her implementation of predetermined teaching practices and objectives only (Deng, 2015) and b) student differentiation being overlooked (for example different experiences and cognitive level, other needs and interests, dissimilar learning style), and not taking the consequences of the rapid social and value system

changes in daily life into account, as well as the role of digital means as a regulatory factor that plays a catalytic role in determining the way in which students today interact and learn in their daily life (Koutsogiannis, 2017; Tsami *et al.*, 2016).

#### **2.4 Language Learning Design from the Perspective of Critical Constructive Didaktik**

The support of the school unit and solid knowledge of the educational content as components of lesson planning can allow teachers to recognise the needs and identities of their students and adapt their teaching accordingly. In this case, the teacher is believed to play a central role in decision-making regarding planning and carrying out the teaching since the selection of the educational content and the way it is organised is recontextualised according to the social and linguistic context and needs and characteristics of the students (Bernstein, 2000; Bladh *et al.*, 2018).

The investigation of the way in which the teachers in this study plan their language teaching is based on Critical Constructive Didaktik (Klafki, 1995; Klafki, 2000; Ryen, 2020). This theoretical framework is used in this study as a component that helps the teachers to critically interpret language teaching design beyond the predetermined objectives and contents of the Curriculum (Ryen, 2020). In addition, it highlights questions regarding the design of the L1 lesson, which are posed by the teacher and focus on the influence of the official school syllabus for language and the way certain educational principles can be applied in certain situations (Beck *et al.*, 2015) so that the students can cultivate skills beyond the purely linguistic, such as self-determination, cooperation, and solidarity (Klafki, 1995; Klafki, 2000; Sommer, 2014). For the above to be feasible, the teacher should select the appropriate examples based on educational content that links linguistic knowledge with *formal education* in a way that uses experiences, diversity, and different student identities. These correlations favour particular discourses and identities, highlight the close relationship of language as an educational commodity with the social landscape within the school classroom (Biesta, 2014; Cope *et al.*, 2018; Koutsogiannis *et al.*, 2015) and transform teaching into a specialised programme adapted to the needs and characteristics of the students (Hopmann, 2015).

Based on this, planning the L1 lesson, through the selection of the teaching goals, educational content, and finally teaching methodology, aims, among other things, to capture the interest of the students and activate their participation in the lesson, to help the students develop cognitive skills that will make them conscientious language scholars beyond the classroom, to cultivate in the students the skills of critical thinking and responsibility for themselves and their social surroundings and the potential to activate skills that help them to consciously develop their learning equipment (Bolitho, 2003; Vasquez-Levy, 2002; Koutsogiannis, 2017). In practical terms, this implies that the student develops linguistic awareness regarding the way in which language not only represents the world but, above all, creates power relations.

Within this framework, the role of the teacher is reshaped into that of a designer, as he/she selects which knowledge or values from the Curriculum are appropriate for

his/her students and finds alternative ways of dealing with the obstacles that are likely to emerge during teaching (Ryen, 2020; Westbury *et al.*, 2016).

### 3. Material and Methods

#### 3.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate the role that primary school teachers play concerning the way they plan the Teaching Units (TU) for the L1 lesson. In particular, the question that is posed concerns whether the teachers act as administrators of the predetermined aims and learning outcomes of the Curriculum or whether they take initiatives that make them the main shapers of the design and, by extension, the language teaching practice.

To answer our research aim, this research focuses on the following research questions:

- 1) What are the teachers' practices regarding the way they plan the L1 lesson?
- 2) What are the proposals they make so as to activate the interest and participation of the students?

#### 3.2. Methodology

To answer the research questions, an individual questionnaire was created and distributed to teachers (Bryman, 2017) in order to investigate the way in which they plan the TU of the L1 lesson and the criteria they use for the selection of the teaching objectives and lesson content (Klafki, 1995; Ryen, 2020; Sjostrom & Eilks, 2020) as well as the views they have shaped regarding how to activate the interest of the students in the L1 lesson. The questionnaire focused on questions investigating the extent to which the teachers in this research shape the language teaching content and the objectives with paradigmatic significance and adaptability to the identities, experiences, and characteristics of their students (Friesen, 2018). In this context, the questions that the teachers were called on to answer concerned the ways in which they prepared the TU for the L1 lesson at the level of target setting and selection of lesson content. For this reason, the questions focused on the degree of adherence they demonstrated to the Curriculum and the student's and teacher's book, the personal study and time spent on preparing the TU, the importance they attach to the needs and characteristics of their students, as factors that influence their design decisions and degree of attachment to earlier similar teaching.

The research was carried out from January to April 2023 using a questionnaire that contained 12 questions of both open and closed type for the collection of demographic data, 7 questions of a closed type regarding design practices and experiences the teachers use to determine teaching objectives and content ( this included 1 dichotomous question, 1 multiple choice question, and 5 ranking questions) and 4 questions to discover the teachers' views on improvements that could be made in teaching the L1 lesson and the activation of the students' interest (this consisted of 1 ranking question and 3 open type questions). A three-member committee of specialists (one a specialist in matters of

research methodology, one a specialist in educational design and one a specialist in matters of language teaching) assessed the research tool, and through their observations and comments, some necessary modifications and changes were made so as to ensure the validity, the effectiveness and the objectivity of the main research.

Before the research data were collected, a pilot application (implementation of the research tool) took place with two teachers and the tool underwent correction with the rephrasing of questions that were not clear to the teachers.

Descriptive and inductive statistical data analysis was conducted, and the Friedman test was used for the prioritisation of options/answers in the ranking questions (level of statistical significance  $\alpha=0.05$ , Software SPSS 21).

### 3.3. Research Sample

A random sample of 144 teachers in state primary schools, whose workplace and/or residence was in the boroughs of the Western Greece region took part in the research. Of those, 36 were men, and 108 were women.

In Table 1, the age group frequencies of the sample are presented, while the frequencies of the participants' level of studies are referred to in Table 2. Finally, Table 3 presents the distribution of teachers according to the class they taught in the school year 2022-2023 (the school year in which the research was carried out).

**Table 1:** Frequencies and Percentages of the Age Groups in the Research Sample (n=144)

Age group	Teachers (frequency/percentage)
20-29 years old	18 (12,5%)
30-39 years old	45 (31,3%)
40-49 years old	36 (25,0%)
50-59 years old	45 (31,3%)

**Table 2:** Frequencies of the Participants' Level of Studies (n=144)

Level of studies	Teachers (number)
Technical Educational Institute Graduate	15
Higher Educational Institute Graduate	75
Holder of a postgraduate title (Master)	45
Holder of a doctoral degree	9

**Table 3:** Distribution of Teachers by Class Year Group (n=144)

Class	Teachers (number)
1 <sup>st</sup> Grade	15
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	18
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	21
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	21
5 <sup>th</sup> Grade	27
6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	42

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Presentation of Results

All the teachers in the research replied that they planned all the TU. Almost half of the teachers (66, or 45%) study the official Curriculum in order to plan the TU for the language lesson. Correspondingly, however, a rather high percentage (36 teachers, in other words, 25.0%) state that they do not study it. It is characteristic that roughly 30% of the sample claim that they always study the teacher's book, and likewise, another 30% state that they refer to the teacher's book to a lesser degree. In addition, the majority of the teachers (96 teachers, 66.7%) study the school textbook. An important element that the research reveals is how most of the teachers (105 teachers, 72.9%) state that they carry out this study on a personal level, in various ways (like books, the internet, discussions with colleagues, discussions with the students, seminars), in order to prepare the lesson. Nevertheless, a number of teachers (61 teachers, 42.3%) state that they already have a plan for conducting the lesson, with reference to certain TU.

In terms of the teachers' criteria for ranking the objectives of the TU of the language lesson, the Friedman test revealed statistically significant differences ( $\chi^2(3) = 35,5; p < ,001$ ). In particular, the first criteria the teachers set when determining the teaching objectives, is the linking of the '*Curriculum targets*' with the '*learning profile and needs of the students*' and the linking of '*previous targets I have applied in the same teaching units*' with '*learning profile and students' needs*'. At the same time, the Friedman test revealed statistically significant differences in terms of the criteria with which the teachers define the teaching content of the TU of the language lesson ( $\chi^2(3) = 35,4; p < ,001$ ). The connection between '*Curriculum objectives*' and '*learning profile and needs of students*' as well as the connection between '*previous objectives they have applied in the same teaching units*' and '*learning profile and needs of students*' are the teachers' first criteria for defining the teaching content.

In addition, 87 teachers (60.4%) believe that students show a lot of, or always, interest in the language lesson. Moreover, the teachers think that the students' interest in the L1 lesson is activated through '*the use of digital and interactive tools*' (126 teachers, 87.5%), the '*collaborative/teamwork-real life activities*' (105 teachers, 72.9%), '*interdisciplinarity*' (96 teachers, 66.7%) followed by '*the use of contemporary texts with comprehensible examples in morphology and syntax*' (66 teachers, 45.8%).

Finally, the statistical analysis (Friedman test) revealed significant differences among the answers of the teachers among the parameters that concern the teaching of the language lesson ( $\chi^2(4) = 22,45; p < ,01$ ). More specifically, in the question regarding the changes required in terms of the teaching of the L1 lesson, the teachers ranked as first choice the '*correspondence of the teaching content with the students' daily life*', followed by the answers '*for the teacher to choose the objectives too, beyond those on the Curriculum*' and the '*teamwork amongst students in the lesson*'.

## 4.2. Discussion of the Results

Based on the findings, the answers to the research questions take shape as follows:

**Research question 1:** What are the teachers' practices regarding the way they plan the L1 lesson?

The findings reveal that the teachers wish to acquire and maintain their own teaching identity since in answer to the question '*What ways do you find help you more to plan the teaching unit of the Modern Greek lesson?*', they stated that they devote personal study to the planning of the language lesson, beyond the narrow limits of the Curriculum and the contents of the schoolbooks. This finding shows how the teachers in the sample want to determine the linguistic content themselves and to link it as much to their own teaching identities as to the characteristics of their students, away from the strict guidelines of the official schoolbooks and the Curriculum (Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Krapp, 2007). Preparation for the language lesson, making use of extracurricular books, the internet, and discussions with colleagues and students, demonstrates that the teachers search for opportunities to redesign the language lesson and learning, with the aim of motivating participation and activating the interest of the students (Inkinen *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, this finding, together with the finding that reveals that the teachers study the Curriculum in order to make planning decisions, demonstrates that the teachers would like to take on more interpretive roles in the face of the official guidelines of the Curriculum and not to follow them exclusively (Deng, 2021).

On the other hand, the findings show that some teachers have difficulty redesigning the TU, as they conduct their lessons based on previous similar TU. This finding bears witness to the difficulty some of the teachers face in accepting and applying updated approaches to lesson planning, most likely due to a lack of knowledge or weakness in managing language teaching practices of an interpretive and critical character, depending on the prevailing school context (Chlapoutaki, 2016). In addition, significant reliance on the student's and teacher's books bears witness to the degree of attachment to the Curriculum since a lot of teachers attempt to strike a balance between the quantifiable aims of the official educational policy and their professional ethics (O'Mara *et al.*, 2021).

What's more, the teachers in the research stated that the criteria with which they determine their linguistic objectives and the linguistic content of the TU, is based on a combination of the objectives and teaching content that the Curriculum lays out and the learning profile of the students as well as the combination of previous objectives and teaching content of the same TU, and the learning profile of the students in the current TU. These findings are in line with the answers that the teachers gave to the question on the ways that help them plan the TU and are telling of the dual character of their design practices. Hence, on the one hand, the teachers are aligned with previous planning decisions as well as with the official teaching objectives and contents, while on the other, they put forward the learning profile of their students as an important parameter in their planning tactics.



The contradiction that emerges is founded on the strong presence of the Curriculum and the schoolbook in the Greek Primary school, as the teaching of the language lesson often follows a grammar-centred approach that is not in line with either the current international bibliography or, even more so, with the current school context and student identities (Koutsogiannis, D. & Chatzikyriakou, I., 2018). However, the teachers in this research seem to recognise the needs of their students largely as a motivation for learning and a prerequisite in the planning of effective teaching in the framework of the different learning situations they teach in (Tokatlidou, 2004).

**Research question 2:** What proposals do the teachers make to activate the students' interest and participation?

Based on the findings, we observe that most teachers in the research (87.5%) take into serious consideration the extent and manner of the students' interaction with digital means across all aspects of their daily lives, both at school and outside of it. This reveals that the teachers are aware of the way in which the '*learning architectures and computer technologies*' affect learning and allow it to go beyond traditional teaching (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2013). In addition, this finding demonstrates the *movement* of the teachers in their search for learning sources that use and reinforce the students' digital identities while encouraging their active participation in the lesson since the utilization of technology and digital environments automatically turns the students into the leading actors in the learning process.

Planning based on collaborative and experiential learning is important for activating the students' interest, according to 72.9% of the teachers. This finding reveals the teachers' shift towards more student-centred planning approaches that make use of their experiences and identities and towards interactive and collaborative activities and the *opening* of the educational language content as an educational commodity with significance and meaning for the students (Klafki, 1995; Sjoström & Eilks, 2020). These views are in line with related studies (Mitsi, 2019; Maletskos, 2015; Pavlidou, 2017) on the Greek Primary school and demonstrate the need for change in the teachers' role in planning, in terms of the construction of language learning frameworks that favour real learning and the active participation of the students as conveyors of action and responsibility (Biesta, 2013; Biesta, 2015a).

In addition, in accordance with the previous findings, 66.7% of the teachers in the research are in favour of interdisciplinarity, while 45.8% are in favour of the use of contemporary texts as practices that can strengthen the students' interest in the language lesson. These answers indicate the teachers' shifts from the teacher-centred model to language teaching practices that incorporate interdisciplinarity, collaboration between teachers and students, as well as linking the lesson as much with daily life as with the texts that the students interact with outside the school classroom (Allen & Kendeou, 2024; Koutsogiannis *et al.*, 2015).

## 5. Recommendations

Another potential perspective of the research can be found in the investigation of the teacher's views on the training activities they have participated in, on matters of language planning and teaching, the degree of satisfaction with their participation in these and the suggestions they have in relation to the determination of educational powerful contents that help them design the L1 lesson better. The questions have a particular interest, and they would essentially complete the results of this research.

## 6. Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal that the design identities of the teachers tend to move away from the explicit, predetermined guidelines in the official Curriculum for the language lesson and are shaped based on the dialectic relationship of the Curriculum with the needs and characteristics of the students. Moreover, the intervention of the natural world in the school classroom through the approach to the students' daily life, and their digital, identities, real learning, and connection to the texts that the students interact with outside school are the fundamental axes of a new design perspective. The dialectic relationship of the objective side that has taken shape (defined language teaching goals and contents) and the subjective side (student and teacher identities, social and school context) of the Curricula may shift the centre of language teaching towards a search for a '*powerful*' language teaching content, that is determined through a reflective consideration of the official educational objectives and processes and the simultaneous adoption of alternative design and teaching decisions (Hordern *et al.*, 2021).

The teachers' autonomy in lesson planning and a focus on consulting both the Curriculum, the language learning practice, and the characteristics of the students may reshape the way in which the students understand their reality critically and interpretively as democratic citizens in a multi-semiotic reality (Forsyth, 2024; Klafki, 2000). In this case, the question that arises concerns which learning identities we want to favour and what kind of literacy we want for our students (Hordern & Brooks, 2023; Koutsogiannis, 2013). It is the teachers responsible for implementing the Curriculum and autonomous lesson planners who favour the creation of authentic and reflective learning, who are called on to answer these questions. So, continued teacher training on issues related to the choice of linguistic content and objectives that exemplify social reality and encourage the students to play a leading role in the lesson (Kress, 2009) is an important prerequisite for the updating of language planning and the shaping of new professional identities (Manolopoulos, 2015; Matalines, 2023). In this context, active participation and the utilization of the teachers' views and experiences as educational professionals, are very important for drawing up educational initiatives, decisions and effective teaching.

## Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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