

## Cypriot Teachers' Attitudes on Bilingualism

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### Abstract

*The present study focuses on bilingualism in the primary schools of Cyprus. A questionnaire was designed in order to investigate attitudes and beliefs of the primary school teachers towards multilingual children. 50 teachers in 52 primary schools participated in the study. The results showed that the teachers felt a) fear and concern for their own professional aptitudes to confront and deal with multilingual issues due to the lack of suitable training, and b) that the bilingual children should be integrated in the classrooms. In addition, the teachers felt that there is a lack of guidance, support, training and collaboration by the responsible authorities in Cyprus. In conclusion, the results of this study are precious for the planning of programs on education of bilingual/multilingual students and will serve as basis for the structure of a well formed training plan to assist teachers in their classrooms.*

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, Multilingualism, Integration, Attitudes, Education, Teacher training.

### 1. Introduction

Bilingualism is a relatively novel phenomenon in Cyprus, and is commonly associated with widespread immigration in the last twenty years. Consequently, many first generation bilingual children are now attending the public primary schools, in numbers which have been constantly rising in the past five years. At present about 11.7% of these pupils do not speak Greek as native speakers (Annual report of MOEC CY 2010) (Table 1).

**Table 1: Numbers and percentages of foreign pupils in Cyprus during the past five years:**

School year	Number of foreign pupils	Percentage (%)
2005-2006	3759	6.7
2006-2007	3951	7.3
2007-2008	4040	7.7
2008-2009	4605	9.0
2009-2010	5916	11.7

Bearing in mind that nowadays, society is becoming all the more multicultural, the Ministry of Education and Culture is obliged to approach the subject of multicultural education with great sensitivity as the changes from a monocultural society to a multicultural one has taken place in a very limited time frame. These rapid changes may possibly lead to a big gap in educational needs in the island's public schools. The teaching staff may be unaware of the specific needs of bilingual students in the mainstream classroom, they are possibly not specifically trained in this matter and there is no additional teaching staff or supplementary helpers in order to cater for the new conditions in the classrooms.

Moreover, this new situation required a readjustment of educational methods and a revision of teachers' attitudes on this issue. Many teachers feel fear of the unknown and even resentment, as they assume that multicultural students placed in their classroom may cause difficulties not only in the harmonization of the classroom work, but also on the basis of social acceptance, inclusion and racism.

In response to the changing social environment, both nationally and internationally, the Ministry of Education and Culture is promoting the implementation of educational measures and policies that will facilitate the smooth integration of groups from different cultural identities in a creative environment. The Department of Primary Education makes the appropriate provisions so that bilingual pupils are distributed evenly in schools and classrooms and that teachers can support their linguistic and cultural needs more effectively (Annual report of the government 2009).

As it is apparent from the aforementioned discussion multicultural education is currently emerging in Cyprus and is practiced in the form of various support measures. These measures aim to facilitate the learning of Greek as a second language and the integration of groups with different cultural identities. This Mainstreaming Program takes place in the normal classroom with native Greek-speaking pupils. In addition, a flexible system of intervention is applied within the ordinary classroom timetable which involves offering bilingual pupils intensive Greek language learning and specialized assistance according to their specific needs.

It is obvious that any definition of bilingualism must include both linguistic and cultural dimensions. Bilingual speakers, have an integrated whole linguistic system which is manifested in two languages. Each bilingual population is linguistically and culturally distinct. There are many situations which give rise to people learning two languages, but not necessarily all will become bilingual. The person needs to be in a situation where both languages are continually needed for effective living (Duncan, 1989). Thus, even though bilingualism is a natural phenomenon, it flourishes only under the right conditions. Most of the time, "immigration" symptoms are accompanied by attitudes both by the teachers and the system as a whole (DeMesquita & Drake, 1994; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). These attitudes are based mainly on presuppositions, on fear of the unknown, teacher self efficacy, negative attitudes and/or resentments. These attitudes can be significant determining factors for the effective inclusion and education of bilingual children. A previous study has shown that the participation of community members in school activities contributes positively to the linguistic or bilingual development of primary school children (Clyne, et al, 1994). The recognition of the influence of the children's reality, home and community life, on their academic performance is also stressed by supporters of antiracist education (*Synergies Sud-Est européen* n° 1 - 2008 pp. 73-83)

Furthermore, Tsiakalos (2000) claims, among other things, that in order to improve the lives and experiences of immigrants, we need to give them access to all social opportunities as well as to the political power necessary to actually obtain those goods. To this end, a fair and inclusive educational context of linguistic and cultural exchange can only function in a positive and empowering manner.

The aim of the present study is to investigate Cypriot teachers' attitudes, knowledge and experiences on bilingualism and the bilingual child. The study was conducted by the European University Speech Pathology Program in Cyprus, in cooperation with the 1<sup>st</sup> Psychiatric Clinic of the University of Athens School of Medicine. Researchers at the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Unit of the Community Mental Health Centre Byron-Kessariani, which is part of the University of Athens had conducted a previous study upon which the present study is based (Vlassopoulos & Rotsika, 2009).

#### **a. Theoretical/Methodological Framework**

Many studies have shown that these attitudes and beliefs play an important role in the practices implemented by the teachers in the classroom. Furthermore, with regard to bilingualism, teacher's knowledge and training could affect these attitudes positively.

Research in other countries has shown that there are a variety of methods that can be used to investigate attitudes and beliefs. It may be that these beliefs are not usually formal theories, but rather informal theories of learning and teaching (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997), which are often created based on the teachers' own experiences as learners.

Implicit philosophical questions concerning teaching and education, their role as teacher, and how this is best accomplished, as well as specific questions concerning non-typical populations, as one could describe bilingual students, seem to play an important role in teaching practice. However, teaching experience also influences the teachers' implicit beliefs. The interaction of all of these parameters is important in creating the knowledge-sharing environment, which constitutes the classroom. Teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy directly influence instructional behavior, which in turn, promote students outcomes and success (DeMesquita & Drake, 1994; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2001). Although in Cyprus such investigations are difficult to conduct, we considered this study a necessary first step in order to define and describe the 'problem' before recommending procedures to rectify or modify it. Thus one could say that this study is a necessary prerequisite in the long road to modification of a system, which allows its members to improvise, when faced with a new situation.

### 1. Methodology

52 teachers in 30 public schools in the greater area of Cyprus and 2 private schools in Nicosia completed a questionnaire consisting of 40 questions (Appendix). The questions consisted of statements, many of which were in the first person, where there were only two possible answers: **true** or **false**. For instance: "The teacher should be especially trained to deal with the bilingual child in the classroom" or "I don't know how to deal with these issues in my classroom". These questions were designed to investigate a variety of issues concerning teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge on bilingualism. Since the teachers' individual profiles may play an important role in their attitudes, the teachers were also required to give information concerning their gender, age, years of experience, educational accomplishments, knowledge of other languages, and whether they have bilingual children in their classrooms. The number of bilingual students was also an important factor. In some areas in Cyprus, bilingual children in the classroom may be as few as 0-2 in a class of 20, yet in other areas the vast majority of children may be bilingual or may have Greek as a second language. The questionnaire was created by the research team of 1st Department of Psychiatry, University of Athens, and has also been used by the Rainbow professional staff of the Department of Inclusion and Communication.

### 2. Procedure

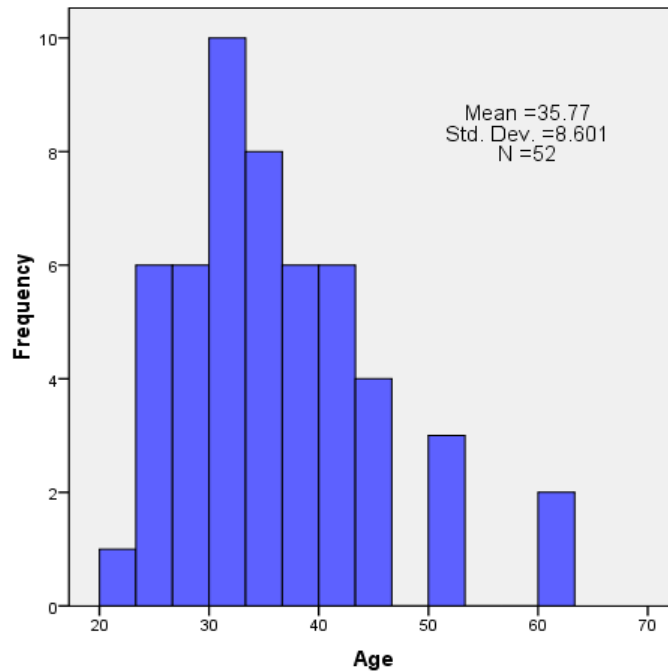
Before the study commenced, a special request form was completed in writing and submitted to the Ministry of Education, Pedagogical Institute, so as to get the permit to enter the public schools and give the survey to the primary teachers. The schools were then contacted through their principal via an information letter accompanied with the Ministry's approval. 90 questionnaires were distributed out of which 30 (27%) were not returned. 52 (46.8%) were correctly completed and 8 (7.2%) were not fully completed.

The data was analyzed with the statistical package SPSS-16.

### 3. Results

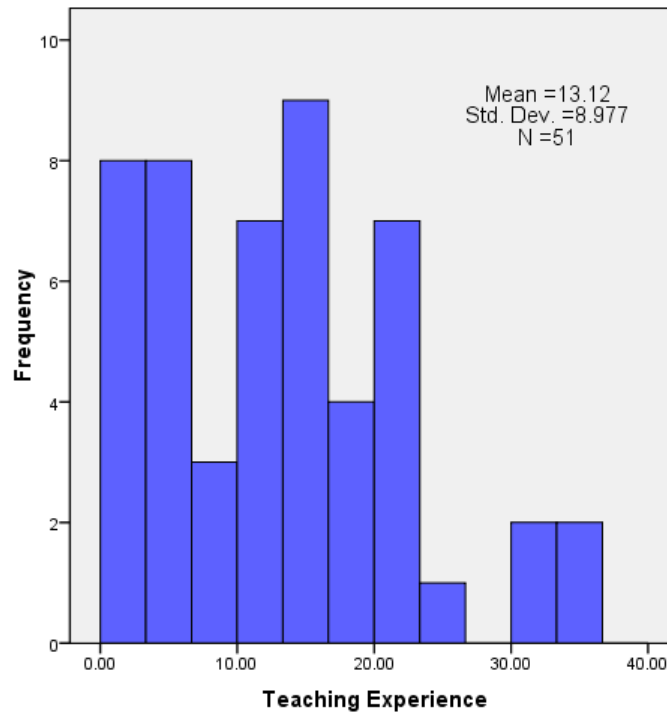
**Sample description:** The sample consists of the 52 primary school teachers who completed the questionnaire. The majority (N=45) of them (86.5%) were female, in contrast to only 7 male (13.5%). Most of the teachers worked in Nicosia, the capital area (N=37, 71.2%), and 15 teachers (28.8%) worked in Limassol. All the teachers, except one, reported that they were proficient in at least one foreign language, predominantly English. One can also note (even though not used for further analysis) that 17 of these teachers (32.7%) reported speaking at least one foreign language other than English.

The mean age of teachers at the time of the study was about 36 years old (SD=8.6), with the youngest teacher being 23 years old and the oldest one 60 years old. Figure 1 shows the distribution of their age.



**Figure 1: Distribution of teachers' age (in years)**

With regard to their teaching experience, the mean time was about 13 years (SD=8.9), and ranging from 1 to 36 years of teaching. The distribution of teaching experience is shown in Figure 2. As expected the age of the teachers was found to be strongly correlated with their teaching experience (Pearson coefficient=0.86,  $p < 0.001$ ).



**Figure 2: Distribution of teachers' teaching experience (in years)**

Grouping teaching experience into 3 categories, revealed that the teachers were equally spread into the 'lower' experience groups of "0 to 10 years" and "11 to 20 years" (N=21, 41.2% in each group), while 9 teachers (17.6%) belonged to the more experienced group with more than 20 years of teaching experience.

These teachers were responsible for 192/1092 (18%) bilingual students. This percentage was found to be higher than that normally reported in official statistics. The maximum reported number of bilingual students per class was 19. The mean number of children per class was approximately 21 (SD=15.4) with classes consisting of a minimum of 6 students to a maximum of 80. About half of these bilingual students were reported by their teachers to be from mixed marriages. Figure 3 shows how the ratio of bilingual students by total number of students in class was distributed, and indicates that even though the majority of classes had small proportions of bilingual students (less than 20%) there were also some classes with much higher proportions, even 100%. Further analysis was based on this classification (0-20%, more than 20%). This results in 37 classes (72.5%) of the sample with low proportions of bilingual students, and 14 of them (27.5%) with high ratio.

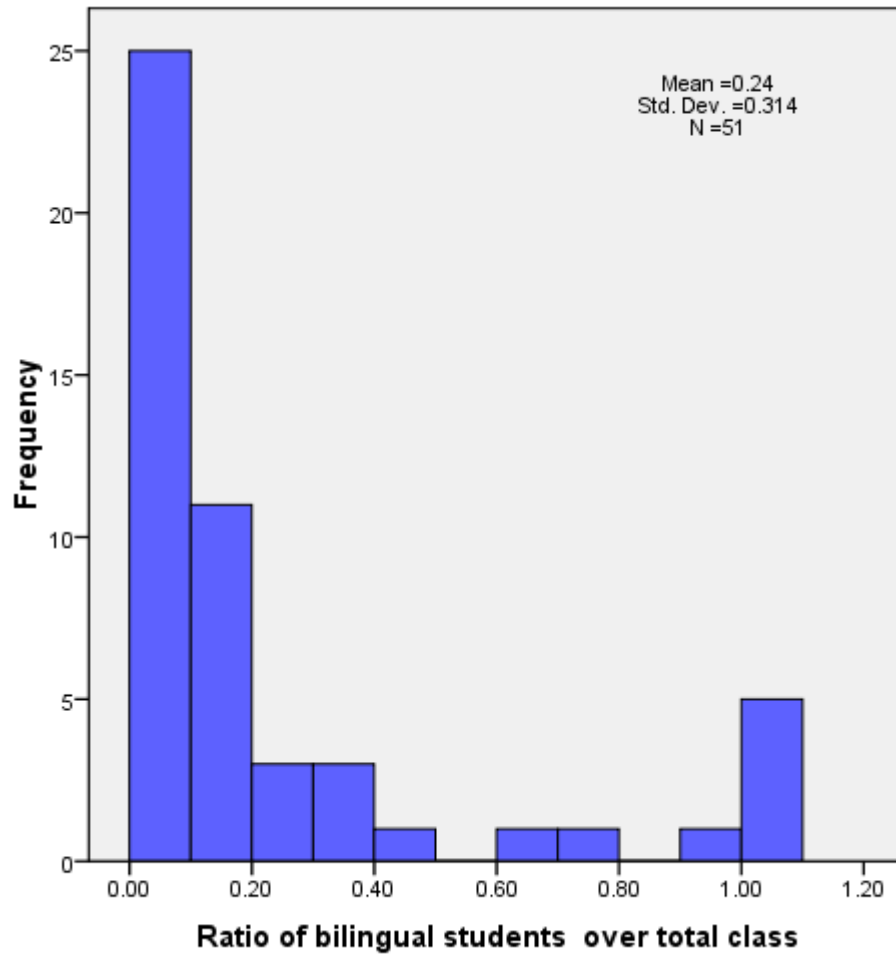


Figure 3: Distribution of the ratios of bilingual students/class size

**a. Teachers Perceptions**

The analysis of the data showed that the majority of the teachers had knowledge/ beliefs/ attitudes towards bilingualism which corresponded to the scientific facts about bilingualism (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997), even though none of these teachers had attended a seminar or any training concerning bilingualism.

The results of the analysis of teachers’ perceptions elicited by the questionnaire are presented under different thematic groups.

The first investigated topic concerns teachers’ perceptions about **the nature of bilingualism**. Teachers’ responses are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of teachers' agreement with statements about the nature of bilingualism**

Statements about the general topic of “what is bilingualism”	Agreement	
	Freq	%
1. A necessary requirement for a child to be characterised as bilingual is to have reached high level of competency of at least two languages.	30	57.7
2. A “truly” bilingual child is the one who grows up in a bilingual environment, that is his/her parents speak different languages.	39	75
3. A child is bilingual when s/he speaks at home a different language than the one spoken in school	29	55.8
4. A bilingual child may be exposed to two language environments at the same time, however does not necessarily speak both languages equally well.	42	80.8
5. A bilingual child speaks two languages equally well.	16	30.8

In Table 1, one can see that the majority of teachers (57.7%) agree that a necessary requirement for a child to be characterised as bilingual is to have reached a high level of competency of at least two languages, and about 56% think that a child is bilingual when s/he speaks at home a different language than the one spoken in school. Higher percentages of agreement appear for Items 2 and 4 (75% and 81% respectively). Hence teachers support the views that a “truly” bilingual child is the one who grows up in a bilingual environment (i.e. his/her parents speak different languages) and that a bilingual child may be exposed to two language environments at the same time, however s/he does not necessarily speak both languages equally well. The majority of teachers disagree with the view that a bilingual child speaks two languages equally well. In fact only 31% of them agree with this view.

Teachers' perceptions are also investigated with regards to their differentiation among different groups of interest. These are gender, teaching experience and the ratio of bilingual students in the reported classes. Table 2 shows the percentages of agreement with these statements (Items 1 to 5) for the different subgroups. The highlighted cells indicate statistically significant differentiations, based on chi-square test ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 2: Group differentiations of agreement with statements about the nature of bilingualism**

	Gender		Teaching Experience			Bilingual Ratio	
	Male	Female	0-10	11-20	Over 20	Low	High
1	14%	64%	62%	57%	56%	68%	36%
2	71	76	81	71	67	81	57
3	71	53	52	52	78	62	43
4	86	80	86	81	78	73	100
5	14	33	24	33	33	35	21

As can be seen, responses to Item 1 are statistically different between male and female, as well as for teachers of classes with low and high bilingual ratio. This means that female teachers and teachers of classes with low bilingual ratio, tend to agree more with the fact that “a necessary requirement for a child to be characterised as bilingual is to have reached high level of the use of at least two languages”. Another highlighted difference concerns Item 4, in which all the teachers of classes with a high proportion of bilingual students reported agreement, compared to a lower percentage reported by teacher of classes with lower ratio. In particular, the former group agrees in total that a bilingual child may be exposed to two language environments at the same time, however s/he does not necessarily speak both languages equally well.

The second topic concerns teachers' perceptions about **students' cognitive development and their schooling experience**. According to teachers' responses, it seems that the majority of teachers agree with the statements that denote a positive impact of bilingualism on students (note that these are highlighted in Table 3). Specifically, about 79% of teachers consider that not only bilingualism is an asset for the child's cognitive development (Item 6), but also it is associated with some students being more gifted (61.5%). Most of the teachers (about 56%) agree that bilingual students are not different from the rest, and finally consider these students' confusions to be natural (Item 20). The smaller percentages of agreement with the rest of the items, (apart from Item 25) indicate problems for students associated with bilingualism.

The results show that for most of these teachers these aspects are not considered problematic. Teachers mainly disagree that bilingualism can hinder the normal process of language learning, and that it is an obstacle, or associated with social aspects. However, we should also note that the results show a rather high percentage of agreement between teachers (46.4%) with the perception that “bilingual children often have more reading and writing difficulties compared to the rest of the class” (Item 18).

**Table 3: Summary of teachers’ agreement with statements about students’ cognitive development and their schooling experience in relation to bilingualism**

Statement	Agreement	
	Freq	%
6. Bilingualism can be an asset for the child’s cognitive development.	41	78.8
7. Bilingualism can hinder the normal language acquisition process	10	19.2
8. Some bilingual children are more gifted than monolingual children.	32	61.5
9. Bilingualism can be an obstacle to learning the language taught at school.	9	17.3
10. Bilingual children are no different from the rest children in the class.	29	55.8
11. Bilingual children often have lower self-esteem than other children.	12	23.1
12. Bilingual children are often shy than their peers.	10	19.2
13. Bilingual children are in disadvantage compared to the rest of the students.	10	19.2
14. The child who lives in a bilingual environment usually underperforms in both languages.	10	19.2
15. A young child should only be exposed to one language in order to learn it well.	9	17.3
16. A bilingual child is often born to immigrant parents, and consequently has social problems.	6	11.5
17. Bilingual children have difficulties/problems at school.	11	21.2
18. Bilingual children have more often reading and writing difficulties compared to the rest of the class.	24	46.2
19. The problems of bilingual children depend on which is the second language.	23	44.2
20. It is natural for a child to get confused when different languages are spoken at school and at home.	32	61.5
24. Bilingualism is of no particular benefit to the child.	2	3.8
25. It is better for a family to speak at home the language spoken at school.	18	34.6

Table 4 presents the percentages of agreement with these statements by the different groups of teachers, and highlights significant differences. Apart from significant differences at the 0.05 level (stronger emphasis), less significant differences are also highlighted (with lighter tones of grey) for the 0.1 level.

**Table 4: Group differentiations of agreement with statements about students’ cognitive development and their schooling experience, in relation to bilingualism**

	Gender		Teaching Experience			Bilingual Ratio	
	Male	Female	0-10	11-20	Over 20	Low	High
6	100%	76%	81%	76%	78%	76%	86%
7	29	18	14	9	56	19	21
8	86	58	67	57	56	57	71
9	14	18	9	14	44	22	7
10	29	60	48	57	67	65	36
11	14	24	19	24	33	27	14
12	29	18	9	24	33	22	14
13	14	20	9	14	56	24	7
14	29	18	19	9	44	24	7
15	29	16	9	19	33	19	14
16	0	13	9	9	22	13	7
17	0	24	14	14	56	24	14
18	43	47	29	52	78	54	29
19	43	44	38	48	44	43	43
20	71	60	48	71	67	59	64
24	0	4	0	0	22	5	0
25	14	38	33	33	44	38	29

The most significant differences for this group of statements are between different groups of teachers based on their experience. In most of these cases, there seems to be a ‘linear’ positive association, with teachers’ percentages of agreement to be increasing with the increase of teacher’s experience. These regards Items 9, 13, 17, 18 and less pronounced for E24. This indicates for example, that the more experienced the teacher, the more likely s/he is to believe that bilingual students are disadvantaged or have more often reading and writing difficulties compared to their classmates. A final note for this table, regarding Item 19 (“The problems of bilingual children depend on which is the second language”) which seems to have the most uniform responses among the investigated groups.

Table 5 summarises the responses of the teachers in statements relevant to **teaching-related perceptions** regarding bilingualism.

**Table 5: Summary of teachers’ agreement with statements about teaching related perceptions of bilingualism**

Statement	Agreement	
	Freq	%
<b>General beliefs about teaching and bilingualism:</b>		
21. Teachers should be specially trained in order to teach bilingual pupils.	31	59.6
22. Bilingualism is a challenge for teachers.	47	90.4
23. Bilingual students have different educational needs than monolingual ones.	27	51.9
<b>Perceptions about own capabilities:</b>		
26. I am not competent enough to help bilingual students.	15	28.8
27. I am not adequately knowledgeable about bilingualism.	34	65.4
28. I do not know how to deal with issues relevant to bilingualism in my class.	15	28.8
29. When a bilingual child has a problem, I do not know where to seek help.	25	48.1
<b>Attitudes related to parents/family of students</b>		
30. I am interested in finding out which is the child’s home language.	48	92.3
31. I usually urge the parents of bilingual children to speak to their children in Greek at home.	19	36.5
32. I usually advise the parents of bilingual children with problems to see professionals.	28	53.8
33. I cannot usually communicate with the bilingual children’s parents	14	26.9
<b>Teaching own practices:</b>		
34. I am usually “more lenient” with bilingual students.	33	63.5
35. I usually take into consideration the linguistic and educational needs of bilingual children in my teaching practice.	49	94.2

As shown in Table 5, the teaching-related perceptions can further be categorised into more specific themes. The first theme involves general beliefs about teaching and its relation to bilingualism. The majority of the teachers (over 90%) consider bilingualism to be a challenge for teaching. They also tend to agree that bilingual students have different educational needs (52%) and that teachers should be specifically trained to teach bilingual students (almost 60%). With regards to their own capabilities to teach bilingual students, most of them feel capable and comfortable dealing with issues related to bilingualism (given the low percentages of agreement with Items 26 and 28). However, a high percentage of these teachers also reported that they do not feel knowledgeable enough about the topic (65% agreement in Item 27). As far as issues regarding parents-teachers relations, the vast majority of teachers (more than 92%) expressed interest in finding out about the child’s home language, when just about a quarter of the teachers (27%) reported that they cannot communicate with the bilingual children’s parents. A high percentage (about 54%) also reported that they usually advise the parents of bilingual children with problems to see other professionals. A less frequent attitude (only 36.5% of the teachers agreed) involves urging the parents of bilingual children to speak to their children in Greek at home. With regards to teaching practice, almost all the teachers (94.2%) reported that they take into consideration the linguistic and educational needs of bilingual children in their teaching. Moreover, a considerable 63.5% of the teachers expressed the view that they are usually “more lenient” with bilingual students.



Table 6 presents the percentages of agreement with these statements

**Table 6: Group differentiations of agreement with statements about teaching related perceptions of bilingualism**

	Gender		Teaching Experience			Bilingual Ratio	
	Male	Female	0-10	11-20	Over 20	Low	High
21	43%	62%	48%	62%	78%	65%	50%
22	100	89	90	86	100	89	93
23	43	53	62	43	56	51	50
26	14	31	5	43	56	38	7
27	57	67	62	57	89	73	43
28	14	31	5	38	56	40	0
29	14	53	48	38	78	57	21
30	100	91	95	86	100	89	100
31	14	40	33	24	78	29	40
32	29	58	57	57	44	68	21
33	14	29	19	33	33	30	21
34	67	43	67	57	78	62	64
35	86	96	95	90	100	95	93

Significant differences appear between the responses of teachers of low and high bilingual ratios for statements about their own capabilities of teaching those students (Items 26 to 29). All these differences imply that the teachers of classes with a high ratio of bilingual students of this sample, expressed significantly more positive perceptions about their own skills to teach these students. They also tend less frequently to advise parents to seek professional help from other specialties (Item 32) probably because of the confidence they feel in their own capabilities. Other differences highlighted are relevant to teaching experience: the more experience the teacher has, the more likely it is for them to report that they are not suitable for teaching bilingual students (E26) and that they don't know how to deal with issues relevant to bilingualism.

The final topic investigates teachers' perceptions about the **educational system**. These are summarised in Table 7.

**Table 7: Summary of teachers' agreement with statements about the educational system in relation to bilingualism**

Items	Agreement	
	Freq	%
36. The school curriculum would be easier to carry out if all of the children were monolingual.	14	26.9
37. The educational system is obliged to incorporate bilingual children.	51	98.1
38. Equal opportunities should be given to all children, regardless of their linguistic background.	52	100
39. With appropriate educational approaches, bilingual students will have the same progress as the rest.	51	98.1
40. Bilingualism should not be considered as a problem.	52	100

According to teachers' responses to the above statements, the majority of them seem to have perceptions in favour of inclusion and incorporation of bilingual students into the educational system (as justified with the very high percentages of agreement to Items 37 to 40). A final note regarding Item 36 ("the school curriculum would be easier to carry out if all of the children were monolingual") which is endorsed by 27% of the teachers. Agreement with this, however, seem to be differentiate by gender (women are more likely to agree), teaching experience (increasing with experience) and is also more associated with teachers of classes with low bilingual ratio (as indicated in Table 8).

**Table 8: Group differentiations of agreement with statements about teaching related perceptions of bilingualism**

	Gender		Teaching Experience			Bilingual Ratio	
	Male	Female	0-10	11-20	Over 20	Low	High
<b>36</b>	0%	31%	9%	29%	68%	35%	7%
<b>37</b>	100	98	100	95	100	97	100
<b>38</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<b>39</b>	86	100	95	100	100	100	93

### 1. Summary of Results

Analysis was based on a sample of 52 primary school teachers, the majority of whom were female (86.5%). The mean age of teachers was about 36 years old and the mean teaching experience 13 years. The teachers were equally spread into the 'lower' experience groups of "0 to 10 years" and "11 to 20 years" (N=21, 41.2% in each group), while 9 teachers (17.6%) belonged to the more experienced group with more than 20 years of teaching experience. These teachers were responsible for 192/1092 (18%) bilingual students, a percentage higher than the normally reported in official statistics. Further analysis of teachers' responses is also based on the ratio of bilingual students per class and its classification between low and high (0-20%, more than 20%, respectively). This results in 37 classes (72.5%) of the sample with low proportions of bilingual students, and 14 of them (27.5%) with high ratio.

Results are reported in regards to the following themes of teachers' perceptions about: the nature of bilingualism, students' cognitive development and their schooling experience, the educational system and teaching-related perceptions in connection to bilingualism. In all cases, the frequency and percentages of teachers' agreement with the relevant statements are presented. In addition the distribution of teachers' responses is also presented based on the various teachers' characteristics (gender and teaching experience) as well as based on class characteristics (the ratio of bilingual students). Statistically significant differences are also reported.

### 2. Discussion

The present study investigates Cypriot teachers' attitudes, knowledge and experience concerning bilingual children. As in many other European countries the influx of immigrants has been noteworthy over the last ten years in particular and since teachers are in a vital position to witness these transitions, our aim was to investigate the level of their knowledge on this subject, their perceptions and attitudes towards bilingual children and their specific experiences in this area. It is interesting to note that all 52 of the participants in the study had never attended a course on bilingualism and how to incorporate a child whose first language is not Greek in the mainstream classroom. Nevertheless it was found that most of the teachers had adequate knowledge about the factors involved in bilingualism.

With respect to the teachers' perceptions about whether or not bilingual students are in a disadvantageous position than their monolingual peers within the educational system, the participants of this study consider that bilingualism is an asset for cognitive development and they do not generally observe social or emotional disadvantages, that is, that the bilingual student is more reserved, had lower self-confidence or other social problems. On the contrary most do not consider that bilingualism is an obstacle, nor that they have difficulties or problems at school. However, about half of the teachers believe that bilingual children are more likely to have reading and writing problems than their monolingual peers.

The more experienced the teacher the more likely is s/he to feel that bilingual students are at a disadvantage educationally, which seems to indicate that the more positive attitudes and beliefs of the younger age groups in possibly due to a more romantic or utopic attitude to education. This finding is reinforced by that of Garcia-Nevarez, Stafford, & Arias (2005) who found that teachers with seven or more years of teaching were more likely to develop negative attitudes toward their students' native language because they had to modify curricula to meet student's needs. In our study the question of how to deal with this new situation and techniques which can be used by the teacher in the classroom are of vital interest. The belief that bilingual children's problems are correlated to "which is the other language", which almost half the teachers agreed to, is an interesting finding which needs further investigation.

On the other hand, although most teachers were interested in finding out about the child's home language, one teacher in three advised the parents to speak Greek at home. As noted by Karabenick & Noda (2004), promoting native language learning is important for second language learners and this in turn promotes success in school.

The Cypriot teachers who participated in our study felt that they were not knowledgeable enough concerning bilingualism and that they did not have adequate resources. On the other hand, they felt it was their duty to respond to the challenge of bilingualism in the classroom and that they were responding on the whole adequately to the challenge. A survey conducted by Monsivais (1990) with 156 teachers teaching in elementary bilingual classrooms revealed that only 34% out of the 75% working in these classrooms felt prepared to teach language minority students, many reported that they felt they had "overcrowded" classrooms and 51% said they would leave the profession in the next 5 years. Mainstream/classroom teachers are significantly less confident about teaching bilingual children and are not prepared for the special needs and complexities of fairly and appropriately assessing second language learners (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Lenski et al., 2006). Flores (2001) explored in-service bilingual education teachers' beliefs about the nature of knowledge and reinforced that teaching practice is influenced by the quality of teacher preparation. The alternatively certified teachers in the study reported a sense of powerlessness to change the status quo within the school system and felt inadequately prepared to work with students. Lee & Oxelson (2006) and Ramos (2001) underlined that the nature of teacher training and professional experience with languages other than English significantly affects their attitude toward native language maintenance and bilingualism.

Finally, although many studies have documented teachers' negative perceptions and the impact on the bilingual student in the classroom (Byrnes, Kiger & Manning, 1996,1997; Walker, Shafer, & Liams, 2004; Youngs & Youngs, 2001), our study has shown that although Cypriot teachers are concerned about the influx of bilingual children in their classrooms, and feel that they are not adequately prepared or trained for this new situation, they appear to be challenged by it and are on the whole have positive views.

### **1. Conclusions**

To promote personal efficacy among practicing teachers, schools must create a supportive climate for teachers where "they perceive that their colleagues set high but achievable goals, create an orderly and serious environment, and respect academic excellence" (Hoy and Woolfolk, 1993, p.365). As a result of this survey one can claim that teachers with bilingual credentials are stronger advocates for bilingual education which emphasizes on the effectiveness of native language instruction, and are more likely to believe in their competence to teach multilingual classrooms. Karabenick & Noda (2004) study confirmed that the bilingual teachers' level of confidence in their responsibility for positive and negative outcomes in bilingual students is strongly related to their perceptions of these. Thus in order to have a harmoniously working efficient school system in our multicultural schools we need to address all these issues.

Multicultural education is currently being practiced in Cyprus in the form of various support measures. These can be categorized as measure for language support, which refer to the learning of Greek as a second language and measures for facilitating the smooth integration of groups with different cultural identities. The model that is currently being used is the mainstreaming program in which bilingual pupils participate in the classrooms along with the native Greek-speaking pupils. A flexible system of intervention within the ordinary timetable exists. This involves placing the bilingual pupils in a separate class for some hours of the week, for intensive learning of the Greek language and specialized assistance according to their specific needs.

The issue of multicultural education is relatively new in Cypriot schools and society, so that the Department of Primary Education (DPE) has promoted forward several cultural measures to promote multicultural awareness. The DPE has provided all schools with educational material, which includes books for the teaching of the Greek language, activity and exercise books, as well as teachers' books with methodological instructions and a variety of suggestions for activities, of mainly communicative character. The DPE has realized the need to provide teachers with the opportunity to further develop their learning and teaching approaches to all children. Within the context, it organizes in-service training seminars and conferences to teachers who teach bilingual pupils. The Ministry of Education and Culture has understood the importance of catering with this multicultural population and developed specialized programs to promote multicultural awareness, and understanding differences both on the social as well as the communication domains.

Within this dynamic framework, teachers will feel empowered and knowledge as well as experience will promote even more positive attitudes towards the challenges of multicultural education.

In conclusion proposals arising from this study are as follows:

- Teachers' additional training for bilingual/bicultural issues should be compulsory universally and should take place prior to the opening of the school academic year.
- The promotion of a more holistic approach which will raise awareness of the advantages of bilingualism /biculturalism in the school system and allow the teacher to discern how this will be an advantage not only to the narrow confines of the class, but to society as a whole.
- On-going support for the schools and the teachers must be built into the system so that problems arising from multicultural issues are dealt with in a comprehensive manner.
- More bilingual teachers should be employed in schools and an effort should be made for a differentiation or modification of teaching techniques, as well as of the school curriculum for the bilingual pupil.

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APPENDIX

**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Number of Students in class	51	6.00	80.00	1092.00	21.4118	15.44691
Number of Bilingual Students	51	.00	19.00	197.00	3.8627	4.31750
Number from mixed marriages	48	.00	12.00	101.00	2.1042	2.53687
Valid N (listwise)	48					

**BilingRatio**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low (up to 20%)	37	71.2	72.5	72.5
	High (more than 20%)	14	26.9	27.5	100.0
	Total	51	98.1	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.9		
Total		52	100.0		

