Teaching Dictionary — Using Strategies in Primary Educational System:

An Empirical Research

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to present, at first, on a theoretical level, the main reasons, for which the pedagogical dictionary can be used as a vocabulary learning strategy by the students/learners of a language as a mother tongue or as a second/foreign language (L2/FL). Towards this direction, not only should the educational systems adopt methods and techniques for the cultivation of strategic uses of the dictionary, but also teachers have to educate students on how to use dictionaries in an effective way through activities and special exercises connected to their use. Secondly, on an empirical level, we detect the attitudes, the views and the behaviors of the students who attend primary schools throughout Greece and particularly in Thrace, as far as the use of dictionaries by them is concerned. Also, another goal is to examine the reasons for using a dictionary, the ways of teaching students how to use them, and finally the contribution of a dictionary to the vocabulary enrichment and cultivation of language expressions.

Key words: pedagogical dictionary, vocabulary learning strategies, dictionary use, empirical research

1. Introduction

The need of the dictionary is considered imperative, both for students and teachers, in order to be used during any language teaching. It is considered to be one of the most basic vocabulary learning strategies. In order to make an effective use of it, students need to practice specific strategies/techniques so as to be able to handle it correctly, to find the words they are looking for and to incorporate them into their speech. In this case, dictionary could become the most accessible and useful means of learning. Therefore, in the present paper, dictionary using skills and strategies are described, in order to examine how to make the dictionary an advantage throughout the educational practice, contributing to the vocabulary enrichment and the cultivation of students' linguistic expression. Finally, we present our research findings about the attitudes, the views and the behaviors of the students who attend primary schools throughout Greece and particularly in Thrace, as far as the use of dictionaries by the need of the dictionary is considered imperative, both for students and teachers, in order to be used during them is concerned.

2. Using Dictionaries in Primary Education

According to the conclusions of theoretical studies and empirical research of educational lexicography, the dictionary is considered to be a valuable as well as a necessary guide throughout the receptive and productive

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language process, with undeniable pedagogical, linguistic and educational value. A dictionary can be used in multiple ways, in order to cover various needs. We believe that its most important purpose can be described as an auxiliary lingual tool in the teaching process of any module. This functional property aims to inform students on its usage. This can be achieved by a) receptive use and b) productive use. Several researchers (Scholfield, 1999, pp. 50–51; Rundell, 1999, pp. 30–31; Nation, 2001, p. 181) developed these two ways in their desire to highlight the complex nature of the dictionary and the prospects it provides for the user.

Students use the dictionary in a receptive/perceptive way, when, during the reading of a text or engagement in verbal conversations, come across words unknown to them. In order to verify the meaning, they search a dictionary's lemmas and collect the information necessary to overcome this semantic obstacle and continue their reading conveniently. Furthermore, they can refer to the dictionary to find a definition that they may partially know, or to confirm their suspicions about the meaning of a word through its context (Efthimiou, 2009, pp. 802–803). It's easier to use a dictionary for texts, since it's immediate and time-saving, which isn't the case for verbal speech.

Students can also use the dictionary to draw information concerning the grammatical use of words, their form, as well as their syntactical nature. They learn the lingual environment a particular word belongs to and utilize them in sentences by choosing the correct syntactical structures. Figuring out a word's spelling and accent enables the students to use it correctly later. Additionally, they collect information on their conceptual relations, their factual dimensions, the dialectical limitations and the connections with other words from the same conceptual group. Therefore, by using a dictionary, students can overcome their issues with understanding text, expand their vocabulary by learning new words and acquire knowledge over various lingual levels. By researching and contemplating the meaning of words on their own, students acquire a deep and thorough knowledge of these words and their properties (Scholfield, 1999, p. 28).

The second basic way to use a dictionary is considered to be the productive use. The productive use refers to the production of verbal or written speech by the students and aims to enhance their lingual expression (Scholfield, 1999, p. 13; Nation, 2001, p. 181; Gavriilidou, 2000, pp. 34–35). This is not a very common practice among students, so the teachers must educate them on the strategies available for the productive use of a dictionary (Béjoint, 1981, pp. 207–222).

When producing speech, users must utilize a rich vocabulary, descriptional accuracy and conceptual clarity, in order to express higher meanings and communicate more efficient. Finding, however, words from the dictionary does not ensure the user's ability to use them correctly on text or speech. During the processing of texts, students come in contact with many new words but, this does not mean they are able to use them on their own and, even if they do manage it, they must be very careful as to the context within which they are using these new words. It is the duty of the teacher to inform the students about the words' polysemy and to show them how to choose the correct form of the word for their purposes.

The students' desire to remember the words they read on the dictionary, as well as their meanings and usage, often pushes them to assemble lists of words. This tactic should be encouraged but, it must be made sure that students perform it in a structured way: the teacher must incite the students to record the most useful among the words they searched for, complimented by information on how to use them, and examples, or context where they can find synonyms, antonyms, expressions etc. This way, students form their own personal dictionary, which will allow them to gradually activate this vocabulary into their own speech. The method of structured repeated reading (Gavriilidou, 2000, p. 36; Treville & Duquette, 1996, p. 107), that is the repetition of words can be fundamental

towards this goal. After every structured repeat, the teacher may divide the class into two groups and hold lingual games in the form of a competition with some kind of prize, in order to turn the teaching of vocabulary from a mundane process into an interesting tactic (Gavriilidou, 2000, p. 36).

Vocabulary learning is another way to use the dictionary during the teaching process without using specific texts. Teachers assign certain vocabulary exercises to their students, such as finding synonyms and antonyms, in order to teach words quickly (Nation, 1990, p. 7). To sum up, the dictionary is used to enhance the students' linguistic and communicative competence. It also contributes to the vocabulary learning and vocabulary expansion of the students by giving them the opportunity to use their language correctly, both verbally and in writing.

3. Dictionary Use Strategies

The dictionary is considered to be one of the most substantial vocabulary learning strategies. In order to use it correctly as an accessible and convenient tool, students must train in certain use strategies, which will allow them to utilize it effectively, find the words they seek and add them to their own vocabulary. Also, it's imperative to engage in real situations of communication, so they can learn to negotiate the meaning of the messages they receive and produce. Finally, it's important to study factors, such as the cultural background of a student, gender, level of education, learning style, as well the differences and similarities between their native language and the language they aim to learn (Anastasiadi-Symeonidi, 1997, p. 153).

Initially, students should be able to recognize the dictionary and separate it from their other books of reference. The teacher will present to them various types of dictionaries and, specifically, a page, bringing their attention to the visual it presents (continuous text, interchanging of typographical elements, abbreviations, symbols etc.). Growing familiar with the typographical elements and the lexicographical metalanguage, will help the students to search the dictionary for lemmas more easily, without wasting time by trying to decipher them. It is also necessary to inform the students of the dictionary's existing tables of content.

The exercises that help in attaining those skills are as follows (Anastasiadi-Symeonidi, 1997, pp. 152–155):

1) Practicing in sorting by alphabetical order.

- The repetition of the alphabetical order by the students, as well as the placement of each letter in the alphabet, e.g., *Which letter can be found between M and O?*
- The page number where the words can be found is provided*: mist, car, gallop*
- After the headers and a group of words is provided, the students are asked to choose the words that can be found on the page corresponding to the specific headers.
- Sorting words in an alphabetical order based on their initial letter, e.g., *Sweet, sea, snail, stand.*
- Sorting words of different initials into an alphabetical order: *call, painting, shadow, late, hug, blossom, jacket.*
- After a word is given, students are asked to indicate which lemma can be found before and after it.
- After a word is chosen, the students are asked to find it within the dictionary.
- Two lemmas are given with a small distance between them, e.g., *enviable* and *envious.* The students must identify their common lemma, e.g., *envy.*
- We ask the students to locate within the first three pages of the letter Z three lemmas referring to animals.

2) Practicing the research of a proper type of lemma and stereotypical expressions:

- After we provide words to the students we ask them to find the forms of the lemma, e.g., *ate eating, girly? girl*
- We provide the students with isolated sentences or a text with underlined words and ask them to find their lemma's forms:

   "Summer has <u>passed</u>! Fall is also <u>ending</u>! The rains have <u>started</u>. It has been <u>raining</u> for five <u>days</u>. When the rain <u>stopped</u>, the sun <u>came</u> out and the <u>animals</u> came to <u>greet</u> him".

3) Lexicography exercises:

- I become a lexicographer by turning every word of a text into a lemma, which means I turn every textual formula into a lemmatic one and then I sort them in correct order.
- Authoring a personal dictionary

4) Practicing the method of "come and go" for words with multiple meanings.

5) Practicing the phrasing of definitions by the students via citing the properties of the referential object:

- The properties of the lemma "spring" are given and then, we ask for its definition.

6) Exercise for the understanding of the dictionary's macrostructure:

- The teacher writes words such as: **furniture, fish, fruit, tools, birds, animals** and then, the students are called to find a word that belongs to the wider spectrum of these concepts, e.g., **chair, salmon, apple, hammer, swallow, horse.** Then, they research the dictionary's macrostructure and mark the pages where each lemma was found.

7) Exercise to understand the acoustic, optical, and semantic value of words:

The teacher recites words whose initial is, for example, the letter "**i**", like: **idea, intelligence, ill, imitate, ignore** and the students write them down, sort them in alphabetical order, find them in the dictionary and mark the page where they found them on.

8) Morphological Exercises:

- Understanding the way words are formed and the functions of composition and production. The students create compound forms, derivatives, or separate the compound parts of the words, by discerning their meaning or, based on the morphological definition, realizing the derivative or compound form by themselves, e.g., *a person of good heart= goodhearted*

9) Semantic Exercises:

- Understanding rhetorical devices like metaphor and paraphrase:

   e.g., attributing humans with animal features "*silent like a fish*" — metaphor.

In many texts, Thessaloniki is referred to as *"Nymph of Thermaikos"* — paraphrase.

However, a common problem for teachers is to encourage the students to use referential books, perhaps because the students aren't experienced in using dictionaries or maybe they lack the motive to use them due to their bad figuration. The most popular school dictionaries (Cobuild and Longman), in order to solve this problem, provide notebooks to accompany the dictionaries. These notebooks contain exercises that teach the student to understand definitions, grammatical information and accent. To sum up, they offer guidance on how the dictionary presents the meaning of words. Hence, notebooks are a useful source for the teacher who wishes to encourage the students by applying correct methods of dictionary use (McCarthy, 1990, p. 141).

The change of the Analytical Program to teach the language course and the introduction of dictionaries in Primary School reveals the awareness of the state governors on the necessity to incorporate the dictionary in the

language course.

Thereafter, we will present the results of the empirical research related to the use of dictionaries by the students of the three last grades of Primary School. This research took place in May 2010 and pertains to field overview researches. For carrying out this research a questionnaire has been used as a methodological tool, which was distributed in 256 students of the last three grades of nine Primary Schools of the Prefectures of Thrace and certain data and information regarding the dictionary use has been collected.

4. Empirical Research Basis

The basis for the empirical research was mainly the finding that, after the introduction and integration of two dictionaries in Primary Education during the school year 2007–2008, i.e., of the *Illustrated dictionary of the 1ˢᵗ, 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ grade "My First Dictionary" and the Spelling — Monolingual dictionary of the 4ᵗʰ, 5ᵗʰ and 6ᵗʰ grade "Our dictionary"*, no empirical research has been performed in order to examine the issues of using these two dictionaries in educational practice.

Another reason that contributed to the examination of this issue was that, apart from the two dictionaries of the Pedagogical Institute, there were also other children's/school dictionaries of different publishing houses available, some of which were user-friendly, illustrated and quite attractive, so as to be consulted by students with pleasure, when necessary.

4.1 Research Goal

The goal of the empirical research was to detect the attitudes, the views and behaviors of the students who attend primary schools throughout Greece and particularly in Thrace, as far as the use of dictionaries by them is concerned. Also, another goal was to examine the reasons for using a dictionary, the way of teaching students how to use them, and finally the contribution of a dictionary to the vocabulary enrichment and cultivation of language expressions after the integration of the two dictionaries, *"My First Dictionary", of the 1ˢᵗ, 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ grade and "Our dictionary", of the 4ᵗʰ, 5ᵗʰ and 6ᵗʰ grade* in Primary Education and to make suggestions after the research findings.

4.2 Data Analysis of the Research

- 1ˢᵗ Question: Have you got your own lingual dictionary?

The highest percentage of the students who completed the questionnaire of the research, 88.7% (227 out of 256 students) said that they have their own linguistic dictionary, while a percentage of 11.3% (29 out of 256 students) answered that they do not have their own linguistic dictionary.

- 2ⁿᵈ Question: How often do you use the dictionary?

As far as the frequency of using the dictionary is concerned, 58.2% (149 out of 256 students) said that they use the dictionary just a few times, 31.6% (81 out of 256 students) replied quite often, 5.5% (14 out of 256) really often while 4.7% (12 out of 256) not at all.

- 3ʳᵈ Question: Where do you usually use the dictionary?

Regarding the place where students use the dictionary, 65.6% (168 out of 256 students) replied "at home", 25.4% (65 out of 256) said "at school", and 9% (23 out of 256) said "nowhere".

- 4ᵗʰ Question: Who taught you how to use a dictionary: 1) your parents, 2) your teachersyou're yourclassmates, 4) another person, 5) by yourself

To the above question "Who showed (taught) you how to use a dictionary", 64% said their parents, 49.8% their teachers, 29.6% by themselves, 7.1% another person, and 2.8% their classmates.

- 5th Question: Which of the following dictionaries have you got and which one do you use?

To the question "Which dictionary have you got and use", we observed that 58.6% of the students said that they use "Our Dictionary", 31.7% replied that they use the dictionary for SCHOOL and OFFICE of G. Mpampiniotis, 27.3% use my first Dictionary for Primary School of Patakis, 25.7% use the Dictionary of Modern Greek Language for PRIMARY SCHOOL students that is published by Savalas, 23.3% "My First Dictionary", 13.3% the Encyclopedic Dictionary PAPYRUS LAROUSSE "To Papyraki", 5.2% the illustrated children's dictionary of Tegopoulos, and 1.2% use my First Dictionary of Livanis publishing house.

- 6th Question: Does the use of a dictionary help you enrich your vocabulary?

From the research data we conclude that 48.0% of the students think that the use of a dictionary helps them enrich their vocabulary a lot, 27.3% quite enough, 21.1% just a little and 3.5% not at all.

- 7th Question: Does the use of the dictionary help you cultivate your linguistic expressions?

At the same time, there are also similar results for the above question, where 41.7% said "A lot", 35.2% "Quite enough", 16.8% "A little", and 6.3% "Not at all".

4.3 Conclusion of the Research

From the analysis of the research data the following information came out:

- The highest percentage of 88.7% of the students has his/her own dictionary. However, there is also a percentage of 11.3%, who said that they do not have their own dictionary, despite the integration of it in the entire educational procedure and the dispatch of dictionaries at schools. Taking into consideration these percentages, and in combination with some personal experience, it is easy to conclude that schools do not distribute the dictionaries given by the Ministry of Education to every single student.

- Taking into consideration the children's answers, it comes up that they do not use the dictionary at school to a satisfactory level. In this research, the negative answers outnumber the positive ones that concern the use of a dictionary at school. Therefore, it seems that the conditions that repress the use of a dictionary at school have not changed yet. Hence, a dictionary is not used even nowadays as much as we would expect during the teaching of the language course.

- The research showed that a high percentage of children have been taught how to use the dictionary by their parents. Moreover, it is worth mentioning the percentage of students who said that they have learnt how to use the dictionary by themselves. However, the percentage of students who said that they have been taught by their teachers how to use the dictionary has been differentiated from other relevant researches in a better way. The new analytical programs of studies and the new text books, as well as the teachers' training in teaching and learning strategies on how to use dictionaries, all these have played an important role in this.

- From the research data it is clear that an important number of students have more than one linguistic dictionaries. This finding shows that the dictionary plays an important role in parents' consciousness and in the effort they make in order to teach to their children the Greek language in an effective way. Therefore, Greek linguistic dictionaries are found in the majority of children's homes that took part in the research. Moreover, it is clear that despite the integration of two dictionaries in the curriculum, these books are not used by a large proportion of students. This is probably due to the lack of encouragement

offered by teachers so as to use them both at school and at home. In any case, the fact that a significant percentage of pupils (23.3%) of the 4th,5th and 6th grade consult the Illustrated Dictionary "My First Dictionary" proves that the children are happy with the use of this dictionary and refer to it with pleasure.

5. Suggestions

We should not forget that school dictionaries constitute a fundamental component when teaching the mother tongue, due to the wealth of information that they can offer to the students combined with the proper guidance on behalf of the teachers (Nikiforakis, 2003, p. 494). Students must learn how a dictionary works, so as to turn it into a source of knowledge throughout their life, a source of enjoyment and specimen of autonomy (Anastasiadis-Simeonidis, 1997, pp. 151–152). Thus, teachers must take full advantage of the dictionary during language teaching. Furthermore, all the Analytical Programmes of Primary and Secondary Education suggest the familiarisation of students with dictionary use, because they acknowledge that it offers new possibilities in the teaching procedure.

Since it is really important to introduce the dictionary as a reference book in the teaching procedure and particularly as a reference book for the language course in Primary School, the Greek educational system must adopt methods for the cultivation of strategic uses of the dictionary in class. Moreover, we must focus and educate students on how to use dictionaries in an effective way through activities and special exercises connected to their use (Treville & Duquette, 1996, pp. 125–128). This conclusion agrees with previous empirical researches, which have proven the educational value of the dictionary (Bensoussan M., 1983, pp. 341–345; Ibrahim A. H. & M. Zalessky, 1989, pp. 24–30).

School and classroom libraries must be equipped with a satisfactory number of dictionaries in order to be used by students, and have as many as needed so as an entire class would be able to work on them. After the introduction of the children's/school dictionary in the educational environment, we expected that it would enable its better evaluation. Unfortunately, even nowadays the dictionary is not integrated at schools in the language course and in general in the teaching procedure not even by the teachers themselves. The State is obliged to urge teachers to make sound use of dictionaries, by offering them with any proper tool and providing them with any supporting material needed. Teachers are obliged to prompt students to the dictionary's use as well. However, it is not sufficient just to prompt teachers, because it is also necessary to have the dictionary officially integrated by the State in the school procedure in order to be used both inside and outside the classroom and at school.

Students, at a high rate, believe that the use of dictionary helps them enrich their vocabulary and cultivate their linguistic expressions. Therefore, it is necessary for the students to be prompted by all involved, starting from the 1st grade of Primary School, even from the Nursery School, to use dictionaries and to be taught strategies of using them.

The use of a dictionary by students will work on in essence, if school manages to render it a reference book, which will introduce them to the autonomous continuous learning, and also a book that students will spontaneously consult for the course needs and beyond them. But, in order to accomplish this, students must become efficient users and practice on its use, while the essential breath of life to the entire procedure can only be given by the scientifically aware and educationally trained teacher (Nikiforakis, 2003, p. 503).

6. Conclusions

The dictionary use strategies for learning and enriching the vocabulary motivate the student to use the dictionary on his own for that purpose. The teacher needs to train the students in these strategies, by initially showing them the steps to realize them and then, by giving them the chance to follow those steps through the use of exercises, in order to understand the process and express any questions or difficulties they may face. The exercises correspond to the method of searching words on dictionaries and every level of lingual analysis, so the children can acquire every necessary skill to enhance their vocabulary, skills that will help them to cultivate their verbal speech and text production within the borders of the communicative/text-centric method and critical literacy

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