

## Integrating Mother Tongue in Multicultural Education: The Case of the Pomaks of Western Thrace

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**Abstract:** This article deals with the issue of mother tongue in multicultural schools, focusing on the minority education of Greek Muslims. The social and educational dimensions of linguistic coexistence are analysed by examining the case of the Pomaks of Western Thrace. The current system of minority education in Greece deprives Pomak students of the right to an education that respects their mother tongue. The main goal of intercultural education in Thrace should be for children to acquire the skills required for their equal participation in the social system, with respect for their language, religion and ethnic identity. We suggest that the incorporation of native tongue, local history, folklore and oral tradition in education may facilitate learning, strengthen the linguistic self-esteem of Pomak students and promote their equal inclusion in the educational framework of public schools.

**Key words:** Pomaks, minority education, mother tongue

### 1. Introduction

The Pomak communities of Greece should not be perceived statically, but should be examined in relation to the historical and social processes that led to the formation of their current status. The Pomaks of Thrace have received economic and cultural influences, which have resulted in multiple transformations of their identity.

The ethnic classification of the Pomaks is often being carried out using identification criteria such as language, origin, religion, anthropological characteristics and general qualities. The representation of the Pomak identity is constructed, either by researchers or by the Pomaks themselves, on the grounds of the language they speak or their Islamic faith. Perceptions of closeness and distance could be used as criteria for the interpretation of the “us” and “them” dichotomy prevailing in their own perception of selfhood (Kokkas, 2007, p. 79). The Pomaks of Western Thrace have great flexibility in handling the diversity of their dialects, as well as their ethnic orientation. Therefore it would not be correct to approach the Pomaks of Greece as a homogeneous group with uniform ethnic reflexes.

The language of the Pomaks is a southern regional dialect complex of Analytical Slavic, consisting of local varieties with common features used in the Slavic communities of the Greek section of the Rhodope mountain range in Thrace. (Papadimitriou, 2008, p. 15). The fact that the local variations of the language spoken by the Pomaks remained unwritten and far from any scholarly record has contributed to the devaluation of their language.

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Despite the long lasting ethnic engineering on the part of Turkey within the Pomak communities, the Pomaks of Western Thrace have preserved their language because of their geographic isolation and social marginalization (Michail, 2002, pp. 276–277). The preservation of essential elements of the Pomaks' ethnic identity, such as language and culture, despite the pressure they receive to abandon them, often becomes a secret but conscientious ethnic identification (Kokkas, 2007, p. 76). A typical example is the preservation of the traditional Pomak costume with the checked loom-woven apron (*préstenlik*) in the villages around Míki (*Mustáfčova*). It appears that such ways of preserving traditional forms of behaviour are regarded as a political attitude (Trubeta, 2001, p. 132).

As far as the education of the Pomaks in Western Thrace is concerned, Michail has pinpointed a paradox: “While the educational system was designed on a bilingual basis to guarantee the minorities, linguistic rights, it resulted in a dominant-subordinate situation and social as well as economic inequality” (Michail 2002: 282).

## **2. Historical Background**

The Ottoman conquest of the Balkans exercised a great influence on the Pomaks and led to the conversion to Islam of some inhabitants of the Rhodope mountain range, from the 16th to the 18th century. In the 19th century new nation-states were formed and the national borders were redrawn.

The Lausanne Treaty (24/7/1923) defined the Muslims of Western Thrace in religious (not ethnic) terms. The use of the term “Muslim minority” was adopted at Turkey's request, as religion was a powerful connective link among the ethnic groups in the Balkans, a link used by the Ottoman Empire in the *millet* administrative system. Articles 40, 41 and 45 of this Treaty established education as an inalienable right of minorities. After the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, the Pomaks of the Rhodope area found themselves scattered in three different countries (Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey), adopting the national identity of these countries or searching for another identity linked to their historical past.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Pomak communities underwent serious changes related to their association with power centers, the gradual formulation of an elite and the predomination of national characteristics in their self-image (Trubeta, 2001, p. 113). Many Pomaks of Western Thrace gradually adopted Turkish as the dominant minority language. Conversely, in the Bulgarian part of Rhodope, linguistic assimilation of local idioms from common Bulgarian was observed (Adamou & Fanciullo, 2018, p. 62; Adamou, 2012, p. 7).

After the end of the civil war, the Pomaks of Greece found themselves standing between Greece and Turkey. The institution of minority education played a decisive role in shaping the ethnic identities of modern Pomaks, strengthening their linguistic competence in the Turkish language. The attitude of the Greek governments towards the Pomaks was linked to the fluctuations of Greek-Turkish relations, resulting in contradictory political decisions (Kokkas, 2022, p. 144). On the other hand, the Turkish Consulate in Komotini had already started raising Turkish nationalism among the Pomaks of Thrace before WW2, but this activity intensified after the 1980s. After the Second World War, Greek politics tried to strengthen the Turkish identity of the Pomaks, considering their Slavonic language to be dangerous, due to the proximity of the Pomak settlements of the Rhodope mountains with Bulgaria, which was under communist rule at that time (Iliadis, 2004, p. 34).

With the Educational Agreement between Greece and Turkey of 20/4/1951 it was agreed to establish educational institutions in both countries, exchange university staff, lecturers, students and scientific researchers, establish scholarships, exchange books and journals. It was also agreed to promote the teaching of the language, culture and history of each country in the territory of the other country. Although that agreement did not stipulate

that the official language of the Muslim minority is Turkish, the Turkish language was then introduced in minority education along with the curriculum of the Turkish Ministry of Education. These measures were taken to a great extent in order to enhance the coherence of NATO and ameliorate Greek-Turkish relationships against the danger of Bulgarian communism.

On 28/1/1954 the General Commander of Thrace G. Fessopoulos sent to the communities and the municipalities of Rhodope area a decree by Marshal Papagos in which it was mentioned: “According to the commands of the President of the Government we ask you from now on in all cases to use the term *Turkish* in the place of *Muslim*. Therefore you should make sure that the various signs of your region such as *Muslim Community*, *Muslim School*, etc. be replaced by the word *Turkish*”. The agreement of 1951 was broadened with a similarly orientated educational protocol signed on 20/12/1968.

The Cold War period in Greece influenced the Pomak identity, mainly through the Turkification of minority education<sup>1</sup>. Issues of minority education and relations between Christians and Muslims in Thrace were often determined by tension in the Greek-Turkish relations (Markou, 2006, p. 55). During the period of the military dictatorship in Greece (1967–1974) a series of contradictions in the Greek minority policy led part of the Pomak population of Thrace to identify with the Turkish national ideology (Tsioumis & Michail, 2005, pp. 248–249). An attempt was also made to stigmatize the Pomaks who used their mother tongue, instead of Turkish. However, in the 1990s in Greece, efforts were made to promote the identity of the Pomaks and their mother tongue<sup>2</sup>.

The state policies implemented in Greece and Bulgaria towards the Pomaks determined the differentiation of their identity in the two countries. Whereas in Bulgaria a number of Pomaks identified with the Bulgarian national identity, in Greece the inclusion of Pomaks in the Greek-Turkish curriculum of minority schools facilitated the Turkification of a large part of the population (Karagiannis, 2012, pp. 23–24). The 21<sup>st</sup> century has found the Pomaks balancing between Balkan nationalisms, choosing to switch from one ethnic identity to another. The existence of multiple identities is a survival strategy for them, as it facilitates their social integration.

### **3. Minority Education and Identity**

Any sort of self-identification for the Pomaks has to accommodate with various interventions related to religion, language or culture. The Pomaks of Greece have proved capable of preserving traditional forms of behavior and remain flexible in handling their ethnic orientation as well as the multiformity of their dialects and customs. It appears that, through the continuing ambiguity and the multiple crossbreeding, the Pomaks of Greece retain for themselves the right to turn ethnic uncertainty into their own history (Kokkas, 2007, p. 107).

With regard to the education of linguistic minorities, the following approaches prevail (Roberts 1995: 369-378; Kokkas 2014: 84-85): language awareness and inclusive models<sup>3</sup>, transitional bilingual education

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<sup>1</sup> On the issue of minority education in Western Thrace see Kanakidou (1994); Vakalios (1997); Baltiotis & Tsitselikis (2001); Askouni (2006); Malamidis (2010); Voulgaridou (2011); Karaikos (2015), pp. 134-149. As concerns the relationship of minority education with the identity of the Pomaks see Markou (2001).

<sup>2</sup> In the 1990s a series of publications contributed to the promotion of the language and culture of the Pomaks, see the works of Petros Theocharides *Pomaks. The Muslims of Rhodope* (1995), *Pomak-Greek Dictionary* (1996a), *Greek-Pomak Dictionary* (1996b), *Grammar of the Pomak Language* (1996). In 1996 the *Pomak-Greek Dictionary* (Karahotza, 1996) and the *Grammar of the Pomak Language* (Karahotza et al., 1996) were also published. In 1997, a *Reader of Pomak for the 1<sup>st</sup> grade* (Moumin & Omer, 1997) was released in Komotini.

<sup>3</sup> They aim to integrate minority speakers. Children are encouraged to use their mother tongue, but the minority language is not used in teaching (Agneta & Svalberg, 2012, pp. 287-308).

models<sup>4</sup>, heritage language education models<sup>5</sup>, developmental maintenance bilingual education models<sup>6</sup>, heritage immersion bilingual education models<sup>7</sup>, two-way bilingual education models<sup>8</sup>, bilingual intercultural education models<sup>9</sup>. In Western Thrace none of the models can accurately describe the existing educational system of minority education. According to article 40 of the Treaty of Lausanne, the members of the Muslim minority of Thrace are recognized the right to establish their own educational institutions and schools and to make free use of their mother tongue within them. Article 41 obliges each country to provide “in respect of public education, suitable facilities for securing the provision of instruction in primary schools in their own language”. Nevertheless, in the minority schools of Thrace, only the Greek and Turkish languages are taught. For the children of the Pomaks, who have a different mother tongue, the establishment of this sort of bilingual minority education has created a situation of trilingualism (Michail, 2002, pp. 271–287; Michail, 2004, pp. 157–180; Voulgaridou, 2011, pp. 54–57; Varvounis, 1999-2000, pp. 115–117), which renders the learning of the Greek language difficult<sup>10</sup>.

The existing minority education does not ensure equal opportunities, nor does it contribute to the dynamic development of the personality of Muslim students. When the graduates of minority primary schools reach secondary education, they find it hard to join a public High School, since important subjects of the core curriculum, such as Mathematics, have not been taught to them in the Greek language.

Cold War legislation has affected minority education for decades, segregating students according to their religion and ghettoizing Muslim students. Moreover, the contribution of minority schools to the construction of a Turkish national identity for the non-Turkish Muslims of Thrace is indubitable. Michail says that the Pomaks’ “literacy in the Turkish language has probably contributed to the development of Turkish consciousness among the majority of them, thus fulfilling one of the political aims of Turkey’s foreign policy since 1920s” (Michail 2002: 283).

As far as the Pomaks are concerned, Michail adopts the distinction of two types of ethnic identification: private and public. Private self-identification is based on the individuals’ self-image, as it relates to the group to which they belong. Public identification corresponds to the identity used by individuals when interacting with others. Michail noticed that, in the Pomaks of Thermes, the public identity is multiple, depending on the person with whom they communicate. She mentions the example of the Pomak immigrants in Germany who present themselves as Greeks-Europeans when they communicate with Germans, whereas they present themselves as Greeks-Pomaks or as Turks when they communicate with Greeks or Turks respectively (Michael, 2003, pp.

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<sup>4</sup> These models move away from the minority language in favor of the majority language (Polanco & Luft de Baker, 2018, pp. 423–444).

<sup>5</sup> In these models the courses are organized by the minority communities. The education provided is supplementary (after school or on weekends) (Kagan, Carreira, Hitchins Chik, 2017; Trifonas & Aravossitas, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Teaching is done by bilingual teachers in two languages. Children are taught the mother tongue and the dominant language at the same time, after acquiring basic literacy in the dominant language (Ovando & Combs, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> They were developed in cases where the children of a minority are already familiar with their mother tongue. After immersion in the mother tongue, there follows an education that balances the minority with the official language (Brinton, Kagan, Bauckus, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> They are also referred to as *bilingual immersion*, *two-way immersion* and *dual language instruction*. Minority children are provided with education in their mother tongue, while majority children can study minority languages. The ultimate goal is the better learning of the official language of the state by minority children (Lindholm, 1987; Cazabon, Lambert, Hall, 1993; Cazabon, Nicolaidis, Lambert, 1998; Lindholm-Leary, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> They aim to provide basic literacy to natives while offering the necessary intercultural skills (Paleologou, 2004, pp. 317–329; Oviedo & Wildemeersch, 2008, pp. 455–470).

<sup>10</sup> It has been observed that the students of the Muslim minority of Thrace often make syntactic, morphological, grammatical and phonological mistakes. see Kelesidis 2003: 585-587; Sarafidou & Zerdeli 2008: 741-746. On the learning difficulties of Pomak students see Gerovasileiou 2006: 59-74; Dimou 2006: 79-84; Kataki 2006: 33-51.

139–157).

In Western Thrace a series of interventions aimed at the ethnic manipulation of the Muslim minority and the construction of a Turkish identity have taken place (Trubeta, 2001, pp. 125–130; Tsimbiridou, 2005, pp. 294–295) for Pomaks and Roma students through minority education. In this context, the native language of the Pomaks was defamed and negative linguistic attitudes were formed among the Pomaks themselves regarding their native language. On the other hand, minority schools have proved to be unable to help Muslim students overcome their learning problems, as they create negative language attitudes of self-exclusion and ignore the mother tongue in the cases of Pomak and Roma students (Kokkas, 2006, pp. 117–129; Karaikos, 2015, pp. 134–149). Minority schools have been criticized by the Pomaks themselves as causing illiteracy (Karahotza, 2022, p. 172).

The establishment of the Turkish language as the only minority language treats the Pomak and Roma students in a racist way, since they are placed in a disadvantageous position when their mother tongue is disregarded (Sarafidou & Zerdeli, 2008, pp. 738 & 747; Mitsiou, 2010, p. 77).

Among the suggestions made (Blackledge 2001: 304) for the overcoming of language discrimination and learning difficulties in a plurilingual environment are the following:

- The curriculum should be developed on the basis of the language attitudes of minority families.
- Parents' participation should be regarded as an important prerequisite for the successful implementation of any project.
- Minority languages should be used in order to facilitate the learning process.
- The thinking skills of pupils should be developed.
- Communication between parents and teachers should be encouraged.

Such principles are not taken into consideration in the minority schools of Thrace. Kelesidis notes that, in general, the students of minority schools have “deficient knowledge, unclear images, a fragmented perception of the world and invalid knowledge”, while “the operation of minority schools to date has been characterized by a lack of clear orientation and an inability to approach their goals” (Kelesidis, 2003, p. 584)<sup>11</sup>. Empirical and statistical data regarding the education of Thracian Muslim students in the 1980s and the 1990s show that the children experienced significant problems during their studies, a high rate of school failure, higher than the national average (Mavromatis, 2003, pp. 591–599; Malamidis, 2010, pp. 99–122).

Despite the important steps that have been taken in the area of intercultural education in recent years, serious problems still remain. Learning difficulties are often due to the non-teaching of the mother tongue or due to mother tongue interference, when the grammatical and syntactic structures and vocabulary of the mother tongue differ from the target language. The limited knowledge of Greek among Muslim students is related to the teaching materials and methods, the attitude of the teachers and the limited use of Greek in the students' familiar environment.

It should be noted that bilingualism as such is not a problem. Bilingual children may be equally capable of developing thinking and language skills as mono-lingual children. Nevertheless, whenever the children's mother tongue is rejected and depreciated, they cannot realize the reasons why this is happening and they are led to feelings of self-depreciation, and an inability to develop either their mother tongue or the second language. Moreover, they find it difficult to transfer knowledge from one language code to the other (Kokkas, 2006, p. 119).

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<sup>11</sup> Critical approaches to the system of minority education in Western Thrace (Michail, 2004, pp. 168–172; Varvounis, 2016, pp. 205–206; Theodoris, 2020, pp. 110–116; Karahotza, 2022, pp. 223–224, 305–310).

According to Banks, the main goal of intercultural education is “to reform the school and other educational institutions in such a way that students from different racial, ethnic groups and from different social classes experience educational equality” (Banks, 1995, p. 3). Some other goals of intercultural teaching are the cultivation of empathy, tolerance, the acceptance of otherness and the development of communication. In order to achieve these goals, it is necessary to implement cooperative teaching models, to promote experiential communicative teaching and to multiply extracurricular activities (Kokkas, 2022, p. 694). Students are encouraged when they feel that teachers accept them, both as individuals and as bearers of specific linguistic and cultural traits. The proper approach to intercultural education does not entail imposing the target language and erasing the mother tongue. Educators must emphasize the importance of diversity without stigmatizing otherness.

#### **4. Plurilingualism and Mother Tongue**

The issue of bilingual education in Western Thrace inevitably has sociolinguistic and political dimensions. The reasons why the Turkish language was imposed in minority education were mainly political. In the Pomak communities of Greece the native language and culture of the locals often become the target of ethnic appropriations. Ignoring the existence of Pomaks and Roma, a pro-Turkey Muslim elite in Western Thrace often attack the use of any Slavic vocabulary in an attempt to show that the Muslim minority of Thrace is an ethnic minority consisting of Turks only. Pro-Turkey activists are horrified by the possibility of introducing Pomak as one of the native tongues in minority education, although this has never been the intention of the Greek Ministry of Education (Kokkas, 2007, pp. 82–83). The mother tongue of the Pomaks of Western Thrace is not included in the bilingual program they follow at school. Turkish is still regarded as a necessary constituent of the minority school curriculum, despite the fact that it is neither the official language nor the mother tongue of all Muslim the students (Michail, 2002, pp. 271–273). In this way, Pomak children “learn to move back and forth between two different language contexts, two different realms and realities” often confusing their individual self-determination (Michail, 2007, p. 136).

An example showing the attitude of the Greek state is the case of the “Fox Tale” incorporated in the Greek language course book that was used in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of Greek Minority Schools (Kriezi, 2002). The course book contained the Slavic words *lesíca* (fox), *májka* (mother) and *dúlka* (quince tree) as names of some tale characters. This fact irritated certain representatives of the Muslim minority of Thrace, who protested against the book. As a result, the action taken by the Greek Ministry of Education was to proceed to a revised edition of the book, in which the word *lesíca* was substituted by the name *Leníca* (Young Helen).

Skutnabb-Kangas (2017, p. 51) pointed out that children of indigenous or minority populations who are taught only through the dominant language generally perform worse at school than the children of the populations whose mother tongue is the same as the dominant language. In addition, they have higher school dropout rates and higher unemployment rates.

All schools of Thrace must respect linguistic and cultural diversity and promote the social integration of students. Children’s literacy is facilitated through the use of their mother tongue. Children taught basic literacy in their mother tongue perform better than children who have not been taught in their mother tongue at all (Tsiplakou & Chadziioannou, 2010, p. 618). Moreover, the knowledge of local language would significantly help teachers to get closer to the local community and to carry out their work more effectively (Dimou & Miliazim, 2003, p. 554; Blackledge, 2001, p. 292). Linking lessons to the Pomaks’ native tongue and folklore can help Pomak-speaking

students to enrich their oral and written language, using complex expressive means, to cultivate critical thinking, and to understand the importance of preserving their cultural heritage.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (16/12/1966, ratified by Greece with Official Decree 45/A/19.3.85), which recognizes in article 13 the right to education of every human being, emphasizes that “education must aim at the full development of the human personality and its sense of dignity and to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Educational planning should respect linguistic diversity and meet the needs of language groups. It is important to strengthen pre-school education, to reform the curriculum, to make use of school libraries and laboratories and to encourage extracurricular visits, sports activities etc.

Through the institution of bilingual minority education, the mother tongue of the Pomaks is degraded and becomes a language of low prestige. On the contrary, the official language of the state (Greek) and Turkish, which appears as the language of literate Muslims, are shown to minority children as highly prestigious languages<sup>12</sup>. For students whose mother tongue (L1) is different from the official language of education (L2) the two languages work in parallel, while language code switching is often observed. The way in which this alternation manifests itself is linked to the speakers’ personal social networks, which are shaped by historical and socio-political conditions (Georgalidou, Kaili, Celtek, 2008, pp. 135–136).

Members of linguistic groups such as the Pomaks need a school that contributes to the exploration of diversity and promotes tolerance, mutual respect and intercultural communication (Kokkas & Miliazim, 2008, pp. 274–280)<sup>13</sup>. The parallel use of two languages for the teaching of cognitive content leads to high levels of proficiency, both in the mother tongue and in the second language, while simultaneously contributing to the development of positive intercultural attitudes (Kokkas, 2022, p. 695). Learners whose native language (L1) is different from the official language of instruction (L2) in the early stages of L2 learning use L1 to decode L2. For this reason, pointing out the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 can enhance children’s language awareness, strengthen their confidence and increase their interest (Abati, 2017, pp. 56–57). Schools should give students the opportunity to use their mother tongue during lessons. Acceptance of the mother tongue will also contribute to more effective learning of the target language.

In the European Union the survival of lesser-used languages depends on the ethno-political balance of each state. In recent decades, European countries have gradually adopted policies to recognize and promote linguistic diversity. The European Union has pursued a systematic policy in favor of linguistic and cultural diversity, with actions and publications that presuppose the existence of multiculturalism in each European country separately (Gotovos, 2002, p. 183). The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (Strasbourg 5/11/1992) aims to protect regional and minority languages in Europe. Article 28 of the Charter declares that states must ensure pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education in the mother tongue. If this is not possible, wherever regional or minority languages are used, the right to education must be ensured for all those who wish it.

Efforts to protect mother tongues are based on the principle that the specific character and temperament of each individual is influenced by his mother tongue, particularly in the case of border communities exposed to a wide range of multilingual stimuli (Carli et al., 2003, pp. 865–883). For children belonging to indigenous or

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<sup>12</sup> On the influence of Turkish as a high prestige language among the Pomaks (Adamou, 2010, p. 25).

<sup>13</sup> Proposals concerning minority education in Greece (Kelesidis, 2003, p. 588; Mitsiou, 2010, pp. 219–226; Kokkas, 2014, pp. 88–89; Karahotza, 2022, pp. 229–230, 337–339).

minority groups, using the mother tongue is the best way to improve communication skills in both the mother tongue and the official language of the state. It also improves school performance, contributes to the development of a positive sense of self in young people and maximizes opportunities for their professional future (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2017, p. 52). Furthermore, through the exploration of their mother tongue in comparison to other languages, students penetrate the mindset of culturally “others” and perceive linguistic otherness through their own value systems (Arvaniti & Chrysanthopoulou, 2014, p. 42).

When teachers show confidence in the students who have a different cultural background, the chances of school success are higher. A necessary condition for this success is not to disparage the students’ mother tongue and culture (Sakellaris, 2010, pp. 12–13). An educational program addressing indigenous or minority populations should aim for high levels of multilingualism, provide opportunities for school success and build a strong multilingual identity and positive attitudes towards self and others (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013, pp. 215–249). For the Pomaks the mother tongue is the means of communication within their community and the vehicle for history and cultural transmission (Michail, 2002, p. 281). This is one more reason why Pomak-speaking students would benefit greatly from the use of their mother tongue in the educational practice.

### **5. Incorporating Mother Tongue in the Teaching Process**

The existence of multicultural elements in Western Thrace makes it necessary to use intercultural approaches in the teaching process, approaches that are far from the current status of minority education. Kokkas (2022, pp. 704–778) has presented fifty-two lesson plans with specific educational objectives, divided by educational level, from pre-school to higher education. The presentation of the activities aims at highlighting the possibilities that exist for the teaching of the Pomak language and culture in a wide range of subjects, through modern teaching methods (cooperative teaching, experiential learning, composition tasks, CLIL, use of ICT etc.).

The integration of mother tongue and oral tradition at all educational levels would give a new dimension to the field of intercultural education in Thrace. The oral tradition of the Pomaks, as expressed through their native language, includes ceremonies, rituals, songs etc., which are important constituents of their ethnic identity (Michail, 2002, p. 274). The study of the oral tradition of the Pomaks can be introduced into various subjects such as Music, Physical Education, English Language, History, Modern Greek Language, Modern Greek Literature, ICT, Social and Political Education, Geography, Arts & Crafts, Theater Education as well as extracurricular activities.

Howard Gardner’s eight areas of intelligence expression (Gardner & Hatch, 1989, pp. 4–10; Gardner, 1993) can be put into practice when implementing teaching plans. The cultivation of logical-mathematical intelligence, linguistic intelligence (poetry, rhetoric, linguistics), physical intelligence (sports and music-dance activities), musical intelligence (distinction of musical patterns), spatial intelligence (visual arts, blueprints, maps), interpersonal intelligence (communication and understanding of others), intrapersonal intelligence (self-discipline, metacognition) and naturalistic intelligence (classifications, knowledge of fauna/flora) can be the main goals of teachers.

The challenge for a modern school is to discover how the various aspects of tradition can be linked to the current learning needs of children. The issue of otherness turns into a teaching challenge for all teachers, as they have to highlight features of their students’ frame of mind, with the ultimate goal of enriching the learning process (Farmakis, 2015, p. 118). The pedagogical use of oral tradition can contribute to the proper education of students,

the cultivation of their intellectual skills, their awareness of the values of life and local traditions and a better formation of their personality. Proverbs, folk tales and folk songs can contribute to the linguistic and mental development of children. However, the didactic approach to folklore must follow modern methods and audio-visual media (computers, multimedia applications, internet, interactive programs, games, etc.). Incorporating tradition into teaching brings children closer to their personal experience and community roots, making them feel proud of their local and family heritage (Hamer, 2000, pp. 57–58). Thus, the study of traditional culture strengthens people's ties with their past, creating the conditions for respect and acceptance of cultural identity (Kokkas, 2022, p. 692). Moreover, young people should realize that their folk culture is an integral part of the world's cultural heritage.

Especially at the pre-school and primary education levels, the use of the mother tongue strengthens children's self-confidence and expressive ability, cultivates their audio-visual perception and kinesthetic abilities, promotes their creativity and imagination and contributes to the learning the official language. By incorporating elements of folk culture into teaching, a series of creative activities can be implemented that will improve observation, encourage interpersonal communication and enrich children's vocabulary.

The parallel use of two languages for teaching leads to high levels of proficiency in both the mother tongue and the second language and contributes to the comprehensive development of the children's personality. When the school integrates, encourages and values mother tongue, it increases the chances that students will be more motivated to approach both the majority language and the various skills taught at school.

In order to achieve these goals, a new approach to minority education is needed. The Greek state should take steps that will encourage the speakers of endangered languages. Education must offer equal opportunities for all Greek citizens, either Christians or Muslims, taking into consideration their individual qualifications. The aims of a new approach to the education of Muslim Greeks of Thrace that does not reproduce social stereotypes should be:

- a) to strengthen pre-school education and establish nursery schools in all villages,
- b) to appoint in the public schools of Thrace Muslim teachers who will teach the Islamic religion, at the same time that the Christian children are taught the Christian religion<sup>14</sup>,
- c) to create public primary schools in Pomak villages, giving the opportunity to those who wish to have equal education with all children in Greece. In this way, parents can have the option for their children to either attend minority or public schools (Karahotza, 2022, pp. 87, 230).
- d) The syllabus should make use of native languages in the learning process. Language planning should correspond to the needs of language groups, while respecting their cultural background.
- e) Minority schools could gradually be turned into multicultural schools, having the same curriculum that all public schools have, with additional optional subjects on mother languages (Turkish, Pomak, Roma) and Islamic Education.

## **6. Conclusion**

The Pomaks of Western Thrace have been deprived of an equal presence of their language in relation to Turkish and Greek, which have pervaded essential fields of linguistic expression. Nowadays, the mother tongue of

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<sup>14</sup> According to law 3536/2007 (article 36) teachers of Islamic religion are employed by the Greek state to teach the Quran in mosques and/or state primary and secondary schools of Thrace. The law was amended with laws 4115/2013 (article 53.1) and 4790/2021 (article 103).

the Pomaks of Greece is still actively used but it has a decreasing number of users and a weak political prestige. This is partly due to the fact that it is not integrated into official teaching.

The bilingual education provided in minority schools hinders students' performance in secondary and higher education. The minority schools of Western Thrace lead to the social exclusion of Muslim Greek students, who are not provided with the same education that is offered to the rest of the citizens of the country. Minority schools cause learning difficulties and reproduce specific linguistic attitudes, such as the self-degradation of the mother tongue. However, bilingualism in itself would not be a problem if programs were implemented which would adequately develop the ability to write and speak in two languages.

In order to overcome linguistic discrimination and learning difficulties in multilingual environments, it is necessary to take radical measures. The integration of the mother tongue and the oral tradition of the Pomaks in education will have multiple benefits both for the intellectual development of the students and for the promotion of respect for linguistic and cultural diversity. When a school encourages the use of mother tongue, the chances increase that students will be more highly motivated to approach both the majority language and the rest of the school skills.

The educational issues related to the minority schools of Western Thrace should be examined far from any political considerations or inter-state concerns. It is important that language planning should be carried out in such a way that it recognizes cultural identity and meets the specific needs of language groups.

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