

Spanish as a Foreign Language in the Greek Educational Context

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ABSTRACT: *In recent years, the teaching of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) has gained increasing importance in the Greek educational context. Although English remains the dominant foreign language taught in Greece, Spanish has emerged as a popular additional foreign language due to globalization, mobility within the European Union and cultural interest in the Spanish-speaking world. This paper explores the position of Spanish in Greek education, the challenges faced in its teaching and effective pedagogical approaches suitable for Greek learners. The aim is to investigate the effectiveness of teaching Spanish as a foreign language in the Greek educational context, with a particular focus on students' attitudes, perceived difficulties and the didactic methodologies employed in the classroom. The methodology that has been employed is triangular research, combining literature review, questionnaire research and classroom observations in order to explore how Greek learners experience Spanish language learning and which factors contribute to successful language acquisition. The main conclusion drawn is that the successful teaching of Spanish not only enhances linguistic competence but also promotes intercultural understanding and lifelong learning, contributing to a more multilingual and culturally aware Greek society.*

KEYWORDS: Greek educational system, Spanish as a foreign language, cultural competence, teaching methodologies, students' attitudes.

L' Espagnol comme Langue Étrangère dans le Contexte Éducatif Grec

RÉSUMÉ : Ces dernières années, l'enseignement de l'espagnol en tant que langue étrangère (ELE) a acquis une importance croissante dans le contexte éducatif grec. Bien que l'anglais demeure la langue étrangère dominante enseignée en Grèce, l'espagnol s'est imposé comme une langue étrangère additionnelle populaire en raison de la mondialisation, de la mobilité au sein de l'Union européenne et de l'intérêt culturel pour le monde hispanophone. Cet article examine la place de l'espagnol dans l'éducation grecque, les défis rencontrés dans son enseignement ainsi que les approches pédagogiques efficaces adaptées aux apprenants grecs. L'objectif est d'analyser l'efficacité de l'enseignement de l'espagnol comme langue étrangère dans le contexte éducatif grec, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur les attitudes des élèves, les difficultés perçues et les méthodologies didactiques employées en classe. La méthodologie adoptée repose sur une recherche triangulaire, combinant une revue de la littérature, une enquête par questionnaire et des observations en classe, afin d'explorer la manière dont les apprenants grecs vivent l'apprentissage de l'espagnol et d'identifier les facteurs contribuant à une acquisition linguistique réussie.

MOTS-CLÉS : système éducatif grec, l'espagnol comme langue étrangère, compétence culturelle, méthodologies d'enseignement, attitudes des élèves.

اللغة الإسبانية كلغة أجنبية في السياق التعليمي

أهمية متزايدة في السياق التعليمي اليوناني. وعلى (ELE) خلال السنوات الأخيرة، اكتسب تعليم اللغة الإسبانية كلغة أجنبية الرغم من أن اللغة الإنجليزية ما تزال اللغة الأجنبية المهيمنة التي تُدرّس في اليونان، فقد فرضت اللغة الإسبانية نفسها كلغة أجنبية إضافية شائعة، وذلك بسبب العولمة، والتنقل داخل الاتحاد الأوروبي، والاهتمام الثقافي بالعالم الناطق بالإسبانية. تتناول هذه المقالة مكانة اللغة الإسبانية في التعليم اليوناني، والتحديات التي تواجه تدريسها، إضافة إلى المقاربات التربوية الفعالة المكيّفة مع المتعلمين اليونانيين. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل فعالية تعليم اللغة الإسبانية كلغة أجنبية في السياق التعليمي اليوناني، مع التركيز بشكل خاص على مواقف المتعلمين، والصعوبات المدركة، والمنهجيات التعليمية المعتمدة داخل الصف وتعتمد المنهجية المتبعة على بحث مثلثي يجمع بين مراجعة الأدبيات العلمية، واستبيان، وملاحظات صفية، وذلك من أجل استكشاف كيفية عيش المتعلمين اليونانيين لتجربة تعلم اللغة الإسبانية، وتحديد العوامل التي تسهم في اكتساب لغوي ناجح.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظام التعليمي اليوناني، اللغة الإسبانية كلغة أجنبية، الكفاءة الثقافية، منهجيات التدريس

مواقف المتعلمين

1. Introduction

Foreign language education has always played a significant role in the Greek educational system. Traditionally, the emphasis has been placed on the teaching of English as the primary foreign language, followed by French and German as secondary options. However, over the past two decades, Spanish has gradually gained recognition and popularity as a foreign language taught in Greece. This development is closely linked to globalization, increased mobility within the European Union, cultural exchange and the growing economic and social importance of the Spanish-speaking world.

Spanish is currently one of the most widely spoken languages globally, with hundreds of millions of native and non-native speakers across Europe, Latin America, and other regions (Instituto Cervantes, 2022). For Greek learners, Spanish represents not only a linguistic asset

but also a gateway to diverse cultures, professional opportunities, and academic mobility. Despite this growing interest, the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) in Greece faces several challenges related to policy, curriculum design, teacher training, and classroom practice.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language within the Greek educational context. In particular, the study explores the status of Spanish in Greek education, analyzes the main linguistic and pedagogical challenges faced by Greek learners and discusses effective teaching approaches and methodologies. Additionally, the role of culture, technology and teacher education is examined in order to provide a comprehensive overview of SFL instruction in Greece.

2. Foreign Language Education in Greece

2.1 Historical Overview

Foreign language instruction in Greece has historically been shaped by political, social and economic factors. English became firmly established as the dominant foreign language after World War II, largely due to its role as an international lingua franca and its association with academic and professional advancement (Griva & Chostelidou, 2012). French and German were later incorporated as optional foreign languages, mainly in secondary education. Spanish, by contrast, entered the Greek educational system relatively late. Its introduction was initially limited to private language schools and university departments. Over time, however, Spanish has been gradually incorporated into public secondary education as an optional foreign language, depending on school availability and student demand (Hellenic Ministry of Education, 2020).

2.2 Current Position of Spanish in Greek Schools

Today, Spanish is taught primarily as a second or third foreign language in Greek lower and upper secondary schools. It is also widely offered in private language institutes, which play a crucial role in foreign language education in Greece. At tertiary level, Spanish is taught in university departments related to foreign languages, translation, tourism, international relations, and Hispanic studies.

Despite its growing presence, Spanish still occupies a marginal position compared to English. Limited teaching hours, lack of permanent teaching positions, and insufficient teaching materials in public schools often restrict its effectiveness (Griva & Kasvikis, 2014). Nevertheless, student interest in Spanish continues to rise, particularly due to its perceived accessibility and cultural appeal.

3. Linguistic Characteristics of Spanish and Greek Learners

3.1 Linguistic Similarities and Differences

Greek learners encounter both advantages and difficulties when learning Spanish. One notable advantage is the phonological transparency of Spanish. Like Greek, Spanish has a relatively consistent relationship between spelling and pronunciation, which facilitates reading and listening comprehension for beginners (Ellis, 1997).

However, significant grammatical differences exist between the two languages. Spanish verb conjugation, tense system, and use of moods—particularly the subjunctive—often pose challenges for Greek learners. Additionally, grammatical gender and agreement rules in Spanish, although familiar to Greek speakers, differ in usage and exceptions, leading to frequent learner errors (Odlin, 1989).

3.2 Cross-Linguistic Influence

Cross-linguistic influence plays a crucial role in the acquisition of Spanish by Greek learners. Transfer from the mother tongue can be both positive and negative. While similarities may facilitate learning, interference can result in persistent grammatical and lexical errors (Ellis, 1997). Moreover, the dominant presence of English as the first foreign language often affects Spanish acquisition, leading to instances of lexical borrowing and syntactic interference from English rather than Greek.

4. Challenges in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language in Greece

4.1 Limited Exposure and Input

One of the most significant challenges in teaching Spanish in Greece is the lack of exposure to authentic language input. Unlike English, Spanish is rarely encountered outside the classroom in Greek society, media, or digital environments (Krashen, 1985). As a result, learners rely heavily on classroom instruction for language input and practice. According to the Input Hypothesis, language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input slightly above their current level (Krashen, 1985). In the Greek context, the limited availability of Spanish input makes it essential for teachers to compensate by incorporating authentic materials and interactive activities into their lessons.

4.2 Institutional and Curricular Constraints

Another major challenge is the absence of a unified national curriculum for Spanish in public education. Teaching objectives, assessment criteria, and instructional materials often vary depending on the school or teacher. This lack of standardization can lead to inconsistencies in learning outcomes and student proficiency levels (Richards, 2001). Additionally, Spanish teachers in public schools frequently face unstable employment conditions, which may negatively affect long-term planning and professional development. Limited teaching hours further restrict opportunities for meaningful language practice.

5. Teaching Approaches and Methodologies

5.1 Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely regarded as an effective approach for teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Greece. CLT emphasizes meaningful communication, learner interaction, and real-life language use rather than rote memorization of grammatical rules (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In the Greek classroom, CLT encourages students to actively use Spanish through pair work, role plays, and problem-solving tasks. This approach helps learners develop communicative competence, which includes grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980).

5.2 Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is closely related to CLT and focuses on the completion of meaningful tasks using the target language. Tasks such as planning a trip to Spain, ordering food in a restaurant, or participating in simulated conversations provide learners with opportunities to use Spanish in authentic contexts (Ellis, 2003). Task-based learning and the use of authentic materials, such as videos, songs, and online resources from Spanish-speaking countries can further motivate Greek learners and enhance cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). Technology also plays a significant role, as digital platforms and language-learning applications provide additional exposure and practice opportunities beyond the classroom. For Greek

learners, task-based activities increase motivation and reduce anxiety, particularly when Spanish is perceived as an enjoyable and culturally rich language.

6. The Role of Culture in Teaching Spanish

Culture is an integral component of foreign language learning. Teaching Spanish in Greece involves introducing learners to the diverse cultures of Spain and Latin America. According to Byram (1997), intercultural competence enables learners to understand, interpret and relate cultural practices to their own experiences. Incorporating cultural elements such as music, festivals, traditions, and everyday customs enhances learner engagement and fosters positive attitudes toward the language. For Greek students, cultural comparisons between Greek and Spanish lifestyles can promote intercultural awareness and critical thinking.

7. Technology and Digital Tools in SFL Instruction

The integration of technology has transformed foreign language teaching worldwide. In the Greek context, digital tools play a crucial role in overcoming limited exposure to Spanish. Online platforms, educational videos, podcasts, and language-learning applications provide learners with additional input and opportunities for autonomous learning (Chapelle, 2001). Blended learning approaches, which combine face-to-face instruction with online activities, have proven particularly effective. These approaches allow Greek learners to practice listening, speaking and vocabulary development beyond classroom hours.

8. Teacher Education and Professional Development

The effectiveness of Spanish instruction in Greece largely depends on teacher training and professional development. Spanish teachers must possess not only linguistic competence but also pedagogical skills tailored to the Greek educational context (Richards, 2001). Continuous professional development programs, workshops, and collaboration with international institutions such as the Instituto Cervantes can support teachers in adopting innovative methodologies and updated teaching practices.

9. Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment in Spanish language learning should align with communicative teaching principles. Formative assessment, portfolios and performance-based tasks provide a more accurate representation of learner progress than traditional grammar-focused exams (Brown, 2004). In Greece, alignment with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) has improved transparency and consistency in assessment practices, particularly in private language institutes.

10. Research Study

10.1 Aim and Research Questions

The empirical part of this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Greece, focusing on learner attitudes, perceived difficulties and teaching practices. The study addresses the following research questions:

- What are Greek students' attitudes toward learning Spanish?
- What difficulties do Greek learners face in learning Spanish?
- Which teaching methodologies are perceived as most effective?
- How do culture and technology influence motivation and learning?

11. Methodology

11.1 Participants

The research was conducted in a Greek educational setting and involved a sample of 60 secondary school students learning Spanish as a foreign language, as well as 10 Spanish language teachers working in public schools and private language institutes. The students' ages ranged from 13 to 17, and their proficiency levels varied from A1 to B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001). The inclusion of both students and teachers allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of Spanish language teaching and learning in Greece, combining learner experiences with pedagogical perspectives.

11.2 Research Instruments

Data were collected through: a. Questionnaires for students and teachers and b. Classroom observations in five Spanish language classes. Questionnaires allowed for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, while classroom observation provided insight into real teaching practices (Dörnyei, 2007; Cohen et al., 2018).

Two questionnaires were used as the primary data collection instruments. One questionnaire was addressed to students and focused on motivation, attitudes, perceived difficulties, and preferences regarding teaching methods. The second questionnaire was distributed to teachers and examined instructional practices, use of materials, and challenges faced in the classroom. Questionnaires were chosen due to their effectiveness in gathering quantitative and qualitative data from a relatively large sample (Dörnyei, 2007).

In addition to questionnaires, classroom observations were conducted in five Spanish language classes. The observations focused on teacher–student interaction, use of communicative activities, integration of cultural elements, and use of technology. Observation allowed for triangulation of data and provided insights into actual classroom practices (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

12. Results

12.1 Student Attitudes toward Learning Spanish

Results showed that most students expressed positive attitudes toward Spanish. Seventy-eight percent described Spanish as interesting and enjoyable, while many reported strong motivation linked to Spanish culture. These findings confirm the importance of positive attitudes in language learning (Gardner, 1985).

The findings indicate that the majority of students hold positive attitudes toward learning Spanish. Approximately 78% of participants reported that Spanish is an “interesting and enjoyable” language, while 65% stated that cultural elements, such as music and lifestyle, increased their motivation. These results support previous research suggesting that positive attitudes significantly influence foreign language learning success (Gardner, 1985).

12.2 Perceived Difficulties

Students identified verb conjugation, particularly past tenses and the subjunctive mood, as the most challenging aspects of Spanish grammar. Vocabulary retention and listening comprehension were also reported as areas of difficulty, especially due to limited exposure outside the classroom. These findings align with earlier studies on second language acquisition and input limitations (Krashen, 1985). Teachers confirmed that limited exposure and reduced teaching hours negatively affect learner progress, supporting Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis.

12.3 Teaching Methodologies and Materials

Both students and teachers reported that communicative activities, group work, and task-based learning were more effective than traditional grammar-based instruction. Classes that incorporated videos, songs, and online resources showed higher levels of student engagement and participation. Teachers emphasized the importance of flexibility and adaptation of materials due to the absence of a standardized national curriculum for Spanish. Communicative and task-based activities were reported as more engaging and effective than traditional grammar-focused instruction. Classes incorporating multimedia and authentic materials showed higher levels of participation and motivation.

13. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Spanish has strong potential within Greek education, supported by positive learner attitudes and cultural interest. However, persistent difficulties and institutional constraints highlight the need for methodological innovation and increased exposure. The results support previous research advocating communicative, learner-centered approaches (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Ellis, 2003). Technology and culture emerge as key motivating factors that compensate for limited contact with Spanish outside the classroom.

The results of the research highlight the crucial role of motivation, methodology and exposure in teaching Spanish as a foreign language in Greece. Positive student attitudes suggest that Spanish has strong potential to expand further within the Greek educational system. However, grammatical difficulties and limited exposure underline the need for pedagogical strategies that emphasize meaningful input and communicative practice.

The findings support the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Language Teaching, as suggested by Richards and Rodgers (2014) and Ellis (2003). Furthermore, the integration of cultural content and digital tools appears to enhance learner motivation and compensate for limited exposure to the target language.

Teacher responses indicate a strong need for institutional support, professional development, and access to updated teaching materials. Without these, the sustainability and quality of Spanish language instruction remain at risk.

14. Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to specific educational contexts, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, data were collected over a short period, and long-term language development was not examined. Future research could involve larger-scale or longitudinal studies across different regions of Greece.

15. Implications and Recommendations

Pedagogical implications include the need for curriculum development, increased teaching hours, teacher training and systematic integration of digital resources. In particular, based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Increased teaching hours for Spanish in public education
- Development of a unified curriculum aligned with CEFR standards
- Greater use of authentic and digital materials
- Ongoing teacher training and professional development
- Encouragement of student autonomy and extracurricular exposure to Spanish

These measures could significantly improve the effectiveness of Spanish language teaching in Greece.

Conclusions

Teaching Spanish as a foreign language in the Greek educational context presents both challenges and opportunities. While limited exposure and curricular constraints exist, the increasing interest in Spanish and the application of communicative and learner-centered methodologies can lead to successful language acquisition. With appropriate teacher training, updated materials, and the integration of technology, Spanish can continue to strengthen its position within Greek education.

While institutional limitations persist, the growing popularity of Spanish, combined with communicative methodologies, cultural integration and technological support, can lead to effective language learning. Spanish can play a significant role in promoting multilingualism, intercultural competence and lifelong learning in Greek education. By adopting communicative methodologies, integrating culture and technology, and supporting teacher development, Spanish language education in Greece can continue to expand and improve. The successful teaching of Spanish not only enhances linguistic competence but also promotes intercultural understanding and lifelong learning, contributing to a more multilingual and culturally aware Greek society.

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