

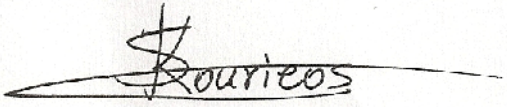
**‘An investigation into the preparation of teachers for language teaching at primary level: Implications for an initial Language Teacher Education programme’**

Submitted by Stella Kourieos Angelidou to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

October, 2011

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following the entry of Cyprus into the European Union in 2004 and based on the philosophy which underpins the language policy in Europe, the island has been investing heavily in early foreign language learning. However, despite improvements in English language learning in primary state schools, no significant changes have been evident as regards the preparation of English teachers at this level. In conducting this research, my primary intention was to offer prospective and practising primary teachers a “voice” to express their own views regarding the content and teaching approach of a potential ELT module within teacher education curricula.

The research adopted a mixed-method sequential approach carried out in two phases between March and July 2010. Data were initially obtained from 296 in-service primary teachers and 124 student teachers through a questionnaire-based survey. Data obtained in the second phase through individual and focus group interviews with 9 in-service-teachers and 11 student teachers respectively were used to explain, interpret and further examine the findings of the survey.

The findings have highlighted the importance of theory and practice, showing evidence that both are necessary in order to avoid fragmented language teaching. The study suggests, therefore, that providing student teachers with meaningful opportunities to form links between the taught theory and its practical application is a fundamental basis for a more holistic teacher approach to teacher education.

This study has also provided evidence that participants view learning as a process embedded in a social context, within which knowledge is constructed through collaborative, awareness-raising tasks set by mentors whose mediating roles in the creation of desirable learning contexts is perceived to be crucial.

Although the findings of this research directly concern the Cypriot situation, they are likely to have broader applicability beyond Cyprus, especially in countries where early foreign language learning forms part of their educational agenda. Developing primary teachers' language teaching knowledge and skills while considering the various types of support they receive during their pre-service education form part of a wider endeavour to ensure quality in early foreign language learning, an objective set by the European Union.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANOVA = Analysis of variance

BA = Bachelor of Arts

BA = Bachelor of Science

CEF = Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

CLIL = Content and Language Integrated Learning

CLT = Communicative Language Teaching

EFL = English as a Foreign Language

ELT = English Language Teaching

FL = Foreign Language

GCE = General Certificate in Education

IGCSE = International General Certificate of Secondary Education

INSET = In-service training

ITE = Initial Teacher Education

KA = Knowing About

KAL = Knowledge About the Language

KEEA = Education Research and Evaluation Centre

KH = Knowing How

KT = Knowing To

L1 – First Language

L2 = Second Language

LTE = Language Teacher Education

MA = Master of Arts

MFL = Modern foreign Language

MOEC = Ministry of Education and Culture

MSc = Master of Science

PA = Pedagogical Academy

PCK = Pedagogical Content Knowledge

SLA = Second Language Acquisition

SPSS = Statistical Package for Social Sciences

TE = Teacher Education

TEFL = Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TESOL = Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

TEYL = Teaching English to Young Learners

TLA = Teacher language awareness

TP = Teaching Practice

UCy = University of Cyprus

YLS = Young Learners

ZPD = Zone of Proximal Development

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My special thanks go to my first supervisor, Dr Jill Cadorath for her ongoing guidance, her promptness in providing me with constructive feedback to drafts and responding to email queries, even during her holidays, and most importantly for sharing my enthusiasm for this research. The feedback and useful remarks I received from my second supervisor, Dr Anthony Wilson, are also greatly appreciated.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the inspectors, teachers and student teachers who gave up their time and energy to provide me with the data for this study. Without their contributions, this thesis would not have been possible.

My EdD study has been a long journey and during this journey many people have supported and helped me through the many ups and downs this study has involved. I am particularly thankful to my colleagues and close friends, Georgina and Nikleia for their continuing interest, help and words of support and encouragement in the progress of this research. Many thanks also go to Mr Andreas Paraskevopoulos for his invaluable help with the statistical elements of the research.

My deepest love and gratitude go to my parents who have always supported me in a number of ways. My mum, for always believing me capable of accomplishing much more than my intended goals and my dad, for financially supporting my studies. Finally, I would like to thank my husband Aris, who has always shown great faith in my abilities and has tolerated my stress and emotional load over the last five years.

This thesis is dedicated to my lovely daughter Lara, who came in the middle of this journey and has, ever since, been deprived of my full attention.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Learning foreign languages is a vital requirement for succeeding in a competitive, modern, dynamic and rapidly changing European society whose primary concerns include the fostering and enabling of communication among European citizens, the promotion of European integration, intercultural awareness and respect for linguistic diversity (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). As a response to these challenges and the pressure to make citizens fluent in more than one language, early foreign language education has become a priority issue on the agenda of the European Union and of national governments throughout Europe. It should be noted that although provision of languages taught, starting age, time allocation, staff and policies on language learning and teaching seem to vary among the countries of Europe (Kirsch, 2008), it appears that the age at which foreign language education begins, is being repeatedly lowered, to younger and younger grades. However, concerns have been expressed that if an early start in foreign language learning is to achieve large-scale success, it should be accompanied by quality teaching (Edelenbos et al., 2006; Martin cited in Kirsch, 2008:4). Based on this premise, Kelly and Grenfell (n.d) stress the importance of language teacher education in achieving the European Union's objective of multilingualism because of their key role in improving foreign language learning and awakening learners' interest in languages (p.4).

Even though the majority of the state members acknowledges and supports the benefits of an early start in language learning, the key problem which they often encounter is lack of adequately trained language teachers (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). This lack of unqualified EFL teachers has made their preparation a central issue in Language Teacher Education in Europe (Ujlakyne, 2005; Calabrese & Dawes n.d; Kalebic, 2005; Kirsch 2008; Doval & Rial, 2002; Macrory & McLachlan, 2009) and beyond like Asia (Breen, 2006; Kirsch, 2008), Australia and the States (Kirsch, 2008). However, while it seems that there is an agreement between the member states of the European Union that the preparation of primary language teachers is an important factor in the educational process, there is not much consensus on *what* these teachers need to know in order to teach their subject-matter effectively or *how* these teachers should be prepared to do so. These are the two issues that this study seeks to address.

## **1.2 RATIONALE**

Following the entry of Cyprus into the European Union in 2004 and based on the philosophy which underpins the language policy in Europe, the island has been investing heavily in both the promotion and reinforcement of foreign language learning. As part of this policy, a number of innovations and proposals have already taken place, aiming at improving the current state of English language learning in primary schools.

The Ministry of Education and Culture in the academic year 2006-2007, within the framework of ongoing reform of the educational system, introduced the all-day compulsory schools in all the districts of Cyprus with English being introduced from

grade 1. From year 1 to 3 of primary school children in these schools attend English lessons in two 40-minute periods a week and from year 4 to year 6 of primary school, this increases to four 40-minute periods. Unlike in ordinary state primary schools these lessons are delivered by specialist rather than generalist primary teachers and, by completion of primary school, pupils are expected to have reached a level of acquisition of the four language skills as proposed by the Council of Europe (2001), in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF).

In addition over the last decades, the use of a foreign language to teach a particular subject referred to as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), has been launched on a pilot basis in primary schools in the majority of European countries (Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe - 2008 Edition). Following this trend, Cyprus first implemented the CLIL programme in 2006 on a pilot basis in 5 nursery and 10 primary state schools in Cyprus and in the second year to 6 nursery and 12 primary schools. Results from the first two years of the study showed that, while parents seemed to view CLIL in a positive light, they thought that schools might have to deal with problems such as lack of trained teachers and consequently student difficulties and their negative reaction towards the lessons taught through the medium of English (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou, 2008).

Finally, an innovation that is to take place in September 2011 is associated with the starting age and time allocated to the subject of English in Primary state schools in Cyprus. English will be now taught at both the pre-primary level and the first cycle of the primary school. During this year and the first year of primary school, English is



gradually integrated into the other subjects of the primary curriculum in short periods which range from 15-30 minutes for two, three times a week. English is treated as a separate subject from grade 2 where it is taught for one forty-minute period a week and the same continues at grade 3. From grades 4 to 6 English continues to be taught for two forty-minute periods per week.

Considering the above reforms already in force, it is quite evident that the subject of English is among those which have undergone a series of reforms and innovations, some of which relate to the curriculum, the amount of time allocated to English in primary education, and, in some cases, the educational status of the teachers. However, despite the great efforts, major changes and improvements in the area of English language learning in primary state schools, no significant changes have been evident as regards the preparation of English teachers at this level. Efforts have been made to enhance the in-service training of these teachers but there is no empirical research in the Cyprus context which has investigated the kind of knowledge primary language teachers need to acquire prior to embarking on their teaching careers and how they learn to teach a foreign language. Lack of attention to an area of increasing importance in the broader context of the European Union is the major reason why pre-service language teacher education is worth investigating.

In addition, teachers in Cyprus have also had to deal with a different student population in recent years, as a result of changes in the borders of many European countries which have enabled a considerable number of immigrants to enter the island. It follows then that state school teachers need to keep up with the above changes in order to integrate

into both the national and European context they are part of and this cannot be achieved if they are not given sufficient opportunities for professional learning that pre-service education can provide them with.

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Following the aforementioned reforms, primary ELT teachers now form a significant number in the primary sector. Therefore there is a clear need for the development of an educational programme which will provide primary teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills needed to teach English confidently. However, for an educational programme to be effective, it must meet the needs of the participants (Bax; Day; Roberts cited in Gantidou, 2004:17). Hence, my primary intention is to offer prospective and practicing primary ELT teachers a “voice” in order to express their own views and needs regarding the provision of pre-service training and at the same time to provide useful feedback about the content of an effective ELT module. Furthermore, acknowledgement of the teachers’ voices and actions opens up the space for teachers to reach new understandings of their practice and take the step towards transformation which is integral to teacher learning (Sonneville, 2007).

Moreover, as a result of this study decision makers will be provided with research-based data drawn from multiple sources, enabling them to make more informed decisions on the content of the programme, bearing in mind the actual context it will be a part of. Finally, the provision of an EFL teacher training programme, based on results drawn

from a needs analysis is likely to result in a more holistic preparation of pre-service language teachers in primary state schools in Cyprus.

This study aims to evaluate the existing Primary Teacher Education programme by highlighting potential gaps, weaknesses or strengths as perceived by those directly affected (prospective and serving language teachers) and estimating its effectiveness on the overall preparation of primary language teachers. The results drawn will be used to make recommendations for the development of an ELT programme integrated in the university-level Primary Teacher Education programme. Such a programme reflects an interdependent relationship between those involved in the educational system: the learner, the teacher, the classroom, the local community and national education. It could therefore be assumed that within this complex system, to change one component means affecting another. In this case, developing or improving an Initial Teacher Training programme may produce more adequately trained teachers, which, in turn should lead to more linguistically proficient students (Roberts, 1998:102).

Based on the above assumption and the aims of the study I have developed two research questions:

1. What kinds of knowledge and skills do pre-service and in-service primary teachers consider necessary for effective language teaching in the context of Cyprus state schools?
2. What are the perceptions of the participants regarding the instructional practices they experience in their pre-service and in-service education and the extent to which these practices promote teacher learning?

Considering the recent reforms in primary foreign language learning and the fact that no similar studies involving primary language teachers have been conducted so far in Cyprus, I believe that this study will offer useful insights into the field of pre-service ELT education for teachers at the primary sector and contribute to the design of a more effective programme.

#### **1.4 PERSONAL MOTIVATION FOR RESEARCH**

My interest in conducting this study has been the outcome of my personal experience as an English instructor in the Education Department of a private University for the last nine years. As a result of my position I have had the opportunity to work with students who will become, after graduating from University, primary school teachers. Over the years, I have come to realise that the English module is rather undervalued by both the students and my colleagues, which is still more or less the case. The students have repeatedly stated that they see no link between the particular module and school teaching, so why do it? A number of students seem to hold the misconception that English is a secondary subject in the primary curriculum so they will not have to teach it unless they choose to do so. Others stated that they have avoided teaching this subject during their Teaching Practice because they simply do not know how to do this and expressed the need for language teaching education, arguing that this will give them more confidence to carry out an English lesson in case they are asked to. These problems and concerns primarily stimulated my interest in carrying out this research which is concerned with the initial education of

Primary teachers in Cyprus regarding ELT, specifically focusing on teacher knowledge and teacher learning.

## **1. 5 CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND**

The present study is concerned with the preparation of language teachers in the context of primary schools in Cyprus; thus this section sets the study within the educational context in which it takes place.

### ***1.5.1 The Cyprus Educational system***

The Cyprus Educational System, in its present form, is the outcome of the developments that established the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, following the island's independence. The entry of Cyprus into the European Union has also led to the promotion of a series of measures expected to improve the quality of education and contribute to the development of the country, making it compatible with the rest of the member states.

### ***1.5.2 The Structure***

Education is provided through pre-primary and primary schooling, secondary general and secondary technical/vocational schools, special schools and tertiary level institutions. Education is compulsory from the age of four years and eight months to the age of fifteen. This ten-year period includes education at pre-school, primary and lower secondary levels. Younger children aged three to four years may enroll in public or private kindergartens on a fee-paying basis.

Pre-primary education is part of basic education, which includes kindergartens and primary schools. Since the new legislation of 1 November 2004, it has become compulsory for children aged four years and eight months to attend either public or community or private kindergartens all of which are registered and approved by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), which also determines the curriculum to be followed. Being compulsory for children aged five-and eight months, primary education is provided free of charge and with no entrance requirements in public primary schools (Dimotika Scholeia) available throughout the country, even in remote areas. Primary Education lasts for six years.

Public secondary education offers a six-year programme of instruction for children aged twelve to eighteen. It is divided in two cycles: the lower or gymnasium (12-15) and the upper or lyceum (15-18). Having a general education orientation, the first cycle is compulsory. In the last year of the Gymnasium, vocational guidance offers pupils an opportunity to familiarise themselves with career prospects, explore academic options available after successful completion of the Gymnasium, and thus select the field or combination of studies they wish to follow in the upper division. The latter stage (comprehensive upper secondary school (Eniaio Lykeio), follows a more flexible and diverse orientation, catering to individual inclinations, aptitudes and interests. However, after completion of compulsory secondary education (the Gymnasium cycle), students have the option to continue with three-year technical education provided they have a leaving certificate.

Higher Education in Cyprus is provided by both state and private institutions at non-university and university level with the latter offering 4-year undergraduate courses

leading to the award of Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc), and postgraduate programmes of study which lead to the award of Masters qualifications (MA and MSc). A doctorate is also offered but only by the state universities. Access to the undergraduate programmes at the state universities is granted upon success in the pancyprian examinations which are used to rank candidate students whereas private universities only require a school-leaving certificate.

### ***1.5.3 The place and status of English in Education***

Cyprus was under British rule from 1878 to 1960, a situation which gave English a very prominent place within the Cypriot Educational system. Although nowadays it is not officially used as a second language in Cyprus, English has been compulsory in schools for decades and it is used as the medium of instruction in all private institutions of tertiary education at university and non-university level. Apart from this, there are a number of private schools where the medium of instruction is English and which follow an English or American curriculum and which are valued and preferred in many cases by a great number of both local and international students; as a result, English is not really in competition with other foreign languages in the Cyprus education system.

### ***1.5.4 English instruction and language teaching policy in Cyprus***

In Cyprus, a substantial proportion of teaching periods are allocated to language education, particularly in primary schools. English as a foreign language is introduced in year 4, with two forty-minute periods per week and in lower secondary school (Gymnasium), with 3.5 periods per week, with 2 periods for French, the other

compulsory foreign language taught in all three grades of the Gymnasium. In the lyceum, on the other hand, English and French were compulsory subjects until the year 2000, when their study became compulsory only in the first grade. In the second and third grade of upper secondary school, students are required to choose two foreign languages, with two periods each according to their own preference, from a total group of seven languages (English, French, German, Italian, Turkish, Spanish and Russian) within the framework of the common core subjects (Papapavlou, 2004: 6).

### ***1.5.5 English in Primary Education***

English officially became part of every school's syllabus in Cyprus during the year 1965-1966 but it was not until 1982 that a national curriculum for the teaching of English was developed together with textbooks written by the Curriculum Development Unit assigned by the Ministry of Education. In 1992, the teaching of English was introduced in the fourth year of primary school (ages 8-9) for 40 minutes a week, which doubled to 80 minutes a week the next year, as the former proved to be inadequate (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlou, 1999). The national curriculum is still followed in all public primary schools, with English being a compulsory subject and the only additional language taught at this level.

The aim of teaching English in the primary school is to enable the pupils, within the limits of the curriculum, to communicate effectively in various situations, become sensitive to language appropriacy and develop a positive attitude towards the English language and culture. Despite the fact that current thinking and recent developments across Europe suggest the use of the communicative approach in the teaching of



foreign languages at primary level, a more eclectic approach has been the foundation on which the present curriculum and syllabus have been designed. This curriculum stresses the primacy of oral/aural skills without neglecting the development of reading and writing; thus the integration and development of all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) seem to be given equal importance. The general aim is to introduce pupils to English in an interesting way, with emphasis on both talk and activity (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2011). As previously mentioned, teaching is based on textbooks produced locally by the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Development Unit, which however, reflect a form-focused, structure-oriented syllabus rather than a communicative one as advocated by the Ministry. Teachers are therefore expected to combine a variety of principles and flexible teaching methods and techniques in a carefully reasoned student-centred manner, encouraging student initiative, promoting meaningful interaction, and emphasizing both fluency and accuracy. However, as I will explain in the following sub-section, most teachers who join the Cyprus State primary schools have no specific training in EFL methodology hence there is an increased difficulty in asserting the methodology that is actually used in schools as opposed to what is recommended for use in schools (Pavlou & Ioannou-Georgiou, 2005).

#### ***1.5.6 Academic requirements of the EFL teachers***

Until a few years ago, on those occasions when there was a lack of specialist teachers in primary schools, secondary school English teachers (usually English literature majors) were employed as a temporary solution for the teaching of English. However, it was then decided that knowledge of the subject matter alone was insufficient for

teaching at this level, so generalist primary teachers, with a four-year Bachelor's degree in Education, became the only teachers eligible to teach English at this level. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, general teachers should be considered able to teach any subject in the national curriculum. When, for example, a teacher is posted at a school, the Ministry does not consider her area of specialization, interest or talents but considers her able to teach all subjects with the same efficiency. As a result, many teachers are required to teach English, despite their lack of training, competency in English or interest in teaching the subject which may often lead to malpractice, an over-reliance on the textbook and a lack of confidence which also results in an avoidance of initiatives (Pavlou & Ioannou-Georgiou, 2005).

However, it is worth mentioning that despite this policy, graduates of the Pedagogical Academy and primary teachers with some specialization in English are still preferred and it is often these teachers who take over the English classes in more than one school.

### ***1.5.7 Primary teacher Education in Cyprus***

Formal teacher training was first offered in Cyprus by the Pedagogical Academy of Cyprus, based on the model of Pedagogical Academies functioning in Greece, following a decision of the then existing Greek Board of Education. It began operating in 1959, during the transition period to the independence of Cyprus from British rule, and offered a two-year training programme for primary school teachers, which was increased to a three-year programme six years later (Eurydice, 2006). In 1992, the Pedagogical Academy (PA) ceased to exist and its role as primary teacher training institution was

primarily taken over by the Department of Education of the newly established University of Cyprus (UCy) and the length of the course increased to four years. However, the aim of the UCy was not to build on the then existing programme of the Academy but to create and gradually develop a new programme which would lead to the more effective preparation of elementary school teachers. Considering the great popularity of the particular course of study in Cyprus and following the UCy, undergraduate programmes in primary education have also been offered since 2007 by the three private universities.

### ***1.5.8 Initial primary language teacher education – An overview***

As previously mentioned during the period 1965-1992, the education of primary teachers was assumed by the Pedagogical Academy offering at the time a three-year course. The curricula of the Academy included compulsory courses in education and psychology, content courses, both theoretical and practical, which covered all the areas, taught in primary education, as well as liberal studies and electives which were included in the second cycle of the third year. All students of the Pedagogical Academy had to undertake teaching practice for 18 weeks during their three years of study during which they would observe lessons conducted by the classroom teacher, teach all subjects of the primary curriculum and be observed by a specialist instructor. English was taught as a compulsory subject for two periods a week in the first two years and one period a week in their final year, in courses such as language development, literature and teaching methodology. If English was chosen as a specialisation subject, it was taught intensively throughout the final year purely as a TEFL subject (Pedagogical Academy, 1981).

Since the education of primary teachers was taken over by the UCy and the other three private universities, students enrolled in this programme still attend generic courses in educational psychology, philosophy of education and general pedagogy, which provide them with skills in classroom management and the management of public school systems as well as with knowledge of the basic concepts and of contemporary teaching methods which underpin the teaching of all subjects in the primary curriculum. These courses also include field experiences in a variety of grade and subject areas but, unlike the Academy, students are encouraged but not obliged to observe or teach all the subjects of the primary curriculum. In addition, students have the option to specialise in subjects such as mathematics, art, science, physical education and music according to their own interests. In the three private universities, even though English courses have remained an integral part of the primary teacher education programme, students are no longer given the option to specialise in English language teaching, even if English constitutes one of the most important and constantly evolving subjects in the primary school curriculum. Unlike the private universities, students studying at the UCy are obliged to attend two modules (one semester each) in a foreign language, which does not necessarily have to be English. Students can choose the language of their preference from among German, Italian, Spanish, English, French and Turkish, regardless of the fact that English is the only foreign language taught at primary level. It should be mentioned that there is an elective module on English language instruction at the UCy and at one of the private Universities which is offered only when there is a specialist teacher available.

Even though English is still a compulsory subject in most of the universities and is taught each year (the hours of instruction may vary according to the institution), the content has shifted its focus away from the preparation of effective language teachers towards the preparation of competent language learners. The aim of the English courses offered is to develop students' oral and written competence using a variety of activities related to grammar, different styles of writing, comprehension and, in some cases, to the study of selected extracts from established British authors. Since mastery of the target language is now the sole aim of the English language course, it is often the case that students who have a certificate in the English Language (International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), General Certificate in Education (GCE) Cambridge Proficiency) do not have to attend the English courses. It is quite evident then that, while prospective EFL teachers may be proficient in the English language, a skill, which is merely attested to by the relevant certificate, they are not taught the skills to apply this knowledge to teaching in the language classroom. While mastery of the target language is also a required competency for a language teacher (Moon 2005, Ellison 2007), Kennedy asserts that one must recognise that language teacher education should primarily focus on teacher-learners as distinct from language learners (cited in Freeman and Johnson, 1998:407), the latter being the case in the preparation of prospective EFL teachers in Cyprus Universities.

### ***1.5.9 Provision of in-service teacher training***

Despite the lack of initial EFL teacher preparation, attempts have always been made to provide serving teachers with opportunities for professional development. Based on

data gained from preliminary interviews with the inspectors (see section 3.5.1), the following information came to light.

The in-service teacher training (INSET) for primary language teachers has always been the task of both the pedagogical institute, which is mainly a staff development organization, and the inspectorate, the latter offering compulsory training once a year but only to some of these teachers. This training usually adopts a top-down approach, where the focus of the programmes provided, the method of delivery, and indeed, the target teachers are chosen by the inspectors and the advisors of English. These seminars typically last between forty minutes and two hours and are delivered in lecture format with a series of “theory sessions” on the topic in focus. Generally, no follow up sessions are conducted, and it is not known whether the sessions lead to any uptake on the part of the teachers.

Apart from this, the maximum number of teachers who can attend these seminars is twenty, which means that there is place for only one teacher from each school. It is also worth noting that, because of the small number of participants, it is often the case that teachers in villages or small schools are never given the chance to attend, as priority is given to teachers who work in bigger schools. These seminars are given during teachers’ working hours so the time allowed by the Ministry of Education and Culture for these is relatively limited and consequently insufficient as it fails to meet the needs of the large number of primary teachers who are assigned to teach English, mostly due to lack of specialist EFL teachers. Thus, it is likely that a primary teacher will be given the opportunity to attend an in-service seminar one or two years after she has been employed in the position of EFL teacher. It is also worth mentioning is that the time

allocated for the in-service training makes it impossible for the inspectors to talk with or observe all the teachers in order to identify their needs; thus their decision on who should be trained is solely based on each teacher's educational background and years of experience. Optional seminars are also provided by the pedagogical institute. These courses usually take place in the afternoon and are neither compulsory nor part of the teachers' assessment, which may be the reason that only few teachers attend them.

Despite the fact that EFL teachers graduating from such programmes are entitled to teach the target language to children in the first six years of their primary education, they do not receive any initial training and are not, therefore, actually equipped with the skills they need. In other words, primary foreign language teaching is the responsibility of the classroom teacher, who, with the provision of only very short in-service training courses, is likely to be very underprepared for this role. Considering that these teachers are expected to produce proficient, motivated, and most importantly, communicatively competent language learners, then the Ministry of Education and Culture should ensure that they receive some kind of initial education, which will at least ascertain their own proficiency and knowledge base in the subject matter they are to teach.

Although teacher knowledge is experiential, highly contextualised and thus individual as will be further discussed in the thesis, there are elements that are shared by all teachers who teach a particular subject to pupils of certain age level. These are the elements or content areas that this study seeks to identify. However, as Freeman (1989) posits, mere knowledge of these areas will not enable student-teachers to teach unless they are enabled to use them productively. Williams (1999) argues that if a unified methodology is to be developed to educate teachers, then it is important to look at areas

outside the language teaching literature in order to gain an understanding of how teachers learn to teach (p. 11-12). Therefore in the following chapter I shall first be looking at the areas of teacher knowledge and teacher learning in general before discussing background theoretical issues which focus specifically on language teacher knowledge and learning. The following chapter ends with reference to previous studies in the field of language teacher education.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a critical review of the literature relevant to my study through a critical account of the issues involved, which are: Language teacher knowledge and language teacher learning for primary level; since this study is concerned with the pre-service education of primary language teachers, I feel it is important to first make reference to the terms 'education' and 'training' as these have been extensively discussed in the language education literature. I then provide a review of the literature on Teacher Education, focusing on the area of teacher knowledge, indicating how this has developed over the last decades, and refer to different models concerning the ways teachers learn to teach. With respect to the different views on general teacher education, I discuss background theoretical issues regarding language specific teacher education, that is, language teacher knowledge and learning. Finally I refer to previous studies and reports on pre-service foreign language teacher education and conclude with the theoretical framework that informs my study.

At this point it should be stated that for purposes of practicality as the majority of teachers involved in the study are female, I will be using the pronoun 'she' to refer to the teacher.

## 2.2 THE TRAINING/EDUCATION CONTINUUM

Some educators use the terms *training* and *education* to refer to the same process: the professional preparation of teachers (Ur, 1996); others try to draw a clear distinction between them. Below I refer to the different definitions given to these two terms in the language education literature and then discuss my own understanding of these key terms.

Moore (1998) asserts that training prepares a teacher for a particular set of activities and thus provides neither broad perspective nor flexibility of approach. Training programmes tend to be characterized by short-term learning aims, leading towards predetermined outcomes (James, 2001:151) and are often pursued through the demonstration of a limited number of desirable behaviours presented as models to be imitated (Williams, 1989a:3). In this sense, Widdowson (1997) describes training as solution-oriented as it provides teachers with practical techniques to deal with predictable events. Otrum (1994) asserts that training represents a more traditional approach to teacher preparation, based on the model of knowledge transmission from expert to novice and points out that this has been shown to be unsatisfactory in recent times when work situations and conditions are rapidly changing and require different competencies than in the past (219).

In contrast to teacher training, Ur (1996:3) and Moore (1998) refer to the term *education* as the process which involves the development of theories, awareness of options and decision-making abilities and which encourages general approaches to problem solving inculcating ways of thinking that are more productive, effective

and rewarding. Similarly Widdowson (1997) describes education as problem-oriented, with the implication that it requires a broader intellectual awareness of theoretical principles underlying particular practices (p. 121).

Williams (1994) refers to Prahbu's useful distinction between *equipping* and *enabling*. In Prahbu's terminology, equipping means providing the teacher with knowledge and skills for immediate use, whereas enabling means developing the teacher's capacity to face the ever-changing demands and challenges of the future. In that sense, training has an equipping perspective while education has an enabling one. We train teachers by equipping them with the tools to become skilled classroom technicians but we educate them by providing them with sound theoretical knowledge and the skills which will enable them to become reflective, critical, autonomous professionals with a capacity for lifelong learning (Lawes, 2002).

With regard to the meanings attached to the concepts of 'education' and 'training', in the next sections I discuss the different types of teacher knowledge and the way these are acquired.

### **2.3 TEACHER KNOWLEDGE**

A great deal of educational research has focused on developing a knowledge base of teaching and where possible, translating it into recommendations for teacher education programmes (Reynolds, 1989). Throughout the literature, different views have been developed about what counts as teacher knowledge and how teachers come to acquire this knowledge (Shulman, 1987; Grossman, 1990; Brown &

McIntire, 1993). Below, I discuss different views on the area of teacher knowledge and the way it develops.

### **2.3.1 The nature and development of teachers' knowledge**

In the 1970s and 1980s, what appeared to be of paramount importance in the training and accreditation of teachers was the transmission of pedagogical knowledge, i.e. theories and methods of teaching. The focus of most research carried out at the time was on generic skills and techniques rather than on the content of instruction (Tsang & Rowland, 2005:2). There is an extensive body of research literature describing the results of process-product, teacher behaviour and teaching effectiveness studies which aimed at identifying how certain patterns of teacher behaviour correlated with improved academic performance among pupils (Shulman 1986, Johnson 1992, Verloop et al. 2001). Research on teaching and learning was upon the manner in which teachers managed their classrooms, organised activities, planned lessons and generally the way in which their skills, methods, techniques affected pupils' learning. As Buchmann (1982) clearly argues, such research has led most teachers to adopt certain *folkways* of teaching to guide their practice. He refers to these folkways as "patterns of action and interpretation that exist, are considered right and are mostly uncoded" (p. 4). Such folkways which simply comprise teaching behaviour, enable most teachers to appear to be effective without necessarily having any kind of expertise (Rosenshine & Stevens 1986, Verloop et al. 2001).

This idea of effective knowledge base during those decades came under increasing criticism, however, as investigators seemed to ignore one central aspect of classroom teaching: the *subject matter*, which, as MacNamara (1991) asserts, provides the substantive content for most lessons (p. 113). This lack of focus on the content of instruction has also been criticised by Romberg & Carpenter (cited in McNamara, 1991:116) who claim that research which only focuses upon generic teaching skills and processes fails to address the quality of pupils' learning experiences, to tap cognitive processes and leads to a fragmented view of learning. Similarly, Shulman (1986) argues that the traditional requirements of teaching – basic skills, content knowledge and general pedagogical skills – trivialize teaching by ignoring its complexities and he refers to the lack of attention to subject matter as the *'Missing Paradigm'*, which characterises most research studies on teaching. Calderhead stresses the importance of subject matter knowledge, asserting that it refers to what the teachers need to know about what they teach, the specialised concepts and disciplinary knowledge constituting the theoretical base of the field (cited in Gantidou, 2004:41. Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann (1986) characterise teaching as a moral activity which requires thinking about how to build bridges between one's own understanding and that of one's students, claiming that this can only be achieved with a sound knowledge of the subject matter on the part of the teacher (p. 239).

However, for a teacher to simply know his/her subject matter well does not always bring the required outcomes unless he/she is also equipped with that sort of knowledge which embodies aspects of how to apply the particular subject when

teaching it. It is at this point that *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK) comes into play. Shulman describes PCK as the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organised, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners and presented for instruction (cited in Johnson, 1999:24). He states that researchers in the field of teacher education should not only be concerned with what teachers know about their subject matter but also how they transform their knowledge into representations that make sense to their students (Shulman, 2002:250). Parker proposes that PCK may in fact be more important than detailed knowledge of the subject itself. He goes further to suggest that current Initial Teacher Training courses place a pervasive focus on teacher subject knowledge and that this needs to be reassessed to incorporate the synthesis of both subject and pedagogy. Other scholars have further developed conceptualizations of PCK as an academic construct representing specialist knowledge of practice, essential in enhancing students' learning (Appleton, 2002; Loughran et al., 2004, 2006).

It would be very simplistic and naïve to assume that what should constitute a teacher's professional knowledge can be solely determined by theories that have developed after years of debate among researchers in the field. An alternative view of teacher knowledge which is characterised as internal to and inseparable from the teacher has emerged from more recent research. Such a view recognises teacher knowledge as largely experiential, as something that is socially constructed out of personal experiences, personal values and individual purposes (Elbaz, Connelly & Clandinin cited in Johnson, 1999:18) and not one that is made available to trainees

through the application of appropriate tasks, demonstrations and explanations. Malderez & Wedell (2007) refer to the former as *personal theories*, a term which is used in the literature almost interchangeably with terms such as beliefs, values, attitudes, judgments, opinions, ideologies, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, perspectives (Pajares, 1992) or personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). These personal theories result from teachers' personal experiences as learners as well as from their understanding of public theories. The term *public theories* incorporates research-based concepts, principles and frameworks found in education-related literature which relate to the knowledge, skills and competencies required by the professional teachers.

Although personal theories are not always explicit, consistent and logical, as Pajares (1992) argues, they form a catalytic component in the development of teachers' professional knowledge for a number of reasons. First, personal theories have been claimed to guide teachers' practical classroom actions (Carter, Halkes & Olson, Richards & Nunan cited in Richards et al., 1996:242). In other words, the way in which teachers make sense of their prior experiences of the learning situations they were exposed to, in turn directly influences the ways they react in subsequent classroom experiences. Waters (2005:217) argues that teacher's learning ultimately depends on the teacher's complex, multi-layered, internal network of meanings, as he names it, which is shaped by other socio-cultural and educational factors which exist outside formal learning. This network seems to refer to the same concept as previously referred to as personal theories. Williams (1999) asserts that "the practice of any teacher is a result of a personal theory whether this is explicit or not" (p.15).

An examination of teachers' personal theories should therefore provide teacher educators with a better understanding of how teachers are taught, how they learn to teach and how they change their approaches to teaching and learning over time.

Lortie makes the assumption that much of what teachers know about teaching comes from what he calls the *apprenticeship of observation*, that is, the memories they have from their teachers as well as their experiences as students (cited in Johnson, 1999:18). While novice teachers are likely to benefit from such an approach to learning in their first days of teaching, it can limit them to teaching the way they were taught and prevents them from moving beyond that, which is an important step in the developmental stage of learning to teach (Johnson, 1999:22). Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann (1986) posit that thinking about teaching from a student's perspective is not the same as looking at teaching from a pedagogically oriented way (p.239). Neither should we ignore the fact that teacher learners return to schools for different reasons; thus, simply knowing what to do in a classroom is no longer enough. What really matters is for them to know whether what they do is right and how they can use their prior knowledge to become better teachers (Golombek cited in Johnson, 1999:18).

Therefore, a reliance on teachers' personal theories to define teacher professional knowledge would also be shortsighted. Although these are thought to be difficult or impossible to change, researchers such as Bailey (1992) and Golombek (2000) affirm the notion that changes in teachers' practices are the result of changes in teachers' personal theories. Malderez & Wedell (2007) assert that if the aim of a



teacher education programme is to influence teachers' practices, they should be encouraged to form links between their personal theories and the public theories available to them through the programme, by comparing and contrasting their own explanations and interpretations with those of others. Being exposed to such an approach, trainees are expected to synthesise their own theories with the new input they receive, in an attempt to confirm what they already know or to achieve better understanding (p. 37). Donaghue (2003) points out that teacher education programmes should first explicitly address the trainees' personal theories before providing input. In other words, teachers' personal theories need to be uncovered before development can occur, enabling critical reflection and then change. Only then, will they be able to adapt public theories and bring about any desirable changes in their teaching practices.

However, the above process is far from static. Personal theories, as Williams (1999) argues, can also be reconstructed through reflection on practice, shaping teachers' learning. This means, according to Grossman (1990), that while teachers can acquire knowledge from a variety of sources, they also create new knowledge within the classroom in the specific context in which they operate. This view is also supported by Freeman (1996), who views teaching as a highly interpretive and situated activity where classrooms and students are the frameworks of interpretation that teachers use for knowing rather than mere settings for implementing ideas (p.98). The above view indicates that teacher's knowledge is experiential and highly contextualised, as practice is rooted in context.

## 2.4 TEACHER LEARNING - A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST VIEW

The conceptualisation of the development of teachers' knowledge offered in this section reveals that it is *dynamic, individual* as well as *context-bound* and this fits into a social constructivist framework as this will be further discussed in this section.

As a philosophy of learning, constructivism can be traced to the work of the philosopher Giambattista Vico, who maintained that humans can understand only what they have themselves constructed (cited in Thanasoulas, n.d:1). A great many philosophers and educationalists have worked with these ideas, but the core ideas were clearly expressed by Piaget and Dewey; it is therefore important to briefly discuss their theories and how these have influenced our stance towards the nature of learning and teaching.

Piaget's constructivism is premised on his view of the psychological development of children. Within his theory, the basis of learning is discovery. He argues that to understand is to discover, or reconstruct by rediscovery, and such conditions must be complied with if in the future individuals are to be formed, who are capable of production and creativity and not simply repetition (Piaget, 1973). According to Piaget, children go through stages in which they accept ideas they may later discard as wrong. Understanding therefore, is built up step by step through active participation and involvement.

Similarly Dewey views learning as a social process which involves the learner engaging with the world. He asserts that students cannot learn by means of rote memorisation; they can only learn by 'directed learning', whereby concrete activities

are combined with theory (cited in Thanasoulas, n.d:2). The obvious implication of Dewey's theory is that students must be engaged in meaningful activities that induce them to apply the concepts they are trying to learn. For him the crucial action of constructing meaning is mental; therefore, while hands-on experience may be necessary for learning, it is not sufficient; activities which engage the mind as well as hands should be provided, which means that he calls for an approach that requires learners to both reflect and experience. He also points out that such activities have to be embedded in a social context, such as a classroom, where learners are given opportunities to interact with others and construct their knowledge together. Interestingly, in contrast with traditional education, which is directed towards seeing learning as a one-on-one relationship between the learner and the objective material to be learned, he recognises the social aspect of learning in progressive education and uses conversation, interaction with others and the application of knowledge as an integral aspect of learning (cited in Hein, 1991:3).

Based on this premise, contemporaries like Glaserfeld, Louden and Salmon tried to give their own understanding of what a constructivist approach means to teaching. Glaserfeld argues that the key idea of constructivism is that there is never a right way to teach; thus, the particular approach does not imply indicating to teachers what to do but is rather concerned with enabling them to make sense of or meaning from the situations in which they find themselves. Taking a constructivist perspective on education therefore, means, helping people to make their own meanings (Williams & Burden, 1997). Louden asserts that a teacher's understanding about teaching is shaped in part by his/her own personal theories but also by the theories

which emerged from the experiences of others. Finally Salmon describes the constructivist approach as the attempt to share what one oneself finds personally meaningful, rather than the passing on of a parcel of objective knowledge (cited in Williams & Burden, 1997:51-53).

It could be argued that constructivism emphasises the importance of the personal theories and skills an individual brings to bear on learning and uses to construct new knowledge. The above views suggest a learning process, where the learners learn by dint of matching new against given information and establishing meaningful connections, rather than by mere internalising of facts and ideas to be regurgitated later on.

Based on the aforementioned views on constructivism, learning is seen as a highly individualised process and the learners as active constructors of meaning (Waters, 2005). However, a more contemporary view of constructivism, which seems to be influenced by Dewey's theory, is expressed by Williams & Burden (1997) and Freeman & Johnson (1998) who emphasise the interactive aspect of learning which they perceive as a dynamic, ongoing process and recognize the importance of the learning environment or context within which the learning takes place. Williams (1999) asserts that learning is concerned with individuals constructing their own knowledge or understandings in their own ways by interacting socially with other people within a social context.

Viewing the construction of new knowledge then, as a combination of prior learning matched against new information, readiness to learn, and as one which arises through social interactions with others, this theory opens new perspectives, leading individuals to informed choices about what to accept and how to fit this into their existing schemata, as well as what to reject. However, as previously discussed, it is important for teachers to become aware of the personal theories they bring with them to the process of learning to teach, a view which relates to the goal of reflective practitioner (Williams & Burdens 1997; Malderez & Wedell, 2007) which will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Such an approach calls for a methodology for teacher education which draws on the teacher's own experience where teachers consider and reconsider old ideas and practices, consider new ideas, work out how to use them and theorise from the results. It also has implications for the trainer's role which should be "to help student teachers become aware of existing knowledge, to organize it and make connections, and to reshape it in the light of new information" (Williams, 1999:14). It is apparent that this methodology is participant-oriented as it places the teacher-learner in the centre of the learning process. I would therefore argue that such an approach to teacher education should be participant-sensitive in order to claim that it has a developmental perspective and this requires teachers' voices to be heard (Bax; Head & Taylor; Jacobson; Roberts, cited in Gantidou, 2004:45).

Having considered the areas of teacher knowledge and teacher learning in general, I will now look into what language teachers in particular, need to know, and into the

processes they go through in acquiring this knowledge. In the following section I shall first discuss the types of knowledge that should form the knowledge base of the EFL primary teacher and then refer to the different models of language teacher education as these have been discussed in the literature in order to decide which model best promotes the social-constructivist view of learning outlined above.

At this point, it is important to note that although some of the issues discussed in the following sections are also applicable in teacher education in general, for the context of this study, I will be approaching them from the viewpoint of language teacher education.

## **2.5 THE KNOWLEDGE BASE OF EFL PRIMARY TEACHERS**

With regard to what has been discussed so far, it could be assumed that the knowledge base of teaching consists, according to Verloop et al. (2001:1), of all profession-related insights, which are potentially relevant to a teacher's activities. From this perspective, it could be argued that teacher's personal theories should be included within this knowledge base, along with formal propositional knowledge. Fenstermacher (1994) refers to the former as knowledge *of* the teachers and to the latter as knowledge *for* the teachers. However, as previously argued, the first type of knowledge is highly determined by individual experiences and personal histories, thus no formal assumptions can be formulated which would form the basis on which a student teacher can be trained. Therefore, this section will only be concerned with elements of a language teacher's knowledge which should be shared by all

language teachers who teach at the primary level and which can therefore be acquired by student-teachers during their formal education.

Before considering the kind of knowledge, competencies and skills that an EFL primary teacher needs to have, we need to understand the duality and complexity of his/her role in the child's education. For many, teaching English to young children is viewed as relatively easy and unchallenging, as an extension of mothering (Cameron, 2003); mere knowledge of the basic structures of English along with generic pedagogical knowledge required to teach at primary level are considered the most important elements of a competent EFL teacher. However, what needs to be realised is that primary language teachers have a greater responsibility than mere teaching, in that it is they who will expose children to a new language and a new culture for the first time, thus laying the necessary foundations for the successful acquisition of the target language. Cameron (2003) argues that teaching children requires all the skills of a good primary teacher, plus knowledge of the language, of language teaching and of language learning.

Even though discussion of children's learning is beyond the scope of this study, I believe that a brief summary would highlight the primary teacher's role in the language learning process; this, in turn, will provide us with useful insights into what kind of knowledge is required by the teacher to facilitate such learning.

### ***2.5.1 Children's learning***

Learning, as argued in section 2.4, is an active process and should be seen as such, regardless of the age of the learner. Piaget referred to active learning as

*constructivism*, suggesting that children construct knowledge by continually working with objects and ideas in their environment. From a Piagetian viewpoint, children are active sense-makers, but their sense-making is limited to their own experiences (cited in Cameron 2003:4).

Vygotsky's views of development differ from Piaget's in the importance he gives to language and to other people in the child's world. For him, development and learning takes place in a social context, in a world full of other people (peers, teachers, parents), who, in a whole range of ways, *mediate* the world of children and make it accessible to them (cited in Cameron, 2003:6). Vygotsky's theory is thus, more associated with the idea of *social constructivism*. He was interested in exploring what individual children were capable of achieving with the help and support of a more knowledgeable 'other'. Accordingly, he developed the concept of *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) which describes the 'zone' between the current knowledge of the child and the potential knowledge achievable with some help from adults (cited in Pinter, 2006:11).

Building on Piaget and Vygotsky's theory and work, Bruner (cited in Cameron, 2003:8) introduced the concept of *scaffolding*, within which language is perceived as the most important tool for cognitive growth. Based on this premise, through an experiment he carried out with American mothers and children, he indicated how adults can use *talk* during the interaction that takes place in the ZPD to offer meaningful support to the child while doing an activity (cited in Pinter, 2006:8).



Wood (1998), Coyle et al. (2001) and Pinter (2006) have clearly indicated how the idea of scaffolding can be transferred to the classroom. Based on the theories of children's learning, the teachers should act as mediators, who will need to think about how they can best *scaffold* their pupils' early language production in their English classes, what questioning techniques they will use to elicit language from their learners and how they can encourage them to use language meaningfully.

### ***2.5.2 Current views on language teachers' knowledge base***

The body of knowledge and skills that a foreign language teacher needed two decades ago is no longer considered sufficient in fulfilling the demands of today's rapidly changing world. While knowledge of the subject matter, which in the case of English meant good knowledge of grammar, sufficed 20 years ago, today's language teacher faces challenges that require a wider array of competencies (Schrier cited in Velez-Rendon, 2002:461).

Although there is no consensus about the core knowledge base of language teacher education, some efforts that seek to define what language teachers should know have been undertaken in the last few years. Various scholars (Shulman, 1987; Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Day, 1991; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Richards, 1998; Richards, 2009; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Yates & Muchisky, 2003; Fradd & Lee, 1998) have come up with frameworks, delineating that knowledge (see appendix A). Instead of looking at each of these frameworks separately, it would be useful to examine what they all have in common, regarding the types of knowledge they argue for.

A rather distinct framework is proposed by Malderez & Wedell (2007), who use three broad categories describing the types of knowledge that a teacher needs: *Knowing about* things (KA), *knowing how* to do things (KH) and *knowing to* use appropriate aspects of other kinds of knowledge while actually teaching (KT). They argue that the latter type brings together the two other types of knowledge and depends on specialised skills (e.g. noticing, interpreting behaviours, using their knowledge and skills in the right place and at the right time) which they can use to support learning (p. 25). Such knowledge, though, cannot be taught but rather developed over time through practising and extensive exposure to real teaching. Since this study is concerned with the content of a pre-service LTE programme, it will focus solely on the other two types of knowledge that can be acquired via formal instruction. I will therefore use the two headings proposed by Malderez & Wedell (KA and KH) and expand on them, using the commonly identified areas drawn from all the frameworks mentioned above (and outlined in the appendix). Such a framework will include the following:

*Knowing about (KA)*

- The subject-matter (Shulman, 1987; Day, 1991; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Yates & Muchisky, 2003; Fradd & Lee, 1998; Richards, 1998; Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Freeman & Johnson, 1998).
- The curriculum and materials used and the place of the subject-matter within the school curriculum - curricular knowledge (Shulman, 1987; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Malderez & Wedell, 2007).

- The context (contextual knowledge) which may refer to a) knowledge of the educational context – the education system as a whole, the school and its policies (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Shulman, 1987; Malderez & Wedell, 2007), and b) knowledge of schooling - prior experiences as language learners (Freeman & Johnson, 1998).
- Their learners, their background and needs (Shulman, 1987. Richards & Farrell, 2005; Fradd & Lee, 1998; Malderez & Wedell, 2007).
- Strategies for managing one's ongoing professional learning (Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Richards & Farrell, 2005).
- Theories of teaching (Richards, 1998).

The development of *knowing how* relates to the development of certain skills which inform a teacher's practices. In other words, it is the development of a teacher's ability to use her *knowing about* in practice in order to facilitate learning. The following skills related to this type of knowledge have been identified.

#### *Knowing how (KH)*

- To use the specialised knowledge to represent content knowledge in diverse ways that learners can understand, providing opportunities for comprehensible input in the classroom (Shulman, 1987; Day, 1991; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Fradd & Lee, 1998; Yates & Muchisky, 2003, Richards, 1998).

- To identify and treat learners' difficulties and errors, providing constructive feedback (Richards, 1998; Day, 1991).
- To select, develop and adapt instructional materials (Shulman, 1987; Day, 1991; Richards & Farrell, 2005).
- To check comprehension and assess learners' knowledge (Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Yates & Muchisky, 2003; Fradd & Lee, 1998).
- To organise and manage the classroom, motivate learners, carry out different forms of evaluation, recognise individual differences, promote conditions which support the learning process, use technology, make decisions (Shulman, 1987; Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Day, 1991; Richards, 1998; Fradd & Lee, 1998).
- To collaborate with students, other professionals, parents and colleagues (Malderez & Wedell, 2007).

The different types of knowledge and skills outlined above seem to form an integral part of every teacher's professional knowledge. However, this study is based on the assumption that the knowledge base of primary classroom teachers differs, to a certain extent, from the knowledge base of primary foreign language teachers. Based on this premise and on the fact that the preparation of primary teachers, regardless of their specialization, exists within primary teacher education curricula, it is essential to examine the current programmes on offer in Cyprus, in order to

identify which of the competencies and skills mentioned above, that relate specifically to language teaching are not covered in the curriculum of general classroom teacher education.

Teacher education programmes in Cyprus cover the same compulsory modules in all four universities even though these may appear under different titles. Student-teachers are exposed to a number of courses on theoretical and practical pedagogy, sociology of education, psychology, mother tongue development as a first and as a second language and content courses, both theoretical and practical, which cover the lessons taught in the primary curriculum. These courses provide them with knowledge of the characteristic features of young learners and of pedagogical principles and skills in using basic techniques and strategies that relate to primary teaching, including aspects of classroom management and discipline. In addition, they take courses on curriculum development and, the organisation of the Cyprus education system as well as courses on how to use information technology in both their teaching and their professional development. The English (or foreign language) courses offered enable student-teachers to develop proficiency in the target language.

As discussed in the background section of this thesis, the current teacher education programmes in Cyprus, equip student teachers with a wide range of useful competencies and skills essential to teach all the subjects of the primary curriculum, but provide them with few to no opportunities to acquire any kind of knowledge or to develop any skills specific to language teaching. It is these subject-specific

knowledge and skills that primary teachers who will be involved in FL teaching, need to develop during their initial preparation at university.

In order to identify the knowledge and skills which differentiate the knowledge base of primary foreign language teachers from the knowledge base of general classroom teachers, we need to exclude those which are acquired through other courses in primary teacher education programmes. In doing so, we come up with the two specialist competences outlined below.

*Knowing about*

- The subject-matter
- The place of the subject-matter within the school curriculum and available materials.

According to Malderez & Wedell (2007), the development of a teacher's Knowledge How is clearly related to aspects of Knowing About. It could therefore be assumed that the development of Knowing About, which in this case is language-specific, should also lead to the development of skills which are related specifically to language teaching. These skills (the first five listed in section 2.5.2) seem to describe what Shulman refers to as a Teacher's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (see 2.3.1).

It seems that all the aforementioned skills which comprise a language teacher's Pedagogical Content Knowledge refer to both the didactic and pedagogical principles of teaching a language. Peck (1999) makes a distinction between *didactics* and *pedagogy*;

he uses the term *didactics* to mean that which has to do with principled planning and conduct of foreign language teaching in general, in other words the different methods used in teaching a foreign language. *Pedagogy*, by contrast, is the specific way an individual teacher selects and implements learning activities in order to introduce or explain a specific lesson to a specific class (p. 110). Acting in a pedagogical way depends on both the teacher's knowledge of didactics, the teacher's knowledge of her class and the teacher's stock of teaching experiences.

If we accept Peck's definitions of these two terms, we could assume that didactics is an aspect of language teaching that informs the teachers' knowing how, whereas pedagogy seems to be more related to what a teacher should be able to do in the long run, as a result of his Knowing About and Knowing How. Drawing on this assumption, I argue for the following framework which outlines the specialist knowledge base of the primary language teacher:

#### *Knowing about*

- The subject-matter
- The place of the subject-matter within the school curriculum and available materials

#### *Knowing how*

- To communicate the subject-matter effectively to the students
- Provide constructive feedback to treat learners' difficulties and errors
- Make effective choice and use of materials
- To check comprehension and assess learners' knowledge

### **2.5.3 The knowing about of a language teacher**

Having decided on the possible areas that are likely to constitute a language teacher's KA, it is worth drawing on the relevant literature in order to explain them in more detail. A clear understanding of the above concepts will enable us to make more informed assumptions on how and when these may be acquired during formal education.

#### **Knowledge of the subject-matter**

Even if we assume that the above types of knowledge and skills are those required by a primary language teacher, a definition of exactly what subject knowledge is required to teach an MFL in primary schools is the subject of much debate. Borg (2006b) found that the content of language teaching is more complex and varied than that of other subjects adding that the subject matter of language teaching is harder to define. Johnston & Goettsch (2000) support this point arguing that the nature of the subject matter of language teaching is an open question. They state:

“In a skill-focused field such as language learning, it is even harder to picture the 'body of knowledge' that might constitute the field. Do we mean procedural knowledge - the teacher's ability to speak the language - or declarative knowledge - the teacher's knowledge about the language, for example, the ability to articulate the rules of the language?” (p.446)

Moon (2005) uses the term linguistic competence to refer to both of these types of knowledge. Linguistic competency has been assumed by many educationists and researchers in the area of TEFL as the most essential component of success in language teaching (Murdock 1994, Butler 2004, Pinter 2006; Blondin et al., 1998;



Ofsted, 2002). Lange (1983) argues that the teacher's linguistic competency is imperative as it is highly related to the teacher's understanding of the nature of FL learning, his knowledge of teaching methods and expertise in classroom interaction

*Procedural knowledge (Knowledge of the language)*

As discussed earlier, primary English teachers act as language models for students, especially at the beginning stages of learning a language. Children often have limited exposure to the English language outside the classroom, thus, their teacher remains the only model of correct and appropriate usage of the language as well as of accurate pronunciation.

Assuming that the language teacher is also a facilitator of language learning, it is obvious that a good command of the English language is necessary to provide comprehensible input and natural exposure to the target language. Teachers with low levels of proficiency are more likely to use the target language less frequently in the classroom or in a more controlled way. Driscoll (1999) refers to a study she conducted which aimed at investigating how specialists (with EFL expertise) and generalists approached an EFL lesson. The results indicated that the specialists used the target language continuously throughout the lesson as a medium of communication, whereas the generalist teachers lacked the confidence and ability to use the language in a natural way. She pointed out that 'their usage appeared rather formulaic and artificial, more like reciting lines from a play in the early stages of rehearsal' (Driscoll, 1999:30). Lack of confidence in their proficiency may lead them to rely on language they have more or less learnt by heart for dealing with routine or

predictable situations, inhibiting spontaneous use of interactive language between them and their pupils.

Driscoll (1999) asserts that classroom language is very complex and requires the teacher to respond to the unpredictable nature of classroom life without the support of teaching aids and materials (p. 30). This suggests that the teacher's proficiency should enable her to carry out all dimensions of the pedagogical processes, mentioned above, which take place in the context of the classroom. Speech, according to Nunan & Lamb (1996), is the tool of the teacher's trade (p.60). It is the tool that she uses to provide essential support to facilitate both language comprehension and language production. Krashen (1985) argues that this is how teachers provide learners with comprehensible input, which he sees as the essential ingredient in second language acquisition.

With regard to what has been discussed so far, it is clear that the teacher's proficiency in the target language is indeed a competency that should form an integral part of the language teacher's knowledge base, but is insufficient on its own. Simply being able to speak or write with fluency in a language does not mean being able to teach that language. If that were the case, then we would expect all native speakers to be ideal language teachers. Shuib (2009) argues that in order to teach effectively, teachers need to have explicit knowledge of the underlying systems of the language in question, in other words, knowledge *about* the language rather than (implicit) knowledge *of* the language.

*Declarative knowledge (Knowledge about the language)*

Since this study is concerned with the expected competencies of primary language teachers in Europe, I will try to examine what type of explicit knowledge about the language is required to teach this age group, as this will be drawn from the relevant literature.

As discussed in the background section, in most countries where English is taught as a foreign language, there has been a shift from the traditional grammar-based methodology to an emphasis on the principles of a more communicative approach aiming to enhance students' interest in English language learning and target culture and develop basic communicative competence. The functional-situational use of language has become the primary goal with its focus on oral/aural skills, which inevitably leads to less explicit attention to grammar. It seems however, that while great emphasis has been placed on the expected outcomes of such an approach (*what* children will be able to do), little attention has been paid to how/by which means these outcomes can be achieved. Cameron (2003) argues that syllabuses informed by such an approach, describe language in terms of how it is used in communication rather than see it as a linguistic system or a set of skills (p.17).

While it seems that communicative/functional syllabuses are widely promoted, it should be noted that in general most of the syllabuses used in primary schools are based on grammar and lexical knowledge (Calabrese & Dawes, n.d:9-10). Apart from this, even though this may not always be the case, the focus of teaching a foreign language frequently revolves around the four skills of reading, writing,

listening and speaking, regardless of whether some are given greater emphasis than others. Cameron (2003) argues that the development and enhancement of speaking and listening skills are subject to constant classroom interaction, whether this is formal or informal. However, the development of reading and writing (literacy skills) present learning tasks which presuppose specific knowledge and understanding of literacy issues on the part of the teacher.

Exposing young learners to new vocabulary might be useful and fun at the very early ages, but the production of single words, by no means leads to the development of the spoken language. In their attempt to encourage communication, teachers may often even try to introduce learners to chunks of language, which might also seem important at the beginning and perhaps confidence-boosting for the young learners. However, such chunks cannot always be used whole. Children should be able to break each chunk down and re-use its parts with other words, in order to produce sentences. Cameron (2003:98) refers to the breaking down and recombining of previously learnt chunks of language as the process of grammar construction which appears to be a useful part of language learning. She asserts that since grammar is closely tied into meaning and use of language and is interconnected with vocabulary, skilful grammar teaching would appear to be a prerequisite for successful language learning.

The importance of explicit grammatical knowledge among English language teachers has also been emphasised by other scholars. Denham and Lobeck (2002) state that many educational textbooks point out that, teachers must be aware of certain grammatical fundamentals in order to help learners recognise

patterns of errors. Azar (2007:24) states that it is the teacher's job to clarify grammar information for students; this means that teacher should be in position to explain why for example '*I danced*' is correct but '*I goed*' is not, instead of expecting the learners to work out the rules as a result of mere exposure to communicative activities. Andrews (2005:74) argues that both initial and continuing teachers should have access to grammar knowledge. In his opinion, a teacher with rich knowledge of grammatical constructions will be in a better position to help young learners. Johnston & Goettsch (2000) argue that the conscious awareness of grammar structures is as much a part of the teacher's knowledge base as the ability to use them in practice.

Apart from explicit knowledge of the grammatical functions of the language, Yates & Muchisky (2003) believe that an understanding of how language is organised and how languages are learned is fundamental to becoming a competent language teacher. Such an understanding enables language teachers to identify possible errors made by their learners, assess learners' knowledge, treat their non-targetlike forms and be able to articulate any differences that may exist between learning an L1 and learning an L2 (p.139). The contribution of second language acquisition (SLA) research to language teaching and its role in teacher education programmes has been repeatedly disputed (Ellis, 1997; Lightbown, 1985; Freeman, 1989; Long, 1990; Yates & Muchisky, 2003). Lightbown (1985), however, suggests that there is an indirect connection between SLA and teachers' pedagogical actions, claiming that teachers' knowledge of relevant theories enables them to be aware of the realistic

constraints of language learning in the classroom context and thus to have appropriate expectations for themselves and their students.

### **The place of the subject-matter within the school curriculum**

Apart from sound knowledge of the subject-matter, it is important for every individual teacher to be well aware of the place her subject-matter holds in the primary curriculum; that is, if it is treated as a separate subject or if it's integrated into the existing primary programme.

In the first case, the teacher should be familiar with the hours of language instruction at different levels and the expected outcomes to be achieved during this time. However, there are cases, as mentioned in the background section of this study, where English is used in a systematic way through the CLIL approach. This approach aims at developing in children, both content and language simultaneously, in which case teachers may need different kinds of knowledge. Having to engage students whose proficiency is not sufficiently advanced in meaningful content relevant activities, is a hard task to achieve (Pinter, 2006:40). This may imply that the teacher needs to be familiar with the aims of such an approach as well as with ways of designing lesson plans and materials suitable for implementing CLIL in their specific context.

Since this study is concerned with the knowledge base of primary language teachers in Cyprus where both of the above cases are possible, it could be assumed that prospective teachers should be familiar with the different place that

English may hold in the primary curriculum as well as with any materials available to support their teaching and their students' learning in any of these cases.

#### ***2.5.4 The knowing how of a language teacher***

Considering what has been discussed so far, it goes without saying that knowledge of the subject-matter in the broader sense discussed above, and its place in the primary curriculum, is an essential competency every foreign language teacher needs to have in order to be able to provide authentic opportunities for language learning, making use of appropriate activities, adjusting them to the level of her students, making links with other subjects and fulfilling the goals set by the curriculum. However, novice teachers who do not yet know their students, and who may have to move from one school to another several times in the course of a career, may find it hard and time consuming to prepare for their lesson based on sheer knowledge of these aspects.

Peck (1999) argues that it is vital for prospective foreign language teachers to also have access to didactic knowledge, which is useful outside the classroom, before the lesson starts, which informs the teaching of the whole language and is relevant to all classes. This means, that, through the study of subject-specific methodology, the teacher is provided with a wide range of strategies and activities she can use to teach her subject, with methods of assessment appropriate for the level of the students they teach and with ways of providing feedback. Gutierrez (2001:15) defines didactics as the 'science which studies the teaching-learning phenomena as prescriptive aspects of an efficient methodology'. He asserts that, even though

knowledge about the methodology is not enough to acquire the art of teaching, it is still a required step to reach that art.

What has been discussed so far is concerned with the knowledge base (knowledge and skills) that a prospective language teacher should acquire during her initial preparation. Below, I present another aspect of a language teacher's professional knowledge base, which I believe should be the ultimate goal of a teacher's education process but which needs a lifetime teaching career to be completed, and which is therefore treated as a topic in its own right.

## **2.6 SUBJECT-SPECIFIC PEDAGOGY - THE ART OF FL TEACHING**

Knowing how to teach your subject involves much more than simply knowing how to do particular things in classroom. For Freeman the ability to teach your subject-matter involves a cognitive dimension that links thought with activity, centering on the context-embedded, interpretive process of knowing what to do under particular circumstances (cited in Jimenez-Raya, 2001:32). For the context of this study, I use the term subject-specific pedagogy rather than Shulman's definition of *Pedagogical Content Knowledge* to refer to this ability or pedagogical skills that are developed over time rather than acquired as knowledge during formal education. In this sense, subject-specific pedagogy refers to the skills teachers develop and use to communicate knowledge to others, to make it easier for students to understand the content they are learning. According to Peck (1999), "these are classroom language-teaching skills which, can only be practised with one specific group or class at a time; they have to be prepared for out of the sum total of knowledge a



teacher has gained, but they are particular as opposed to being general (as in the case of didactics), because they must be refined, and tuned anew every time the teacher encounters a different group of students with different needs, aptitudes and abilities” (p. 111).

This ability relates to a teacher’s development of certain specialised skills (e.g. noticing, interpreting behaviours), which seem to be what Malderez & Wedell (2007) refer to as *Knowing to (KT)*. They argue that this ability or skill (I will avoid using the term ‘knowledge’ for the same reason mentioned above) brings both of the other types of knowledge together (KA & KH) and is therefore the most important of the three. However, these are not skills to be taught but ones that gradually develop as a result of personal teaching experiences and a sufficient amount of effort and time invested in real teaching and in this sense, they are considered non-prescriptive (Jimenez-Raya, 2001:31). It is therefore evident that such skills cannot be acquired by a FL teacher at a pre-service stage, as I also argued earlier in this section; however, teachers can be helped to draw on their Knowing About & Knowing How as a way of engaging in the development of their Knowing To or subject-specific pedagogy, which should be seen as a lifelong process.

Such a view implies that effective teaching cannot be a goal to be reached on completion of a pre-service teacher education programme. The aim of such a programme should be to educate student-teachers to use reason soundly and to be capable of skilful performance. Fenstermacher (cited in Jimenez-Raya,

2001:32) argues that *sound reasoning* requires a process of thinking about what one is doing and an appropriate *knowledge base* that should provide the grounds for choices and actions. These two aspects will be further discussed in the next section.

Following the previous discussion with regard to *what* primary EFL teachers need to know and be able to do, in the following section, I refer to different approaches to the process of developing this knowledge base in future teachers, as these are discussed in the literature.

## **2.7 APPROACHES TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION - BACKGROUND ISSUES**

Although teacher education programmes have been in existence for a long time, foreign language teacher education is a relatively recent development. According to Day (1991), in the past, language teachers were either native speakers or had some recognised expertise in the language, usually based on their knowledge of the literature and the culture of the target language. This knowledge was indeed the only criterion for a teacher to enter the particular profession, which implied that no further education was necessary. However, during the last two decades, there has been an explosion in the teaching and learning of foreign languages, both in the actual classroom teaching and in the education of foreign language teachers (p. 1). This has been particularly rapid in the field of primary foreign language teacher education where a growing professionalism has pushed an agenda for both pre-service and in-service teacher education to the fore (Kirsch, 2008; Kelly et al., 2004), the former being the focus of this paper.

In recent years, even though the content of FLT education has been repeatedly debated, as discussed in the previous section, the process and methodology of delivering this content to trainee teachers has been given particular attention (Williams, 1994). Freeman & Richards (1993) assert that the different views regarding approaches to the preparation of teachers, in this case language teachers, derive from the different conceptions on what teaching is, what skills it involves and what teachers must know, which, is the topic of the discussion in the following subsection.

### ***2.7.1 Goals of Language Teacher Education programmes***

Teacher education programmes set different goals they ultimately aim to achieve and these direct the focus of their content and structure. Freeman & Richards (1993) assert that there cannot be universal consensus on what 'good' teaching is as this can be conceived in different ways depending on how the nature of the work and the role of the teacher are framed in different contexts (p. 194). It is clear that one of the most crucial issues in language teacher education is the conception of teaching adhered to and the view of the teacher which necessarily derives from this conception. This conception determines the goal to be achieved as a result of the programme, which in turn, will manifest itself in a model of teaching. It is, therefore, important to briefly summarise some possible goals of LTE programmes and the various conceptions of teaching which underpin them, as these are discussed in the literature.

One goal is likely to be the production of 'good' teachers which emphasises turning the individual into a teacher; in other words, producing self-confident teachers who are able to survive in the classroom (Malderez & Wedell, 2007). A programme informed by such a goal should therefore help the teacher to develop some 'teacherly qualities', which will be accepted and valued in a given context. This entails programmes using a *micro* (Richards & Nunan, 1990) or *competency-based* (Britten, 1985a) approach which focuses on providing student teachers with discrete and measurable skills for TEFL such as what to teach (content) and how to teach it (methods). Williams (1994:217) refers to these as "the tools of the trade".

Malderez & Wedell (2007) refer to a second goal of language teacher education programmes, which focuses on producing/developing 'good' teaching and stresses the importance of the activity and how it is carried out rather than of the individual. However, sharing this goal does not necessarily mean adopting the same approach to teacher education since the activity of teaching may also be understood differently. Some people see it as a *craft*, in the sense that learning means replicating the behaviours of experienced others, or as a *science*, in the sense that learning means access to the latest scholarly thinking and research. The above conceptions imply that teaching is a closed skill and support the view that there is only one best way of doing something, ignoring the complexity and the influence of the context within which this activity takes place. Freeman (1989:42) posits that the focus here is on prescribed, specific, short-term measurable goals for the novice teacher that can be mastered in a set amount of time "through specific courses of action". Even though Malderez & Wedell (2007) view the development of technician

teachers as a separate goal, I see it as being the outcome of the craft or science conceptions of teaching. A technician is somebody who is trained to display certain sets of behaviours in order to achieve the expected outcomes; such behaviours, however, may be modeled to them as a craft or as a science passed on to them from expertise which derives from specialist research. Nevertheless, regardless of the sources which guide such behaviours, they do not account for the individual teacher's thinking, and professional contexts and programmes informed by such conceptions expect the teacher to exhibit prescribed strategies.

A third goal identified by Malderez & Wedell (2007), is to produce *professional teachers*, who can autonomously make practical decisions on a variety of unpredictable issues while making use of relevant knowledge and skills, and who are capable of carrying out individual research and introducing innovation. While this seems to be the ideal goal to be set by a language teacher education programme, it sounds rather broad and theoretical as it mainly focuses on the qualities expected of the professional teacher but little attention is paid to *how* these may be acquired. Undoubtedly, seeing the value of professional journals, participating in professional debates, developing flexible, informed decision-making skills all contribute to the construction of a teacher's professional knowledge but how does the teacher come to develop these skills? This is where the notion of reflective practitioner comes in to complement the aforementioned goal. Here the focus is on the teacher learning process, especially in terms of self-evaluation and reflection. This goal demands a *macro* (Richards & Nunan, 1990) or *holistic approach* (Britten, 1995a), which concentrates on developing student teachers' individual, internal, long-term needs

and assumes that teachers will need to think for themselves and respond to teaching dilemmas and societal changes that cannot be anticipated (Kennedy, 1987; Lange, 1990; Fullan, 1999). Instead of knowledge and skills, this goal aims at developing a trainee's 'attitude' and 'awareness', which contrary to the traditional knowledge-transmission model of teacher education, aims at bringing about long-lasting change and development (Freeman cited in Bailey, 2006:37). This will subsequently enable her to become what Williams (1994) refers to as a *thinking professional* who will autonomously engage in any professional action mentioned above.

In light of the above discussion, it seems that the various conceptions of teaching which underpin particular goals of language teacher education programmes imply different assumptions about the role of the teacher, and the education of the teachers. These differences in philosophical conceptions are reflected in terminological differences (Richards & Crookes, cited in Raya, 2001:30). Accordingly, programmes are described in terms of *teacher training* or *teacher education*, depending on the outcomes they aim to achieve. Based on this premise, it is clear that the first two goals reflect the notion of training while the last two are more likely to be the outcome of education (see section 2.2). Nevertheless, Williams (1989a), argues that the relationship between the above, seemingly contradictory terms, can be a collaborative one and as such they should be seen as points on a continuum rather than different goals to be achieved.

In the next sub-section, I will review the different models of Language Teacher Education and discuss how these relate to the above goals.

### ***2.7.2 Models of Language Teacher Education***

In this paper, I will use Day's term 'model' (or approach) to characterise the overall way in which a teacher education programme presents or delivers knowledge to its learners. To avoid any confusion, the term 'learners', is used synonymously with the terms 'trainees' and 'student teachers'.

Various models of Language Teacher Education have been suggested in the literature, deriving from the different views on teacher learning as well as the goals set by the programmes preparing these teachers. I distinguish these models or approaches into two major categories: *Teacher-centred* and *learner-centred*. However, in the context of Teacher Education, the term 'teacher' refers to the trainer and the term 'learner' to the trainee; thus, for the sake of this study, I will use the terms: Trainer-centred and trainee-centred approaches.

I use the term *Trainer-centred* to refer to approaches to teacher education which involve the application of public theory to teaching. These, as Williams (2002) argues, adopt a "transmission view of learning" where theory is perceived as a body of external knowledge which informs practice and which is transmitted from the expert to the novice (p.22). Within this context, I discuss two approaches: the *craft/apprenticeship* and the *applied-science approach*.

## **The craft/apprenticeship model**

This model is the oldest form of professional education and is still used today, albeit limitedly. This view of teacher education assumes that there are mystical or intangible skills that only the master can teach (Richards, 1998) through the process of showing or modeling, slowly inducting trainees into the skills of the craft. It is used in situations that are less likely to be researched and is based on the concept of apprenticeship with the apprentice (student teacher) learning from the craftsman (teacher educator) by observing and imitating her behaviors, which represent the proper ways to teach. This means that through the processes of demonstration, simulation and role play, experts aim at enabling trainees to master new techniques with the hope that they will transfer them into their classrooms and eventually incorporate them into their repertoire of teaching strategies. Knowledge is therefore acquired as a result of observation, instruction and practice.

Shimahara (1998) asserts that the craft model allows the trainee to develop pedagogical content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge, since her primary responsibilities are in the classroom. He claims that both types of knowledge stem from professionally unique classroom-based practices and as such, they have a great deal to offer the trainee. However, it is doubtful if the mere development of these two kinds of knowledge will ultimately result in effective teaching as these are differentiated from substantive subject-matter knowledge. Shulman (1987) refers to PCK as *the blending of content and pedagogy*, which means that lack of knowledge of the subject-matter itself will simply lead the learner to develop pedagogical knowledge distanced from content as it is the case in the Cyprus context where the



study of the subject-matter as this was described in section 2.5.2 is most likely to be excluded at the undergraduate stage.

Practice gives trainees opportunities to acquire first-hand experiences of the teaching profession, thus enabling them to develop what Waters (2005) refers to as experiential knowledge; although its significance cannot be denied (Hegarty, 2000; Watzke, 2007, Verloop et al., 2001), this represents an incomplete view of the teacher's professional knowledge, as it needs to be combined with propositional knowledge to make important contributions to the development of teacher learning as discussed in section 2.5.1. Apart from this, the craft approach has been criticised as being a static approach to a dynamic profession; Grenfell (1998) argues that practice can remain static without ideals to work towards and he quotes the words of Waller that 'practice is naturally conservative, theory naturally progressive' (p.11). Criticisms regarding the limited learning outcomes resulting from practice led to the adoption of the *applied science model*.

### **The applied science or theory to practice model**

This approach to EFL teacher education assumes scientific enquiry is the basis of all knowledge (Wallace, 1991:9). This has also been termed as the *rationalist learn-the-theory-and-then-apply-it model* (Ur, 1992) or *the rationalist model* (Day, 1991). Knowledge is constructed scientifically, it is objective and when applied to teacher education, it attempts to uncover the rules of teaching and learning through systematic observation and experiment.

In teacher education programmes, this approach implies that “unscientific and mystical approaches” (Stones & Morris cited in Wallace, 1991:8) to teacher education are rejected and teaching problems are solved by the application of empirical science to the desired objectives. The aims of such programmes are for teachers to understand the theoretical foundations and principles on which a particular set of practice is based, to select or design syllabi, materials, tasks and activities according to these principles, and to monitor their own teaching to check that it conforms to those theories and principles (Freeman & Richards, 1993).

In spite of its widespread usage, this model has some important shortcomings. Hirst (cited in Grenfell, 1998:8) was amongst the most influential who questioned the effectiveness and the rigor of the theories which inform the applied science; he claims that educational theory is concerned with humans, their beliefs and unpredictable actions, and as such, it cannot derive from scientific inquiry. Day (1991) asserts that among the most serious problems of this approach is leaving trainees to apply on their own the scientific knowledge they have learnt to teaching. This has important implications for teacher educators working with this model, who seem to be more concerned with communicating content rather than attending to how prospective teachers transform that content into pedagogical practice (p.4). Schon (1983) also faults the model for its separation of research and practice. That is, those who are practising the profession are not the same ones who are creating and testing the theories, which results in a gap between teacher and academic research (Zeichner, 1995).

While it is evident that this model is an excellent source of content which helps the learner to understand the theoretical aspects of the subject-matter, pedagogical content knowledge is hardly dealt with, merely by studying the results of pedagogic research. Day (1991) points out that theoretical understanding of pedagogical content knowledge is only partial, as trainees are not given any opportunities to use their understanding in a real classroom so as to integrate theory and practice (p.4).

Considering all the above mentioned, it could be argued that this model also appears to be inadequate in fully preparing language teachers; in contrast to the craft model, the applied science approach helps the trainee gain propositional knowledge through the process of *feeding* (lectures, readings) but at the same time, leaves her rather unprepared for the realities of the language classroom.

Grenfell (1998), attempts to make a connection between these two models discussed so far; he argues that, while they differ in their philosophy of teacher learning, they share the assumption that teaching is mainly concerned with a technicist view of classroom activity where lessons are viewed as a series of prescribed procedures which allow little or no flexibility on the part of the trainees (p.31). He posits that under the craft model the trainee risks adopting an individual trainer's or institution's approach to teaching which may be of very little relevance to another context. Similarly, in the applied science model, the scientific theory presented may sound plausible in an academic context, but practical experience based on such theory may bring counterproductive results (p.10).

Apart from being context-neutral, these two models seem also to ignore individual trainees' personal and professional biographies, as referred to by Goodson (1992), which will eventually impact on the way trainees interpret the behaviors, strategies and methods 'imposed' on them. In Hirst's view, what both the 'craft model' and 'applied science model' have in common, is that, in their claims to general applicability, they necessarily ignore many of the practical, context-dependent particularities of classroom teaching itself (cited in Grenfell, 1998:9).

In examining these two approaches to determine which of the aforementioned goals they treat, it is obvious that they both aim at developing 'good teaching', focusing on the activity and ignoring the individual. It is evident that the positions outlined in these models most closely resemble a positivist or behaviourist view of teaching and knowing, where knowledge is viewed as external to the knower (Case & Bereiter; Jonassen cited in Diez, 1999:227).

It should be clear then, that relying exclusively on any one of them would result in a failure to deal adequately with the knowledge base expected of a professional teacher (see section 2.3). Inadequacies of trainer-centred approaches have led to the development of the trainee-centred approaches, which are based more on internal than external views of learning.

*Trainee-centred approaches* start from the assumption that teachers, rather than methods, make a difference and that teachers are engaged in a complex process of planning, decision-making, hypothesis, testing, experimentation and reflection (Richards, 1990). Moreover, this process is often personal and situation specific; it

involves teachers developing their own theories of teaching, exploring the nature of their own decision-making and classroom practices and developing strategies for critical reflection and practice. In contrast to trainer-centred approaches, here teaching is viewed within a constructivist framework, where knowledge is viewed as an interaction between the knower and the known. While behaviourism focuses on observable behavior and how it can be shaped, cognitive psychology, the theoretical basis of constructivism, is concerned with the ways the human mind thinks and learns. Within this tradition, I now move on to discuss the reflective and integrative models.

### **The reflective model**

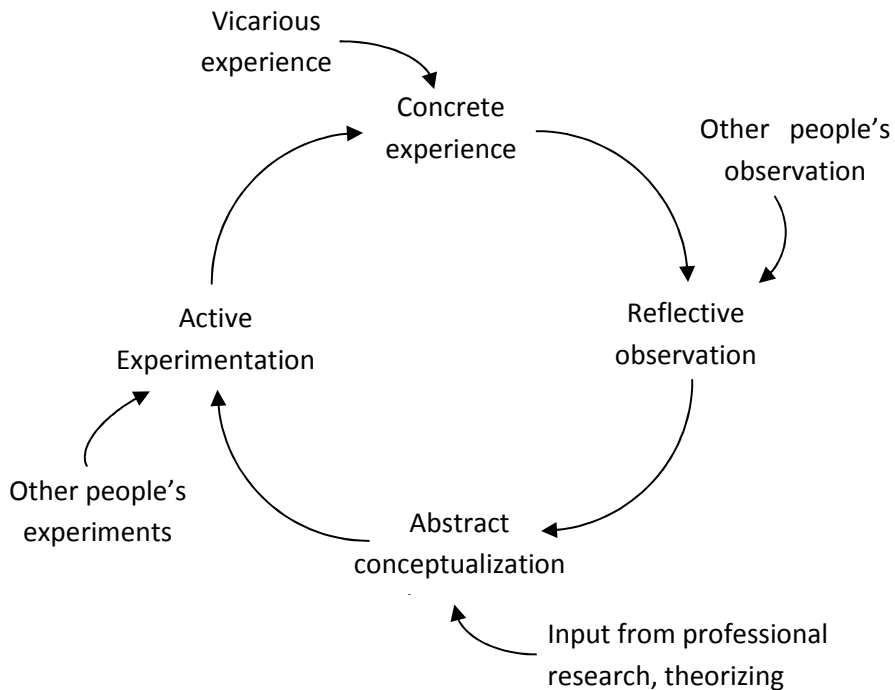
Deep-rooted in the philosophy of constructivism, this model aims at enabling trainees to explore, define and clarify their own classroom practice and their personal theories of teaching and learning. In contrast with the models already discussed, this model assumes that merely bombarding the trainee with theories or exposing her to modeled activities does not ensure an integration of the knowledge base required of the prospective language teacher. In order to accomplish this, a reflective component must be included in the learning process, which will bridge the gap between theory and practice. The notion of reflection in second/foreign language teacher education is the source of extensive discussion, not only as to what it actually means but also how it should be used.

The notion of reflective practitioner emanates directly from the work of Schon (1983) who talks about the individual's ability to reflect *in* and *on* action in order to articulate

her own practice and makes the distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former is defined by Schön as the ability of professionals to 'think what they are doing *while* they are doing it'. This is the kind of reflection that occurs while the problem is being addressed, in other words, it is reflection in the action-present. He asserts that the outcome of such a process is our knowing-in-action (or the development of personal theories, as I understand it), which is often left unexplained or unmentioned when teachers describe what they do but is revealed in the way teachers perform. The task of the reflective practitioner is to bring this tacit or implicit knowledge to the awareness of the teachers by reflection-on action. According to Schon (1983:26), this process involves 'thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome'. This means that the teacher first acts, then consciously reflects on the action and develops hypotheses which are tried out in more action. Building on Schon's idea of reflective practice, Kolb develops his own theory of experiential learning, which also elaborates the idea of experience and reflection (see Ur, 1996:6).

Ur (1996), however, criticises such a process for over-emphasising experience and considering teachers as the sole source of knowledge with a relative neglect of external input (p.6). For her, teacher reflection should be seen as a way of ensuring the processing of any input, regardless of where it comes from, that the individual teacher can use to make sense of his/her experiences. Therefore, she believes that a fully reflective model should be enriched by external sources of input (lectures, readings and so on) as illustrated in the following diagram:

## 'ENRICHED REFLECTION'



(Ur, 1996:7)

She posits that lack of external sources of input is akin to expecting the trainees to 'reinvent the wheel', by merely prolonging the ways they were taught or the ways others teach, with little opportunity to familiarise themselves with new ideas, to benefit from progress made in the field or to develop personal theories through systematic study and experiment (p. 7-8). It seems that the reflective model alone does not facilitate the formation of links between propositional knowledge (theory) and experiential knowledge (practice). Thus, what is needed is an approach or a model that is able to incorporate the strengths of all three. Day (1991) refers to such an approach as the integrative model.

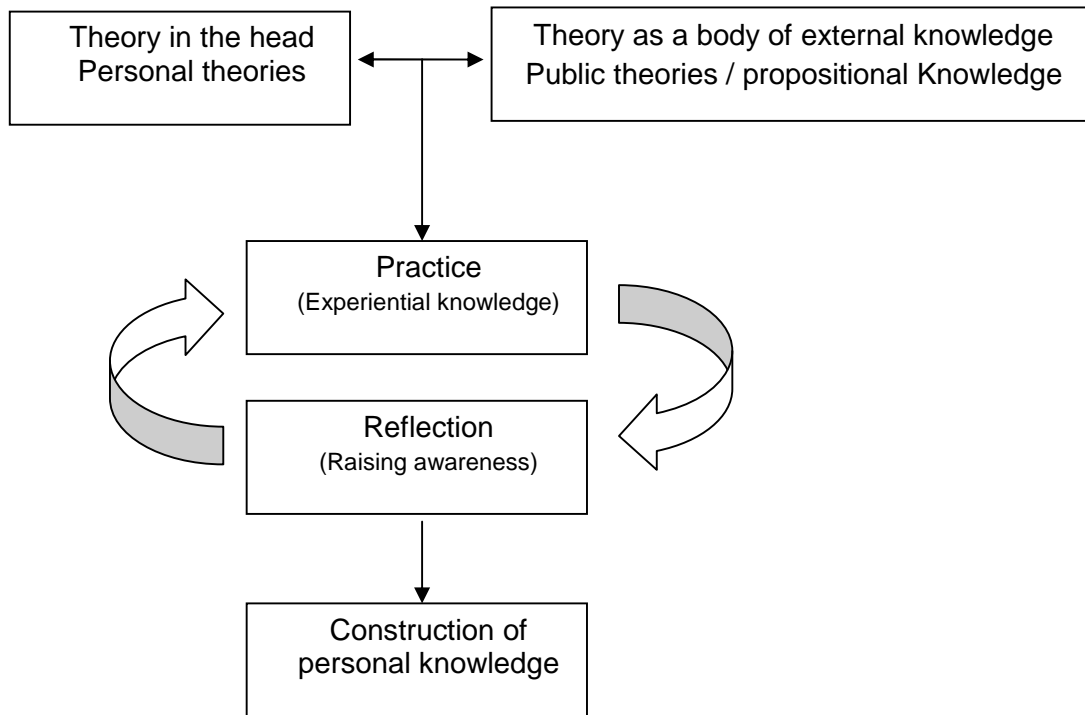
## **The integrative model**

In light of the above discussion regarding the three most commonly used models of language teacher education, it is obvious that the views about whether theory is more important than practice or vice versa vary considerably. Some educationists would argue that in order to be able to teach effectively, teachers must possess rich background knowledge (as in the applied science model) while others would claim that theory does not guarantee a good performance, that knowledge is acquired by doing (as in the craft model). Both arguments are valid. The key to effective teaching is definitely a balance between theory and practice. The lack of one element makes the other one meaningless.

Based on this premise, Day (1991) proposes this model, which combines aspects of the applied science and the craft model with reflective practice, as a means of integrating experiential and propositional knowledge in some systematic fashion. He stresses the importance of reflective practice, arguing that it offers the possibility of being integrative; this means that student teachers should be given opportunities to acquire propositional knowledge (theory), which provides the theoretical aspects for thinking about experiential knowledge (practice), which in turn offers opportunities for trying out and testing propositional knowledge (further practice) (p. 6). Williams (1994) argues that if reflection is to mediate between theory and practice to help learners construct new meanings, then an attempt must be made to define what is meant by *theory*. She asserts that this term can refer to the body of knowledge that is external to the learner and can be learned or to the theory that is in the head of the



learner and which informs his/her actions and practices (p.218). If we combine Day's integrative model with William's conception of theory, then we come up with the model outlined below:



**Figure 2.1: Proposed model of Language Teacher Education**

In sum, linking theory and practice through reflective inquiry brings flexibility in instructional settings by helping practitioners examine successes and failures in a constructive environment and promote self-awareness and knowledge through personal experience. It also provides practicality because it asks practitioners to make connections between their personal theories and what really is happening in different contexts. Thus experiential learning and reflection on that experience together with propositional knowledge are the key features of this approach.

Within these two trainee-centred approaches, there is a shift in emphasis from that of training to that of educating. This means that there is no longer an attempt to reduce teaching to a bulk of propositional or experiential knowledge but rather to feature teaching as involving processes that try to foster the development of personal knowledge. This seems to be the case of Day's integrative model, which clearly implies that both types of knowledge are essential but not sufficient on their own.

### ***2.7.3 Fostering the development of teachers' personal knowledge during practicum***

If we accept the premise that propositional knowledge is external to the learner and can be learned, it could be assumed that it should comprise both types of knowledge discussed in the previous section (KA & KH) and can be thus, taught to teachers-in-preparation, through lectures, readings, workshops or classroom observations. The purpose of propositional knowledge in a foreign language teacher education programme is to enable student teachers to better understand the nature of language and language learning and to acquire knowledge about effective teaching strategies. However, telling prospective teachers what we believe they should *know about*, and they should *know how* to do will be meaningless to them in the long run if they cannot use this knowledge productively. Teaching practice has long been seen as the opportunity student teachers have to apply the obtained theoretical knowledge when teaching their lesson; Hegarty (2000) and Watzke (2007) highlight the importance of experience during the teaching practice arguing that it should be seen as a mediator factor in the development of teacher knowledge. However, if the

aim of a language teacher education programme is to produce thinking professionals who will constantly engage in personal construction of meaning, using sound reasoning, then, teaching practice should no longer be understood as merely putting theory into practice; rather, it should be seen as a learning opportunity in which students engage in the process of thinking *what* and *how* they are doing and an adequate base of facts, principles and experiences from which to reason. In this sense, teaching practice should become the process during which student teachers are helped to make explicit their needs and concerns for teaching (Nilsson, 2008) and to develop the core competences of a language teacher, which include observation skills, self-reflection, critical thinking and decision-making (Kalebic, 2005:109).

This in its turn certainly implies a change in the roles of those involved in the programme. Teacher trainees assume a more active and collaborative role in their learning to teach while the teacher trainer takes on the role of the facilitator, triggering change through raising the teacher's awareness (Freeman cited in Richards, 1989:7) and through equipping them with an appropriate knowledge base that should provide the grounds for choices and actions. Richards (1990) points out that the role of teacher educators as opposed to that of teacher trainers should be to guide the student teachers in the process of generating and testing hypotheses and in using the knowledge so acquired as a basis for further development and lifelong learning (p.15).

This study aims to collect prospective and practicing teachers' views on the effectiveness of the existing Primary Teacher Education programme in preparing primary language teachers as this is offered within university curricula in Cyprus. It is therefore of interest to consider other contexts where similar or closely related programmes have been investigated with regard to the extent to which they respond to student teacher needs or the demands of the primary English curriculum. Relevant studies will therefore be reviewed in the following section.

## **2.8 PREVIOUS STUDIES**

My aim in this section is to review a selection of previous studies regarding the professional needs of primary language teachers and then to consider studies of pre-service language teacher education currently on offer in other countries in order to identify what programme characteristics are considered important.

### ***2.8.1 Studies regarding the perceived professional needs of primary foreign language teachers***

An interesting study carried out by Mewald (2001) investigated the perceived beliefs of novice and experienced teachers in Austria who are faced with the new situation of teaching a FL to young learners. Based on a combination of interviews, document research, questionnaires and observation, findings revealed that the greatest needs of the teachers seem to be those which refer to the following: a) language competencies (mainly pronunciation and fluency, classroom language, paraphrasing), b) a good repertoire of 'instant' activities and materials and knowledge of how to use them, c) knowledge about using and selecting

supplementary materials and d) knowledge of materials that cover cross-curricular topics.

A study conducted by Raya & Hewitt (2001) in Austria, Italy, and Spain, sought to explore the perceived professional needs of foreign primary language teachers. The findings reveal that the teachers' perceived shortcomings are of similar nature across countries, which the authors thought could be attributable to the same causes, namely lack of initial teacher education programmes, unsatisfactory continuing teacher development, as well as recent unfinished educational reforms. Teachers seem to experience difficulties with the use of the target language as an instrument for communication, which is why they give a high priority to the need for language improvement, and feel a need for more information about current methodological approaches specific to primary language teaching, supplementary materials for foreign language teaching and teaching techniques which focus on the development of oral and aural language.

Butler's study (2004) involving primary language teachers in Korea, Japan and Taiwan also attempted to elicit what competencies these teachers thought they needed in order to teach effectively. Information related to the teaching of oral skills was most frequently requested, while other items included a) training in the development of lesson plans, materials and activities, b) skills to teach English through the medium of English, and c) skills needed to teach students with different proficiencies.

An interesting paper written by Bondi & Poppi (2007) reports on the findings of a study to evaluate the competences primary language teachers are expected to master. After observing primary language classrooms and conducting surveys of teachers' views, certain competences were singled out: language proficiency, which is seen in relation to its use within the classroom context as well as within the professional development context, and language awareness, a component which the authors claim, underpins both language and pedagogy.

Kalebic (2005), in an attempt to develop standards in foreign language teacher preparation, conducted a study which aimed at finding out the competencies of a language teacher as seen by future teachers of English. Their written reports reveal that they consider high proficiency in the target language to be the most important competence, followed by the ability to 'transfer' knowledge successfully to learners and the ability to motivate them for learning. The results indicate that there is a need for language teachers to be given opportunities to develop practical competences, and this can be best developed in school-based teaching practice. However, as the author points out, school-based teaching practice should not be a one-off event but a process in which student-teachers raise their awareness about the teaching process and develop the ability to reflect upon and observe their own teaching.

There are clearly similarities in the findings of these studies and these will be summarized at the end of this section, after looking at the studies of current pre-service teacher education programmes below.

### **2.8.2 Studies on Pre-service LTE programmes**

Even though there seems to be a common concern about the shortage of qualified teachers for primary language teaching and about the preparation of these teachers, globally speaking, there is little information available on pre-service training programmes specifically for primary language teachers, a fact which could be attributable to lack of such programmes. Below I refer to recent studies on pre-service language teacher education in Spain, Turkey, Greece, Hong Kong, Slovenia and Croatia and to consider their effectiveness in preparing prospective language teachers regardless of the level they will be teaching.

A comparative study carried out by Dagarin & Andraka (2007) evaluated two teacher training programmes for primary language teachers in Ljubliana and in Zagreb. Findings revealed that both pre-service and in-service teachers felt that the programmes needed to provide student-teachers with information regarding cross-curricular activities and children's literature as well as opportunities for more interactive work, as they felt that language proficiency was among the most important competencies in a language teacher's repertoire. However, what they highlighted to be the major weakness of the programmes was the insufficient time given for classroom practice as well as the theoretical nature of the courses which did not require their active participation.

Similar findings were also found in Peacock's study (2009), evaluating a TEFL programme in the department of English at the City University in Hong Kong.

Results indicated that most participants thought that practice teaching, i.e. gaining experience in schools, is insufficient in preparing them for the real job; in addition, time given for language improvement was inadequate. Other weaknesses which emerged were lack of management skills, insufficient focus on testing or educational technology, and the teaching methods courses which were too theoretical and impractical.

The theoretical component also figures largely in the study by Doval & Rial (2002), former EFL students and current primary language teachers. The authors criticise the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme for EFL primary school teachers at a Spanish university, as, firstly, adopting a transmission view of learning and, secondly, including a theoretical component, which, although useful, concentrates only on improving student teachers' command of the language and their knowledge of its culture and literature rather than on improving their teaching skills. Teaching practice, only a small part of the overall programme, seems to serve as an opportunity to use those prescriptive practices outlined during lectures and to become familiar with the textbook, most of the time without any form of observation or feedback. They therefore argue for a more balanced curriculum in which practice is emphasised and student-teachers are involved in reflective activities while on teaching practice in order to become aware of their real needs.

A similar deficiency was identified in the pre-service programme for both primary and secondary language teachers at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, in that it, too, followed a transmission-based approach and focused mainly on theory



rather than practice. This programme was redesigned in 1995 with the aim of addressing the imbalance. Mattheoudakis (2007) conducted a longitudinal study which attempted to track possible changes in student teachers' beliefs during the new programme and explored the impact of the teaching practice, in particular, on student teachers' beliefs. Findings indicate that teachers' engagement in the teaching practice seems to have a low impact on student teachers' beliefs. The author argues that despite efforts to change the Teacher Education programme into a communicative one, the transmission model is still prevalent in most courses as limited opportunities are offered for interaction, reflection and experiential learning. What is also interesting about the results is that some beliefs seem to have been affected by other courses like *Theories of Language Acquisition* and *Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages*, which she attributes to the fact that such courses place special emphasis on addressing student teachers' traditional beliefs and helping them to overcome their prior experiences as language learners. Based on the results of the study, Mattheoudakis stresses the importance of raising awareness and reflective activities during the teaching practice.

Another study, which emphasised the importance of raising awareness activities, was conducted by Tuzel & Akcan (2009). The participants of the study were all proficient in the target language and attended language awareness training sessions which aimed at improving their language use in the classroom. These sessions included classroom observations, feedback sessions, interviews, retrospective protocols and discussion meetings with the student teachers. Participants reported that the programme gave them the opportunity to find,

analyse and reflect on the source of their problems and consequently become more aware of their needs as language teachers. Vocabulary, adjusting language to the students' level, using classroom language and knowledge of grammar were the difficulties identified among the participants; such difficulties are likely to cause decrease in self-confidence and anxiety on the part of non-native language teachers, which is why the authors argue for the integration of a language awareness training in the curriculum of language teacher education faculties.

it is evident from the above studies that the competence most commonly identified as required is language proficiency and reported to be a prerequisite for effective use of the target language in the classroom as both a means of communication as well as a means of instruction. Other areas that student teachers perceive to need could be summarised below:

*Theoretical knowledge:* knowing about activities, teaching strategies, instructional materials, lesson planning, approaches and methods in teaching FL to young learners.

*Practical competences:* Knowing how to make effective use of the target language in the classroom, how to use the activities and materials available for the subject matter in order to motivate learners of different proficiencies, how to use appropriate teaching strategies and how to transfer their knowledge successfully to their learners.

However, it would be naïve to simply assume that theoretical knowledge is to be developed during lectures and practical competences during school-based teaching practice. The implications drawn from the above studies are that student teachers should be exposed to awareness-raising reflective activities, which will enable them to form meaningful links between the theoretical and practical components of the ITE programme and to eventually construct their personal knowledge.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I shall briefly review the purpose of the study and the two research questions as these were stated in chapter 1. I shall then proceed to describe the adopted methodology, giving details of the overall design, the instrumentation that was used, and the processes of sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation. Finally, issues related to the research, such as limitations of the study, ethical considerations and aspects of validity and transferability will be presented.

#### **3.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore **what** primary teachers involved in language teaching need to know and **how** they learn to teach. The review of the literature relevant to the issues under investigation enabled me to refine my research questions as follows:

1. What kinds of knowledge and skills do pre and in-service primary teachers consider necessary for effective language teaching in the context of Cyprus state schools?
2. What are the perceptions of the participants regarding the instructional practices they experience in their pre or in-service

education and the extent to which these practices promote teacher learning?

### **3.3 PARADIGMATIC STANCE**

To quote Cohen et al. (2005:3) “research is concerned with understanding the world and that this is informed by how we view our world(s), what we take understanding to be, and what we see as the purposes of our understanding”. Human beings hold different philosophical assumptions and preconceptions about the nature of reality (ontology) and the way they come to know that reality (epistemology), which influence the way knowledge is studied and interpreted. These underlying beliefs largely define the methodologies and methods researchers choose to adopt in order to study an educational issue. This philosophical stance is referred to as a paradigm, which Guba & Lincoln (1994:105) describe as “the basic belief system or world view that guides the investigation”. Bryman (2004: 453) identifies a paradigm as a cluster of beliefs and dictates which influence what should be studied, how research should be done [and] how results should be interpreted.

The different philosophical stances which researchers choose to adopt, consequently lead to different paradigms used in educational research. In the social and behavioural sciences these have traditionally fallen into two camps with some scholars supporting the scientific/positivist paradigm and others supporting the constructivist/interpretive paradigm with the former underlying quantitative methods and the latter underlying qualitative methods (Silverman, 2001; Wiersma,

2000; Bogdan & Biklen 1998; Mertens, 1998; Burns, 1997; Glesne & Peshkin 1992). These theorists emphasise the differences in ontology and epistemology that exist between these two paradigms and thus reject the 'coexistence' between quantitative and qualitative methods in the study of the same phenomenon (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

The dominance of the mono method approach has been criticized and challenged by many influential researchers (Howe, 1988; Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998; Creswell, 2003; Johnson & Onwegbuzie, 2004; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006) who posit the compatibility thesis between quantitative and qualitative methods stressing the usefulness and importance of both. They also assert that the main goal of combining methods is to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in a single research study, which, in turn, is likely to bring more rigorous findings. This stance has led to the emergence of a third set of beliefs, known as the pragmatic paradigm which rejects the either-or of the incompatibility thesis and embraces both points of view (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

Pragmatism has what Tashakkori & Teddlie (1998) and Creswell (2003) see as intuitive appeal, embracing methods that are appropriate to understanding the topic that is being researched and linking the choice of approach directly to the purpose of and the nature of the research questions posed (Creswell 2003). This means that they choose to address the research questions they are attempting to answer with any methodological tool available, using the pragmatist credo of "what works"

(Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998: 21). This allows the researcher to address questions that do not sit comfortably within a wholly quantitative or qualitative approach to design and methodology. Supporting this Darlington and Scott (2002) note that in reality a great number of decisions of whether to take a quantitative or qualitative research approach are based not on philosophical commitment but on a belief of a design and methodology being best suited to purpose.

It is therefore evident that pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy or reality but seems to accept, however only partly, the tenets held by both positivism and interpretivism regarding ontology and epistemology. While pragmatists recognize the existence and importance of the natural or physical world, they also acknowledge the emergent social, psychological world that includes language, culture, human institutions and subjective thoughts (Johnson & Onwegbuzie, 2004:18); in other words, they view knowledge as being both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and we live in. Regarding epistemology, pragmatists embrace both the objective and the subjective points of view and accept the fact that researchers may be both objective and subjective in epistemological orientation over the course of studying a research question (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998:25).

After studying the ontological assumptions held by the different paradigms, I aligned myself to the pragmatic paradigm as I felt both objectivism and subjectivism were essential in addressing the aims set by this study. The survey seemed an appropriate method for the initial purpose of my study which was to

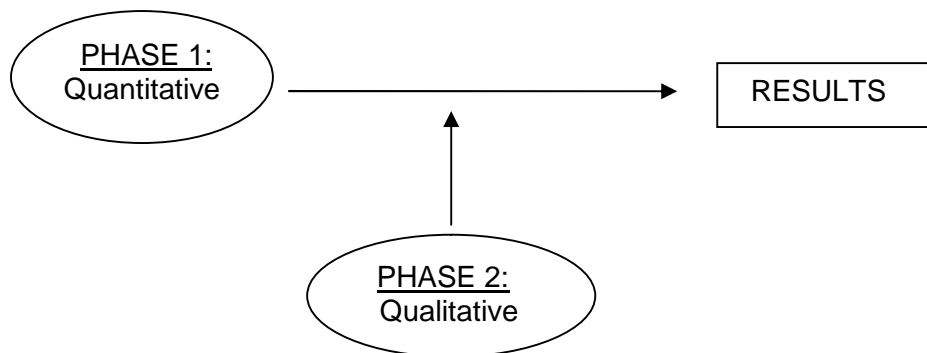
describe and get an overview of the situation in both the schools where the 'teaching' takes place as well as in the universities where the initial preparation for this teaching takes place. It also enabled me to take a holistic look at the subject under study by giving me pertinent information and helping me to form initial hypotheses about the subject which would be confirmed or not and further explored during the in-depth interviews and focus groups. What I therefore needed for the first phase of this research was the objective views of a large population regarding the items listed on the questionnaire. Fetterman (1988), however, stresses the value of subjectivity and claims that what people believe to be true is more important than any objective reality. As the study of teacher knowledge and teacher learning were the ultimate aims of this research, it felt necessary to access teachers' reasoning of what they (have) experienced during their pre or in-service education and the significance of these experiences to their current/future work. This inevitably implies the existence of multiple realities which are subjectively defined by the participants of this study whose views and lived experiences are not the same. The use of the interviews seemed therefore most appropriate for exploring the different understandings and subjective meanings participants gave to the areas under study as they allowed participants' voices to be heard.

### **3.4 METHODOLOGY**

Based on the nature of my research questions and my paradigmatic stance, I chose to use a sequential mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis (Tashakkori & Teddie, 1998; Tashakkori, 2003).



The design type of my 'mixed-method' research can be characterised as 'sequential', since quantitative data are collected and analyzed and then qualitative data collection and analysis follow. The two methods are integrated during the interpretation phase of the study. Creswell (cited in Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998:18), argues that the two ways of research, quantitative and qualitative, during the 'sequential mixed-method' study, are conducted in two separate phases. He claims that the purpose of this type of mixed method approach is to use qualitative results to assist in explaining, interpreting and further examining the findings of the quantitative study (Creswell, 2003:215). In my research, qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews & focus group interviews) – phase 2 - aimed to explain and triangulate the quantitative results from phase 1 (questionnaires) and possibly add to the main results, as indicated in the following figure.



**Figure 3.1: Sequence of the research approach**

Based on the above, by applying a sequential mixed method approach, this study contains a quantitative as well as a qualitative component. The difference between the two, as Best & Kahn (1998) describe, lie in numbers. Numerical data is of

utmost importance in quantitative research which is concerned with measuring factors in terms of amount, intensity or frequency and thus providing more 'shallow' understandings but at the same time an opportunity for achieving generalisability. On the other hand, qualitative research involves watching, asking and exploring participants' views and attitudes regarding the issues under investigation. The strength of qualitative research is that it attempts to explain and thus achieve a deeper, holistic understanding of the phenomenon being studied from an emic perspective but at the same time with the risk of achieving biased results due to the researcher's role in the interpretation process.

Tashakkori & Teddlie (2003) and Bryman (2004) suggest the following advantages of a mixed-method approach: the ability to answer simultaneously confirmatory and exploratory questions; stronger inferences through depth and breadth in answer to complex social phenomena; the opportunity through divergent findings for an expression of differing viewpoints and enabling the researcher to fill in the gaps left when using one dominant approach through triangulation. Similarly Johnson and Christensen (2004), state that combining more than one method improves the quality, integrity and trustworthiness of the research findings.

However, in order to achieve rigorous results when using a mixed-method approach the researcher needs to consider all of the relevant characteristics of quantitative and qualitative methods along with their strengths and weaknesses and use what Johnson and Turner (2003) call the *fundamental principle of mixed research*. According to this principle, researchers should collect multiple data using

different strategies, approaches, and methods in such a way that the resulting mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and no overlapping weaknesses.

Taking into consideration everything that has been discussed in this section I shall explain the rationale underlying my choice of the quantitative and qualitative methods at different stages of this study along with the data collection tools I considered most appropriate in addressing my research questions. However, before doing so, it is important to give a brief overview of the study's participants.

As Chenail (1995:2) says:

“The readers have to have a clear picture of the data’s setting so that they can begin to have a perspective from which to judge the observations being made by the researcher regarding the data. Without the setting, without the developed characterization, there can be no context and with no context for the data, there can be no significant meaning in the analysis”.

### **3.4.1 Sample**

#### *Questionnaires*

The survey sample consists of 296 in-service primary teachers and 124 pre-service teachers (student teachers). Details of the participants’ profiles are presented in diagrams and tables in Appendix B. The in-service teachers) work in 210 different schools in all five districts of the Southern part of the island in both towns and villages. The vast majority of the participants are female (86.5%) and those who are over 40 years old form only a small percentage of the whole population surveyed. A small but significant number of the in-service teachers have a relevant

Masters degree, and the majority of the participants have some kind of English language background even though the extent of their language proficiency is not clearly indicated in the table in appendix B. A small percentage (5.7%) of in-service teachers did not have any relevant background with the language they are currently teaching prior to their university studies and a significant number (n=49) did not attend any English-related module during their university studies. It is also important to mention that most of the participants (69%) have taught English for 1-5 years despite their relatively longer teaching careers and the great majority (n:232) were assigned to teach English for reasons other than relevant qualifications. Finally, it seems that many participants, but not all, have attended some kind of in-service training in relation to language teaching.

Pre-service teachers study in all four universities where the Teacher Education programme is offered and are in their third and fourth year of studies. The majority of the participants are female and most of them have attended a compulsory language-improvement course during their university studies. A small percentage (20.16%) said that there was an elective module on English language didactics at the university where they were studying.

### *Interviews*

Sample 1 consists of 9 in-service teachers, five of whom attended an English language improvement module. Two participants who graduated from the PA attended modules during their initial education which helped them improve their language skills and prepared them to teach English. One participant

studied at the University of Ioannina in Greece where the Teacher Education programme of study did not include any modules related to the English language. Even though their teaching experience varied, what is noticeable from the data (see appendix C) is the significant difference between the participants' overall years of teaching and the years of teaching English. Three of them have had no in-service training, while the rest have attended compulsory and/or optional seminars.

The participants of sample 2 consists of two focus groups comprising eleven 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year university students enrolled in the Primary Teacher Education programme, seven of whom taught English a couple of times during their practicum. All of them are competent students but three of them do not have a very good command of the English language. Regardless of their language level, both groups were homogeneous in terms of their language learning experiences as all, with one exception, were taught English in the same traditional way in school and all attended a language improvement course for one semester each year of their studies.

Details of the participants' profiles are presented in tables in appendix C.

### ***3.4.2 Research methods and data collection instruments***

The first phase in this study consisted of a questionnaire-based survey administered to a large number of Cypriot primary school teachers involved in language teaching around the island and to a sample of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year university student-teachers in Cyprus. The questionnaire aimed at obtaining information

regarding a) participants' language and professional background, b) their education/training, c) areas in which they would welcome further training and d) the instructional processes they consider most appropriate. The use of a postal questionnaire was considered to be the most appropriate instrument for the initial purposes of my research as questionnaires had to be widely distributed geographically (in all five districts of Cyprus) and this was therefore more practical. According to Wilson and McLean (1994), the use of a questionnaire is the most appropriate method in such cases because it can reach a large sample of the target population, it is anonymous and because of this, the participants feel more comfortable to give more honest answers, and the information gathered is comparatively straightforward to analyse.

However, I was aware of the possible problems that one may experience when using postal questionnaires, namely low return rate, and inability to confirm responses given (Kerlinger cited in Gray, 2004: 108).

I decided to send questionnaires to all primary schools of Cyprus in all five districts, so that I would increase the possibilities of having a higher return rate. However, it was impossible to overcome the second problem. Thus, when I analysed a part of my results, I came out with a standardised and descriptive set of data. For example, the data collected through the questionnaires showed that some of the content areas and the instructional processes were scored much higher than others or were rated differently by the two samples. However, no data explained this difference in participants' responses. Gillham (2000) argues that when

research is conducted through questionnaires, most of the possible answers of the questions asked are determined in advance. Thus, it is impossible to know what lies behind the participants' responses or if the respondents have given the answers they wished (p. 2-3). According to Pring (2000), quantitative methods which reflect a positivist stance do not provide any explanation of *how* and *why* human beings behave in the way they do, which is why relying solely on such methods would be inadequate in addressing the aims of this study.

Therefore, I decided to use individual and focus group interviews. According to Cohen & Manion (1994) and Kerlinger (1986) other reasons for using interviews is to give a deeper perspective into the research phenomenon under study and to substantiate or reject a host of previously formulated hypotheses about the respondents' views based on the questionnaire responses. As Seidman (1998) explains, the purpose of in-depth interviewing is neither to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses. He maintains that 'at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (p. 3). I also decided to use semi-structured interviews whose nature allows depth to be achieved, providing me with the opportunity to probe and expand the interviewees' responses and to elicit new ideas on the topic.

I considered that conducting individual semi-structured interviews with school teachers would be appropriate for various reasons. Firstly, participants came from four different districts in Cyprus so it was practically difficult to find a common venue or to arrange a time that would suit everybody. Another reason was that

individual interviews ensured anonymity, especially in such a small educational context as the one in Cyprus; this in turn, would allow teachers to express their views or unveil their personal experiences more freely. Focus group interviews seemed more appropriate with student-teachers for reasons given by Morgan (1997) and Lynch (1996). Firstly, according to Morgan, the researcher can conduct a less structured interview and allow the discussion to roam more freely, with the possible emergence of new themes related to the research topic. Furthermore, the comparisons which participants make among each other's experiences, comments and behaviour are a valuable source of insights into complex behaviours and motivations. In order to encourage more free expression of views and a more honest sharing of experiences, I divided the student-teachers into two focus groups based on friendship groupings.

The interviews, which took place at the second phase of the data collection process, were used to evaluate, confirm, complement and/or better understand the survey findings. The qualitative inquiry addressed the in depth questions of *why* participants valued some content areas more than others or *why* they felt that they benefitted more from exposure to certain instructional practices. Responses to these questions enabled me to elicit richer empirical data, and investigate in depth phenomena such as *how* relevant and effective the participants viewed their initial preparation to be in relation to their future professional needs and *how* they felt they learnt best to teach. Additionally, the interviews revealed factors not predicted in the literature that influenced participants' views of effective language teaching and learning and their decisions regarding what to teach and how to teach it. An



identification of these factors allowed me to explain some of the issues that were found to impede participants from adhering to the national English primary curriculum guidelines (see section 1.4.5); this, in turn, has shed more light on primary language teachers' knowledge base and teacher learning, the two constructs under investigation in this study.

### **3.5 DEVELOPING THE DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

#### ***3.5.1 Designing the questionnaire***

In order to formulate the questions that would be included in the questionnaire, I first conducted interviews with the two inspectors of English at primary level (see appendix D). Since the inspectors had access to these teachers' classrooms and provided them with in-service training and support, they would be the most suitable people to give me a clearer idea primarily of the context of this study (see chapter 1) and then of the professional needs of these teachers from their own perspective. Information obtained from these interviews along with a review of the relevant literature on teacher learning and the knowledge base of language teacher education, informal feedback from my students (discussions, observations) as well as my own understanding of language teaching and experience of language learning enabled me to develop the first draft of the questionnaire. It was divided into two sections and consisted of closed questions with the exception of the last one which asked participants to add any comments or make any suggestions if they wished.

The first section focuses on the personal, academic and contextual profile of the participants. In the same section there are questions regarding the nature of the English-related course participants attended (if they did) during their pre-service education. I felt that these questions would enable me to form a more complete picture of the kind of initial preparation offered to primary teachers in Cyprus in relation to language teaching. The second section is divided into two parts which are directly related to the two research questions. The first part consists of an inventory of 24 content areas and respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which they find them necessary for the education of prospective primary language teachers on a five-point Likert scale.

The second part of this section concerns research question 2 which deals with teacher learning. Participants are asked to circle the four most important instructional practices from a list of seven. I felt that numerical data would be inadequate in providing me with sufficient information in relation to this area, which meant that data obtained from the questionnaire only intended to facilitate me in the formulation of more in-depth, focused questions in the subsequent interviews.

At the end of the in-service teachers' questionnaire, I attached a form, asking for contact details, to be filled only by those who might be interested in following up with an interview.

A copy of the final version of the in-service teachers' questionnaires can be found in appendix E and of the pre-service teachers' questionnaire in appendix F.

### ***3.5.2 Designing the interview protocols***

The interview, the second data collection instrument, was designed in order to enable me to further explore and gain a better understanding of the constructs under investigation.

In semi-structured interviews, interviewers have a general idea of where they want the interview to go and what should come out of it, but do not enter the interview with lists of pre-determined questions. Rather, they are directed by a set of general themes to encourage interviewees to talk about their experiences (Radnor, 1994). Therefore, the interview protocol for both samples was divided in two main sections consisting of five themes, relating to the two research questions (see appendices G and H for in-service teachers and pre-service teachers respectively). Section I sought to give further insight into the knowledge base of primary language teachers. As discussed in the literature (see section 2.3 in chapter 2), a teacher's professional knowledge consists of his/her personal theories which are constructed through personal experiences, and public theories which are acquired via readings and formal instruction. Bearing this in mind, I addressed the following three areas, a) participants' language learning experiences, b) beliefs about language learning and c) language teaching experience (if any). More direct questions regarding the content areas were also asked but with reference to the responses they had given in the questionnaire.

The second section aimed at exploring R.Q.2 in more depth as questionnaires proved to be inadequate in sufficiently addressing this question. Both samples

were asked about a) their views on their initial education and on their teaching practice experience at University. In-service teachers were also asked about b) their views on the in-service training experience if they have had any. The interview ended with a general question which asked participants to suggest any changes that could make the undergraduate programme of primary teacher education more relevant in relation to ELT.

It is important to mention that the order the questions are presented in the interview protocols does not imply that interviews were conducted in the same order since the participants' abilities to articulate their personal experiences and their views on certain issues provided outlets for some probes or minor questions to further the discussion.

### **3.6 GAINING APPROVAL**

According to Blaxter et al (2001), as part of the process of planning and managing the project, the researcher must approach the key individuals or gatekeepers involved in order to be able to access the people and/or institutions needed for his/her research (p. 155). Regarding the needs of my study, I had to first obtain official permission from KEEA (Education Research and Evaluation Centre) in order to gain access in public schools in Cyprus. After my formal request to KEEA, which included a sample of my questionnaire, a sample of the interview protocol and a general overview of the proposed study, I received the formal approval (see appendix I for the Greek version and appendix J for the translation in English) to send out my questionnaires on March 3, 2010. It is important to mention that the

approval would only be valid if I agreed to comply with some of the changes they suggested which had to do mainly with wording and clarification of instructions.

### **3.7 PILOTING THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

Gaining approval to distribute the questionnaires to schools was an important step to be taken but did not necessarily guarantee that the questionnaire would receive a positive response from potential respondents. Thus, ten primary school teachers who also taught English were selected simply on the basis that they were acquaintances of the researcher and were willing to participate. These teachers were asked to complete the draft questionnaire and to comment on any difficulties. I observed that some of the questions of the questionnaire were unclear for the participants, as only a few of them answered them. Other questions were missing important variables from which the participants could choose, hence, some participants gave their own answers below the given options. Therefore, a few more amendments were made to the questions.

The most significant of these changes was the decision to prepare a Greek version of the questionnaire as this would encourage a greater amount of responses, a suggestion also made by the two inspectors.

In order to trial the student-teachers' questionnaire, I distributed it to a group of 3<sup>rd</sup> year students who I taught and asked them to complete it in class anonymously and give me written or oral comments on possible ambiguities. It is also important to mention that they were given a Greek version of the questionnaire in order to minimize any biases that could arise from lack of understanding or

misinterpretation of the questions and thus lead to more accurate and reliable results. Minor changes took place such as clarifications, better explanations of the questions, terminology, and expression of questions.

### **3.8 QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

#### ***3.8.1 Administration of questionnaires***

Copies of the final version of the in-service teachers' questionnaire together with a copy of the approval letter from MOEC were mailed in the first two weeks of April to 300 (out of 343) second cycle Greek Cypriot public primary schools in all five districts of the Southern side of the island (Nicosia, Lemesos, Larnaka, Pafos, Famagusta). As I mentioned in chapter 1, not all primary teachers are assigned to teach English because of poor language proficiency, in which case a teacher with some kind of specialisation or personal interest takes over all or most of the English classes not only in that particular school but also in other schools where there is not such a teacher available. This means that the number of teachers who teach English changes every year and it was therefore impossible to know how many teachers were involved in language teaching at the time unless I personally called to all schools in search of that information.

I therefore decided to enclose three copies of the questionnaire in the envelope which was sent to each school asking the school principal of each school to forward a copy of the questionnaire to all the teachers of that particular school who were currently teaching English. As requested by KEEA, a letter was also sent to the principal of the school, which explained the purposes of the study.

Two hundred and ninety-six questionnaires were completed anonymously by in-service teachers working at 210 different schools from all five districts (town, suburbs, villages) and posted to me, using the stamped envelopes enclosed.

Data collection from student-teachers from all four universities in Cyprus was more difficult and time-consuming. Firstly, three of the universities were located in another town so I had to contact the heads of the department of Primary Education in each University, explain to them the aims of my study and ask them to assist me in distributing the questionnaires, collecting them and posting them back to me. Secondly, data collection began in April, close to Easter holidays, which meant that student-teachers could not be reached for two weeks. It was also the end of the semester and they were often absent from university as they were very busy studying for their final exams. I therefore decided to send 40 copies to each university and hope for a high response rate. At the University where I was working it was easier for me to get more student-teachers to complete the questionnaires. One hundred and twenty-four questionnaires were completed anonymously and returned to me.

### ***3.8.2 Analysis of the questionnaires***

The first section of the questionnaire was different between the samples so they were analysed separately using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). This allowed me to get an overview of my sample through descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages).

Section II which relates to the two research questions was similar for both samples. Data obtained from both samples were coded and entered together into SPSS and were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviation). T-tests were also used to check for statistical significance between the samples. Inductive statistics (ANOVA) were then applied using a number of independent variables which I believed may have influenced the participants' answers regarding the content areas. These variables were *experience* between and within groups as well as *in-service training*.

For the analysis of the first part of section II (content areas), I felt that if I presented it in a more structured way rather than as a long list of areas, this would facilitate me in the final presentation of results where quantitative and qualitative data would be combined and this, in turn, would make it easier for the reader to formulate a clearer view of the findings. I therefore decided to adopt the structure proposed by Raya (2001), as this reflects the teaching act in its three phases and it therefore covers all the areas mentioned in the list. More information about this structure will be given in chapter 4.

### **3.9 QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

#### ***3.9.1 Conducting the interviews***

I decided to carry out about 10 interviews because this was the number I felt I could manage as a lone researcher. Besides, it is stated that sample size has no definite formula in qualitative research as the main aim of qualitative research is the depth of insights (Holliday, 2002; Patton, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The



samples for both semi-structured interviews and focus groups were deliberately selected on the grounds of purposefulness and accessibility (Creswell, 2007). Out of 25 in-service teachers who agreed to be interviewed, 9 were chosen based on factors such as qualifications, years of ELT experience as well as INSET. For the focus group interviews, 11 student-teachers (5 in group 1 and 6 in group 2) were chosen based on year of study, language teaching experience during Teaching practice, interest in the study and accessibility.

All Interviews were carried out between June and July of 2010 and the venue was always chosen by the interviewees. The interviews were conducted in Greek as I believed that participants were more likely to express their thoughts and feelings or elaborate on their responses in their mother tongue. All the interviews were recorded after seeking the informants' permission before each interview. This was done in order to avoid distraction, forgetting and to provide credibility and reliability to the collected data (Kvale, 2007; Silverman, 2001). Since they were semi-structured interviews, the participants were offered great freedom in expressing their views on the issues raised. Moreover, I was able to probe and expand on their responses where I felt it was necessary. All interviews were conducted in a very open and relaxed atmosphere and lasted between 50 and ninety minutes depending on the interviewees' availability and flow of the interview.

### ***3.9.2 Analysis of the interviews***

The interview data were in the first instance transcribed and returned to the individual interviewees or the group for respondent validation (Radnor, 1994).

The process of analyzing the data related to the first research question was quite different from that of analyzing the second one. As mentioned earlier, for the analysis of the quantitative data related to R.Q. 1 three broad categories adopted by Raya's proposed structure were used and were further subdivided into subordinate categories (see section 4.2). Since the aim of the relevant qualitative data was to clarify and back up the responses given in the questionnaires, I gathered all the chunks of data belonging to each of these categories (see appendix K). Some of the data obtained from the interviews did not fit the three categories but were organised in two sub-categories (personal and public theories) forming a fourth broader category – the teachers' background knowledge – which is also part of Raya's (2001) structure.

Participants' responses in relation to research question 2 primarily led me to a simple grouping and reporting of the participants' comments in relation to the pre-determined themes outlined in the interview protocols (Initial education, Teaching practice experience, INSET, suggestions for improvement). However, as I went on reading the whole transcripts of individual and focus group interviews, I noticed that many of the participants' comments overlapped. This is a purposeful strategy to check for reliability. Observing consistency in answers to the questions that overlap can work as a kind of triangulation, wherein each participant's answers supplement the previous answers rather than contradicting them. These overlapping responses/comments were subsequently classified into more focused sub-themes which were influenced by the literature and were relevant to the research question. Having put extracts of data under the relevant subthemes, I had to re-read them for

possible subtleties of meaning. This, according to Radnor (2002), is where the interpretive process takes over the descriptive and this is where the researcher tries to give his/her own interpretation of what is going on (p.88). Hence, based on my own understanding and inevitably my own interpretation of the findings related to R.Q. 2, I decided on four major themes which I shall explain in detail in section 5.4 in chapter 5.

### **3.10 RESEARCH ISSUES**

The present study is exploratory in nature employing a mixed-method approach. Therefore this type of research requires a set of criteria that can be used to assess the quality of the research and the validity of the findings. Validity is a requirement for both quantitative and qualitative research since 'invalid' research is worthless. However, as Cohen et al. (2005) maintain "it is important that validity in different research traditions is faithful to these traditions, and hence the researcher will need to locate her discussions of validity within the paradigm being used".

In quantitative research data validity is achieved through careful sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of the data (Cohen et al., 2005). The first part of this study (phase 1) was conducted within a quantitative approach through questionnaires. My main objective during this phase was to frame some general statements about the context of my study (the training of primary language teachers in Cyprus). The questionnaire would therefore be used to cater to the practical need of reaching a great number of primary classroom teachers around the southern part of the island as well as a sufficient

number of student-teachers. The second reason was to obtain a general idea of what is perceived as useful and necessary by a larger population which would not have been possible with the use of any other data collection instrument. Another factor which I believe, adds to the rigor of the findings in this phase was the sample which was randomly selected. This, according to Cohen et al. (2005) enables the researcher to make generalizations as s(he) achieves representativeness of the wider population.

Finally I feel statistical validity has been achieved to a great extent in the analysis of the quantitative data. Mere descriptive statistics were considered to be inadequate as my sample consisted of both in-service and pre-service teachers and a comparison between these two groups was seen to be necessary. Therefore, I considered the application of inductive statistics to be important, as in many cases statistical significance has been indeed shown in comparing the views of the two groups, and thus conclusions could be drawn from the comparison data. Inductive statistics (ANOVA) were also used to check for any relationship within sample 1 (in-service teachers). For example certain professional details (see section 4.3) were used as independent variables together with the replies for the content areas requested for training. This was done in order to see if there were any significant differences in the personal details that might shed light on the reasons for the type of training needed.

In qualitative data validity means establishing the trustworthiness of the results and inferences made. The first criterion is the researchers' honesty and integrity; they

should be able to locate themselves in the data by acknowledging their own biases and by trying to separate their view of a situation from the views of the participants. Due to my long-term experience as a language teacher and a language learner I know I am bringing my own bias to this research. My experience as a language teacher, has led me to form my own view of what kind of knowledge effective language teaching should entail and my experience as a language learner being taught in the traditional way and being aware of the effect this has had on my language proficiency, may have unconsciously guided my participants' responses or the emphasis they placed on certain areas/issues. In order to minimise the effects of this in my research, I recorded the interviews and made verbatim transcriptions of these recordings right after each interview. This primarily enabled me to listen to the recording critically for a second or third time by trying to understand the meanings participants attached to their words and actions (Maxwell, 1996) without imposing my values on the interpretation of the findings.

Apart from this, in analysing the data I attempted to identify common concerns and issues among the participants which were then supported by citing actual quotations from their narrative accounts and related theory from the literature which added to some extent to the rigor of the results. For more confidence in my interpretation I needed to double check with the informants to confirm that the analysis/interpretation I had given, made sense and reflected their real views and experiences. Hence, the transcripts of the interviews were returned to the participants for respondent validation (Radnor, 2002).

Further I have attempted to achieve credibility in my findings by using triangulation (the use of several research methods in the study of the same phenomenon) which is a successful approach that can be used to achieve the aims of this study. Researchers can choose to implement different types of triangulation, including data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory and methodological triangulation (Denzin cited in Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998:91). In the current study methodological triangulation was adopted involving a combination of questionnaires, interviews and focus group interviews and data were collected both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Merriam (1998) describes credibility as the production of results that may be generalised or transferable by readers to their own needs and situations. Although transferability is not the primary aim of interpretative research, it becomes possible if rich descriptions of data are produced; Merriam explains that such descriptions allow readers to determine how closely their situations match the research situation and hence, whether the findings can be transferred (p. 211). Similarly Ritchie & Lewis (2003) & Schwandt (2001) posit that the findings of an interpretive study can be transferred if they share similar settings and population characteristics with the target study context and sample. Even though this research was conducted among Cypriot pre and in-service primary school teachers, my findings are likely to have broader applicability beyond Cyprus. As I have already discussed in chapter 2, research done in this area shows that the training of primary language teachers also concerns various scholars and researchers worldwide.

### **3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The research process creates tension between the aims of research to get the truth or make generalizations for the benefits of others, and the participant's rights and values which are potentially threatened by the research (Cohen et al., 2005; Orb et al., 2001). It is therefore essential that the ethical issues which may arise at each stage of the research sequence are taken into consideration; the researcher should make sure that any possible harm is reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles (Orb et al., 2001). I therefore took a number of steps to allay any such problems from arising.

Prior to embarking on my research I had to ensure that my methodology met the ethical standards of Exeter University. In line with their ethical practice committee I obtained their approval prior to implementing any aspect of my research proposal (see appendix L). A number of other ethical considerations were then addressed.

#### **Informed consent**

According to Burns (2000), informed consent is the most fundamental principle that is involved, as participants must understand the nature and purpose of the research and must consent to participate without coercion (p. 18). For this reason, the nature and the purposes of my research were clearly explained on the front page of the questionnaire, available for every participant to read and requesting their participation in the survey. Teachers and student-teachers had the choice not to participate in the survey if they felt that they did not wish to. In the case of the in-service teachers, the ones who agreed to follow up with an interview, filled in and signed a consent form, which was attached at the end of the questionnaire. This

procedure was different with student-teachers in the sense that I contacted the student-teachers who I considered appropriate for the purpose of the interviews and then I asked for their consent to continue with a focus group interview. All participants were also informed about the approximate duration of the interview (about one hour). It was also mentioned that the interview would be recorded for facilitating the analysis process, asking participants to confirm whether they finally agreed to follow this procedure.

It should also be mentioned that although the purpose of the interviews with the inspectors was purely informative, the two inspectors were also given a consent form to sign before conducting the interview (see appendices M and N).

### **Privacy and confidentiality**

Burns (2000) argues that confidentiality involves a clear understanding between the researcher and the participant concerning the use to be made of the data provided (p. 20). For these reasons, the participants of the survey remained anonymous as they were not asked to provide any contact details. Although the participants who agreed to a follow up interview were asked to fill a form with their real name and contact details, I assured them that their personal details would not be used for any reason other than contacting them in order to arrange our meeting for the interview. I also made it clear to the interviewees that individual data would not be quoted using the real names of the participants or the institutions where they were currently working or studying.



Furthermore, as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interviews were recorded to increase the accuracy and reliability of the data and facilitate the analysis process. In order to eradicate any kind of stress or anxiety on the part of the participants, I assured them that:

- the recorded data would be only used for the purposes of this research
- the recorded data would be destroyed after this research comes to an end
- confidentiality would be maintained during the whole process.

### **3.12 LIMITATIONS**

As with all research there are a number of limitations which need to be taken into consideration by the reader. The main limitation relate to the methods of data collection. For my study, a questionnaire and interview were used; however, words may not be as informative as actions. Observational data allow the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations (Cohen et al., 2005:304). For example, participants may fail to talk about certain needs or problems they encounter in the language classroom simply because they are not aware of them. Having the opportunity to observe pre and in-service teachers in the context of actual teaching may help both the researcher and the participants to identify a host of other problems they were not cognizant of. Observations inside the class would also allow the researcher to confirm participants' comments regarding their teaching practices. Even though I was aware of this limitation from the onset, accessibility, time and space constraints prevented me from using this data collection instrument. Firstly, I believe that in order to get a reliable picture of what really goes on in class and compare this with the participants' responses in the

questionnaires and interviews would mean observing each interviewee systematically. This would require getting permission from MOEC, all the parents and the participants. Apart from this, participants work in different towns around the island which would be unmanageable for a lone researcher. Finally conducting observations with all the interviewees would mean generating a vast amount of data which I would not be able to include or analyse in depth considering the space limitations of this thesis.

Another limitation could be the design of the questionnaire as regards the content areas. This part consisted of a long list of content areas which may have led participants to overlook some areas or give a different emphasis on some others. Another problem may be connected with an understanding of terminology. Even though the questionnaire was piloted before being distributed to the participants, it is possible that in some cases the translation in Greek did not give the intended meaning. (i.e. teaching writing could mean spelling, the alphabet or writing paragraphs/compositions). However, this was then clarified in the interviews and the results were consistent with the questionnaires. A further shortcoming related to the design of the questionnaire is associated with some questions which required respondents to give numerical data (years of (ELT) teaching experience) which were proved to be impossible to analyse using SPSS. Therefore I had to do it manually (group them: i.e. 1-5 years) which was really confusing and time consuming considering the size of the sample. There were also questions which required participants to give 2 answers which was again difficult to analyse, which

is why I believe more options should have been given that would have facilitated the data analysis process.

A further limitation relates to the objectivity of the interview data. While every attempt has been made to avoid researcher bias and to allow the voices of the participants as I explained earlier, I cannot be certain that the interpretation I have given to the participants' accounts is completely unbiased. Peer debriefing and member checks (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998) are two methods which would increase the trustworthiness of my findings. However, considering my colleagues' workload and limited free time, asking them to get involved in reading and interpreting the long transcriptions of the interviews would not have been possible.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

#### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

##### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I report on the findings drawn from the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups in relation to Research question 1. The data are then discussed in relation to the relevant literature. Reference is made to data from both samples: sample 1 = in-service teachers and sample 2 = pre-service teachers. Interview comments from members of the first group will be indicated with the letter 'T' (to indicate practicing Teacher), while comments from members of the second group will be indicated with the letter 'S' (to indicate Student teacher).

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1:** What kinds of knowledge and skills do pre-service and in-service primary teachers consider necessary for effective language teaching in the context of Cyprus state schools?

##### **4.2 PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON THE CONTENT AREAS REQUIRED FOR ELT**

According to Raya (see section 3.8.2) the teaching act comprises three phases (Planning phase, Implementation phase and Evaluation phase) which I further subdivided into subordinate categories describing the knowledge and skills that each phase entails. Raya also refers to a fourth component of this structure, the Background knowledge which is defined by Woods (1996:69) as "what a person

knows that affects thinking, interpretation and planning action” and as such it precedes the other three phases which are related to the Teaching act. As data from this category will be used to answer Research question 1, the statistical results will be presented for both samples in the same tables, to allow for comparison between the views of both samples while findings from the interviews will be used to explain and possibly add to the main results.

The following questions were asked in semi-structured and focus group interviews in order to obtain data regarding the primary language teacher’s professional knowledge as this is discussed in the literature (see section 2.3 in chapter 2).

1. To what extent do you feel you have benefited from the language improvement side of the English modules you have taken at university?
2. Can you recall any difficulties that you have encountered throughout your ELT career? (In-service teachers).
3. Can you recall any difficulties that you encountered, when you taught English during the practicum? (Student teachers with language teaching experience).
4. Can you tell me about your experience of learning EFL prior to your formal studies at university? (Both samples)
5. What impact, if any, has your experience as a language learner had on the way you teach now? (In-service teachers).
6. Would you use any aspects of your EFL experience with your own pupils?  
(Student-teachers)

Due to space limitations the participants' comments regarding the first question will be summarized in the table below.

**Table 4.2.1a - Language-focused module effectiveness**

Participants		Extent to which they have benefitted from the English-related course at university	Reasons
In-service	Pre-service		
T1, T2, T5, T4	S9	Not at all	Revision of what they already knew. No connection between that course and classroom practices. Grammar does not help me learn a FL
T6, T7	S1, S2	Little	Revision of what they already knew. Little Improvement of language skills No connection between that course and classroom practices.
T8	S3, S4, S6, S7, S8, S10	Enough	Revision of important language aspects. Improvement of language skills No connection between that course and classroom practices.

It seems that one aspect that all participants who attended a language-improvement module agreed on was that the particular module(s) was irrelevant to the teaching profession, arguing that while they were expected to act as language teachers in schools, they were treated as language learners at university. It is noticeable, however, that pre-service teachers, despite expressing dissatisfaction with the content of this module, claimed to have benefitted from it to some extent, as this has helped them to improve their language skills. In-service teachers, on

the other hand, even though they also stressed the importance of language proficiency, still felt that the English module did not offer them much.

### *Language proficiency*

Regardless of the module effectiveness as perceived by the participants, they all agreed that knowledge of the target language or language proficiency is a competence that any teacher involved in language teaching should have. Some made a connection between teachers' language proficiency and factors such as:

- Confidence in making extensive use of the FL in the classroom (T3, T7, T8, S2, S6, S7, S8).
- Ability to create their own material (T3, T7, T8).
- Understanding of the instructions given in the teacher's book (T3, T7, T8).
- Ability to deal with English-speaking pupils (T5).
- Ability to paraphrase or simplify language in order to facilitate comprehension (T1, T5, S2).

It is important to mention, however, that the comments of some of the in-service and two of the pre-service teachers with English language teaching experience go beyond mere language proficiency and reveal a need for knowledge about the language. This became evident from the reasons they gave which had to do with:

- Naming language features (T8, S2)
- Understanding FL-related questions from students with a good language background (T8)

- Providing (further) explanation, not included in the Teacher's book (T1, T5, T8, S2, S4).

While the teacher's high proficiency in the target language contributes greatly to the teacher's confidence and effective use of that language in the classroom, it is certainly not enough when it comes to dealing with situations that cannot be predicted and thus prepared in advance.

In relation to the second question, four of the pre-service teachers who taught English during their practicum (S2, S8, S7, S6) had difficulty using the target language in the classroom, to give instructions and to communicate with children, despite the fact that they all considered their level of English high enough for the level they had to teach. One of them commented:

*"I was so anxious! I didn't know what to tell them or how to introduce a new activity". (S2)*

Two of these participants (S8, S6) also reported feelings of anxiety and fear when they were asked to carry out the lesson in English and admitted that most of the times they had to provide further explanations in Greek because the children could not follow the lesson.

Similar comments were also reported by one of the in-service teachers who recalled her first years of teaching and some of the difficulties she faced at the time related to her language use in class:



*“I remember when I started teaching I was told that I had to use as much English as possible in class, which initially I thought it would be easy.... I was wrong! Believe me it takes time to prepare for this; even if you are fluent in English you still need to spare time at home to prepare”. (T3)*

Participants’ responses in relation to the second question have important implications for the kind of language improvement module that teachers need to attend during their university studies, which will enable them to use the target language confidently in the classroom.

As indicated in the literature, *theories about how languages are learnt* also form part of the teacher’s knowledge *about* the language. Data for this and for *knowledge of the English primary curriculum* will be displayed statistically in the table below, as these were two areas that were included in the questionnaire of both samples with respondents indicating on the Likert scale the degree of importance (out of 5) attached to them.

**Table 4.2.1b – Knowledge of the subject-matter**

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
<b>Theories of how languages are learnt</b>	3.72	1.05	3.58	1.20	.010
<b>Knowledge of the English primary curriculum</b>	3.82	0.96	3.61	1.16	.001

Statistical results show that these two areas were rated below 4 which mean that even though it seems that in-service teachers rated these more highly, they were generally not considered as important as the rest of the content areas.

Regarding the importance of the first area, Theories of how languages are learnt, comments were of similar nature among the in-service teachers. Five out of nine participants argued that they see no connection between knowing how languages are learnt and actual teaching. Their views were based on the following assumptions:

- Learning a FL depends on some kind of personal talent (T4)
- Learning a FL depends on the teacher's approach/personality and the pupil's willingness to learn and not on some kind of theory (T1, T9).
- The learning of such theories can only become relevant if prospective teachers receive some explanation as to how these can be put into practice. (T2, T8)
- Such theories would probably help a language teacher who teaches higher levels but definitely not a primary teacher who teaches English. (T8)

Reference to this area was made by participant S1 from sample 2 who argued that knowledge of such theories would be very useful in helping a teacher decide on the materials and activities to be used in her lesson, a view which was surprisingly supported by the rest of the participants in this group. It seems that there is some inconsistency between the participants' comments and the questionnaire results, as shown, in the table (4.2.1b) above.

The participants' comments regarding Knowledge of the primary English curriculum were quite similar between the samples. Only one participant (S9) thought that some knowledge of the curriculum would help a teacher plan her lesson. Participants T2, T8, S3 and S9 shared a different view, arguing that this can be learnt while on the job since the textbooks follow the curriculum and teachers are expected to follow the textbooks. They also argued that there are more important things to be learnt during their initial education so no time should be wasted on that. The rest of the participants did not refer to this area, which may imply that they do not consider it as important.

The analysis of in-service and pre-service teachers' answers to the fourth question indicated that, while they were a very homogeneous group regarding their language learning experiences which were based on a grammar-translation approach, their comments about the effectiveness of such an approach seemed to vary between the two samples. Even though in-service teachers acknowledge the fact that the old methods were quite boring in relation to the ones used nowadays, nine of them claimed that they did not remember being bored in the English lesson for reasons such as:

- They were fond of foreign languages (ALL)
- They loved the teacher's approach/personality (T5)
- They were very good at English (ALL)
- English was an easy and useful language to learn (T9)

Pre-service teachers were more critical of their own teachers and the teaching approaches used, especially in schools. They even commented on the school teacher's reliance on the textbook which revealed her poor proficiency in L2. They stressed the deficiencies of the traditional approach referring to it as boring and ineffective in developing language learners' interest towards the target language and fluency in both the written and spoken language, the latter being skills they are still struggling with. They all seemed to favour to a great extent the use of the communicative approach, which was absent from most of the participants' language learning experiences.

Besides receiving the above as mere reasons given by the participants for their (in)effective language learning, one could assume that such comments may indicate teachers' attributions for (un)successful language learning, implicitly directing our attention to personal interest, teacher's approach/personality, methodology used and personal talent.

It is also important to mention that all in-service teachers stressed the effectiveness of the traditional approach to English language teaching and expressed some kind of disbelief on the methods currently used. Although the following comments were not made in response to the above question, they were evidence of what teachers felt effective language learning should entail, which is why these are presented in this section.

*"My daughter has been taught in a completely different way, through the communicative approach and the truth is that she is fluent in English and she is only fourteen years old. However,*

*she still makes grammar mistakes when it comes to writing!"*  
(T1)

*"I have to admit though that even though communicative activities attract their interest, they are not always effective in teaching them a particular grammatical item. I mean that while they may be having fun, they don't learn what they are supposed to learn".* (T6)

Regarding the fifth question, which concerned only the in-service teachers, three of the participants said that the way they teach is completely different from the way they were taught because they should be using a completely different approach. Another participant (with an MA in TESOL) argued that, although she can easily follow the communicative approach because of her MA, she is sometimes 'forced' to use a more traditional approach because this is the approach followed by the current English textbook. Three other participants commented that their prior language learning experience has had very little impact on their current teaching practices and the other two asserted that it has had a 'great', 'irritating' impact.

However, it is interesting that, when participants were later asked if there were any situations where they ended up using a more traditional approach, they **all** agreed that they found grammar impossible to be taught through the communicative approach and only if it was explicitly explained in Greek could it be understood by all pupils. One participant commented:

*"When I have to teach a particular tense, I tell them when we use it, how we form it; for example I give them a verb and I write a sentence and I tell them 'this is a subject, this is the auxiliary and so on.'" (T5)*

For the respective question, pre-service teachers' views varied. One participant (S9) said that she would use some of the methods through which she was taught English at university, in order to teach a tense; for example she would use different colours to distinguish between the different parts of speech whereas the rest said that they wouldn't use any of these with their own pupils.

Below, I summarise the participants' personal theories as I perceive them, based on their comments outlined above:

- Learning a language requires some kind of personal '*talent*'.
- Learning a language depends on the teacher's approach and the pupil's willingness.
- Theory does not help you teach better.
- Children learn better through the use of communicative activities.
- Fluency is more important than accuracy at this level.
- Fluency cannot really be achieved without a good command of the grammar.
- Grammar needs to be explicitly explained in order to be understood.

Even though investigating teachers' personal theories was not the prime aim of this research as also stated in chapter 2, they seem to hold an important place in teachers' professional knowledge (see section 2.3.1) and it is therefore an area that cannot be ignored. The above personal theories clearly indicate that the teachers' views on what they consider important often contradicts their practices, which means that while they confirm the participants' perceived needs on certain

areas (e.g. teaching grammar using the communicative approach, a repertoire of communicative activities, motivating young language learners), they also reveal a need for education on other areas that were not perceived as particularly important (e.g. theories of how languages are learnt).

Based on Wood's definition and the findings from both interviews and focus groups, teachers' background knowledge seems to comprise two components. The first is related to teachers' knowledge of explicit theoretical principles related to their subject-matter, that is, knowledge of Public theories that can be learnt via formal instruction, and the second, to their personal beliefs of language teaching and learning which are also referred to as Personal theories in the literature (Malderez & Wedell, 2007; Pajares, 1992; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). It could therefore be assumed that such knowledge constitutes an important part of teacher's professional knowledge and its importance should not be undervalued as this seems to guide teacher's decisions *before* and actions *during* the learning process, as this will be discussed in more detail later in section 4.5.1.

#### **4.2.2 Planning phase**

In the Planning phase, the teacher should be able to determine the content and organisation of the lesson (i.e. type of activities, time allocated to each activity, the methods to be used, objectives and so on) which is why I consider that the areas included within this phase are related to a teacher's decision-making skills.

**Table 4.2.2 - Decision-making skills**

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
<b>Lesson planning</b>	3.87	0.92	3.87	1.12	.012
<b>Textbook / material evaluation</b>	3.80	0.86	3.85	1.03	.086
<b>Designing instructional material</b>	4.05	0.89	4.33	0.98	.054
<b>Adapting material to the pupils' level</b>	4.48	0.65	4.44	0.79	.019

Table (4.2.2) above highlights the distribution of in-service and pre-service teachers' views on the content areas related to this phase. Only one area was rated higher than 4 by both samples, which initially indicate that the areas included in this phase are not considered very important by the participants or at least not a priority. At first glance, it seems that there is a very small difference between the means shown for both samples. However, results from inductive statistics (T-test) clearly indicate that there is a statistically significant difference between the answers given by the two samples related to the first area (sig. =.012) and the fourth area (sig. = .019) which means that these are considered more important by the in-service teachers. The scores of the other two areas were very similar between the two samples.



Lesson planning using the current English textbooks was reported as quite useful by participants T6 and T7, the latter emphasizing the importance of being able to prepare a lesson based on the time given. Difficulties with estimating the time that should be allocated to each activity were also reported by two participants (S2 & S4) from sample 2 who were asked to prepare a lesson plan during their teaching practice. Participant T5, however, believed that there is no need to learn how to prepare a lesson plan as the aims and methodology are indicated in the Teacher's book.

Concerning Textbook/material evaluation, participants T2, T3 and T7 argued that knowledge and ability to evaluate a textbook or any relevant material are really useful and definitely something that university should prepare prospective teachers for. Another participant said that the teacher should be able to evaluate the activities in the textbook and any material that may accompany these, as these may not be as effective, as is the case of the current textbooks, and thus not achieve the required results with the pupils. Similar comments were also made by most of the pre-service teachers, who seemed to relate this area with maintaining pupils' interest throughout the lesson and with making informed decisions about what activities to use with pupils to facilitate language learning (S1, S9, S3). Even though this area was not one of the highest ranked in the questionnaire, its importance was greatly valued by some of the interviewed participants.

Related to the third area of the planning phase, findings were rather inconsistent with those in the questionnaire, in that participants did not seem to consider this very important. One participant (T9) thought that while knowing how to design instructional

material may be useful, it is definitely not a priority and therefore not something that needs to be taught at university since it can be done without training. Two other participants from the same sample also argued that primary teachers' busy schedule does not leave them time to create their own material (T1, T5, T4) so they always use ready-made ones from other sources. Regarding the same area, one of the pre-service teachers who taught English during practicum (S8) said that one of the difficulties that she had when preparing for the lesson was that she had to spend hours preparing materials and activities for the lesson because she had never done that before. No reference was made to this area by any of the other pre-service teachers.

Although adapting materials to the pupils' level was not given too much attention in the interviews, it became evident from some of the comments from sample 1 participants that this is an area of special relevance, which calls for future training. Two of the in-service teachers' comments were:

*"I had no problem teaching 6<sup>th</sup> graders because they could understand everything I said in English and had no problem following the book. However, now that I am teaching 4<sup>th</sup> graders whose English is not very good, I find it quite hard to deal with the lesson". (T1)*

*"The truth is that most of the times only the good pupils understand the lesson when it comes to teaching them something a bit more complicated". (T5)*

The above comments indicate the teachers' difficulty in adapting their language and the activities to the pupils' level in order to facilitate understanding and learning of the new content, something which, I believe, has important implications for the teacher's PCK, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

### 4.2.3 Implementation phase

The next three tables present the findings related to the implementation phase within which the teacher is concerned with the teaching/learning process, that is, with how the new content will be introduced/explained and how the instructional material and activities can be best used to facilitate learning. Based on this, the findings are divided in three sub-categories: a) Language teaching skills, b) Classroom activities and c) The Teacher's role.

**Table 4.2.3a - Language teaching skills**

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
Teaching speaking	4.71	0.56	4.44	0.85	.000
Teaching listening	4.52	0.62	4.08	1.02	.000
Teaching writing	3.70	1.09	4.16	0.92	.005
Teaching reading	4.55	0.60	4.23	0.92	.000
Teaching vocabulary	4.65	0.54	4.37	0.83	.000
Teaching grammar	4.54	0.62	4.44	0.79	.000

**Table 4.2.3b - Classroom activities**

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
<b>Drama and games specific to FLT</b>	4.56	0.67	4.37	0.85	.000
<b>Storytelling</b>	3.79	0.96	3.89	1.00	<b>.765</b>
<b>Using technology</b>	4.19	0.78	4.07	1.07	.000
<b>Activities for oral practice</b>	4.53	0.59	4.33	0.88	.000
<b>Activities which promote intercultural understanding</b>	3.70	0.95	3.75	0.94	<b>.585</b>
<b>Activities for integrating cross-curricular contents</b>	3.86	0.90	3.88	1.06	.040

**Table 4.2.3c - Teacher's role**

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
<b>Using language as an instrument of communication</b>	4.51	0.62	3.98	1.01	.000
<b>Using language as a means of instruction</b>	4.24	0.79	3.72	1.03	.000
<b>Motivating YLL</b>	4.34	0.76	3.93	1.02	.001
<b>Dealing with mixed-ability classes</b>	4.50	0.67	4.08	1.07	.000

## **Language teaching skills**

Table (4.2.3a) shows that all the areas within this phase were given a high score by both samples, which may indicate that these areas are considered quite important. However, after a T-Test had been applied, it became evident that in all cases, with the exception of 'Teaching writing', the in-service teachers rated these areas more highly than the pre-service teachers.

Since interviews and focus groups followed the questionnaires and some of the interview questions were based on the questionnaire results (see chapter 3), I thought of explicitly asking them to comment on the importance of knowing how to teach writing at primary level. Their responses were consistent with those in the questionnaire: seven out of nine in-service teachers thought that knowing how to teach writing at primary level is not so important, as it is not an important skill to be developed at this age, according to the primary English curriculum. Other reasons given were:

- No time for this skill to be developed during primary education as emphasis should be given to the oral/aural skills. (T4)
- Pupils already learn how to write in private institutes. (T1)
- It's boring and 'off-putting' for children. (T7 & T9)
- They can't understand how to structure a sentence. (T1)

One of them (T2) had a different view, arguing that it is a difficult skill to teach especially to English-speaking pupils, and another participant argued that while pupils should be first exposed to the spoken language and develop their oral/aural skills, when they reach the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they should definitely be involved in writing activities in order to be prepared for secondary school. (T6)

When pre-service teachers were asked the same question, they all thought this is an area that prospective teachers should receive training on. The reasons they gave, however, were more related to difficulties they themselves have with the language than with the relevance of this area within the curriculum:

*“I find this a difficult skill to teach even in Greek”. (S7)*

*“I find it hard myself to structure a sentence; I think it will be very difficult for me to find a way to explain to them how to produce a syntactically and grammatically correct sentence” (S3)*

In making these comments, pre-service teachers expressed their concerns which, it seemed to me, were influenced by their personal language learning experiences as well as their own proficiency in the target language.

During the interviews all participants stressed the importance of knowing how to teach the language, making reference to all aspects of it: speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, even prepositions. However, it soon became evident that in-service teachers seemed to be more concerned with how to teach the language in a communicative way while the latter simply requested guidance on how to teach a FL.

Special reference was made to grammar, which all participants from sample 1 consider rather impossible to teach communicatively, as shown in some of their comments below:

*'I have difficulty teaching grammar using the communicative approach and making them understand'.* (T2)

*"...grammar, I always teach it in a more traditional way. I can't see how grammar can be taught communicatively".* (T5)

It is interesting to mention that this need was also expressed by one of the pre-service teachers, who had to teach a class of 6<sup>th</sup> graders during his teaching practice.

*"Even though I knew the rules of the tense I was going to teach on that particular day, and I felt quite prepared for that, things didn't turn out the way I expected in class. Very few pupils participated in the lesson and most of them seemed quite bored! But I really didn't know any other way to teach it!"* (S2)

Other participants from sample 2 with no language teaching practice also thought that grammar is one of the most difficult skills to be taught and primary teachers require some training on that. Even though their concerns were not geared towards the communicative aspect of grammar teaching they argued that in order to teach grammar you need to have a good knowledge of the grammar yourself and even in the case that you do, you need to be able to explain it in simple words to make it comprehensible to your pupils. Two participants (S8 & S9) also expressed the need for interesting activities that can be used for further practice.

During the interviews with the in-service teachers, I noticed that they all placed great emphasis on the development of pupils' aural/oral skills. However, when I started analyzing the data, I realized that what they needed was information about a wide

range of ready-made activities that they could use in their lessons rather than discussion of different approaches or theories regarding the teaching of these skills.

### **Classroom activities**

All of the participants expressed the need for a repertoire of child-friendly activities, including games, songs, drama, for immediate use in classroom, findings that are consistent with the questionnaire results (see table 4.2.3b). They argued that the current English textbook does not offer enough opportunities for oral/aural practice or the activities offered do not encourage any kind of interaction between the pupils, in which case the teacher may want to replace them with more effective ones. A need for oral activities was also reported by one student-teacher with some experience in English language teaching, as was revealed in his comment below:

*“Lack of knowledge of oral activities led me to follow the book strictly and asked them to do one exercise after another. This made the lesson quite boring and the worst was that they got out of hand and I couldn’t manage the classroom”. (S2)*

Student-teachers also stressed the importance of teaching English through games and other child-friendly activities, arguing that learning a FL can be both hard and boring; therefore, such an approach can be motivating and help children develop a positive attitude towards the learning of the target language. Even though they did not refer explicitly to oral/aural activities, they all seemed to agree that speaking and listening are the most important skills for pupils at this age to develop, which may indirectly imply training on these areas.



There are also similarities between the two samples as regards the areas perceived as least needed. These were storytelling, activities which promote intercultural understanding and integration of cross-curricular links; these were the three areas within the implementation phase which were the lowest rated by all the participants. Storytelling was thought to be boring for this age and one participant (T9) argued that this could probably be useful for language teachers who teach English in the first cycle of primary school (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades), as is now the case in all day schools. Activities for intercultural understanding were not mentioned by any of the in-service teachers whereas there was an agreement among the pre-service teachers that such an area is covered in another subject (Intercultural education) and it shouldn't be any different with English. As for the third area mentioned above, only two participants referred to it (T4) and (S5), arguing that there is limited time for English in primary schools, so there is really no time for this.

Regarding the use of technology to teach English, even though most of them agreed that pupils are really motivated when they use computers especially during their lesson, they did not consider it a priority since it doesn't require any kind of specialized knowledge and can be easily learnt after their studies (T7).

### **The teacher's role**

Regarding the third sub-category of the implementation phase, table (4.2.3c) shows that in-service teachers rated all areas quite high whereas pre-service teachers rated only one of these higher than 4. A t-test had also been applied in order to check for any significance between the responses of the two samples.

Once again, in-service teachers rated all the areas more highly than the pre-service teachers.

Interestingly the first two areas were greatly valued by four of the pre-service teachers who taught English during their practicum (S2, S8, S7, S6). Although the rest of the in-service teachers did not refer to these two areas explicitly, four (T1, T4, T5, T6) argued that they very often have to switch from L2 to L1 simply because they can't get their message across, which, however, they all attribute to the pupils' low level of English rather than their own ability to communicate their message effectively

In-service teachers have also placed a strong emphasis on motivating young learners and on the development of pupils' positive attitudes towards the learning of a foreign language. They all shared the view that it is more important for the children to enjoy the lesson at this age rather than learn, a view that seems to be more associated with the affective goals of education. Pre-service teachers, on the other hand, while they also stressed the great importance that motivation and positive attitudes play at this stage of education, the majority agreed that this is again an area that is covered in other subjects, so there is no need for this to be part of the English module. Their argument was based on the fact that children at this age should be involved in playful activities and as long as the teacher exposes them to such activities, then motivation is 'guaranteed'.

As regards the area of dealing with mixed-ability classes, similarities were also identified between the in-service teachers and one of the pre-service teachers with

some English language teaching experience. All in-service teachers argued that dealing with mixed-ability classes has always been one of the main difficulties they have had to face in primary schools in Cyprus. When they were asked to define what they meant by mixed-ability classes, they referred to classes consisting of very weak and very strong students, classes consisting of different graders and classes consisting of English-speaking and Greek-speaking pupils. All these combinations are very common in Cyprus primary schools and when unprepared for such situations, teachers claim to be unable to deal with the lesson effectively. This is an area that was also highlighted by both the inspectors as one of major concern (see section 3.5.1). Inability to deal with such classes was related to motivation and consequently to classroom management as some participants (S2, T2 & T5) argued that they have very often been unable to keep the pupils concentrated and interested throughout the lesson.

In short, regarding the last sub-category of the implementation phase related to the teacher's role there seems to be a consistency between the responses given by the two samples in both the questionnaires and the interviews.

#### ***4.2.4 Evaluation phase***

The next table presents the findings related to the evaluation phase within which the teacher is concerned with monitoring and evaluating pupils' learning. Only one area was included in the questionnaire which is why this phase has not been sub-divided into subordinate categories. This area was rated with 4 only by in-service teachers as indicated in the table below.

**Table 4.2.4 – Evaluation phase**

	In-service		Pre-service		Sig.
	Mean	Std.D	Mean	Std.D	
Assessing young language learners	4.01	0.81	3.90	0.93	.046

In the interviews, this area was given no attention by the in-service teachers and little attention by the pre-service teachers, whose views were rather controversial. Participants (S2, S3 and S5), all from the same focus group, agreed that it would help if the teacher were familiar with certain methods of assessing the language skills of the pupils, even though they argued that this was an area that should not be covered in much depth. Participant S1 had a different view, saying that this was also covered in other subjects, which familiarize student-teachers with different possible methods of assessing young learners, like portfolio, oral assessment, and the usual, as she commented. This view was contradicted by the other three participants who tried to differentiate between knowledge of assessment methods and an awareness of certain criteria against which a teacher can assess language learners' performance based on pupils' expected levels of achievement.

Worth mentioning was also a comment made by participant T7, who, even though he did not refer to the particular area in the questionnaire, argued that a teacher should be able to evaluate his lesson. I consider this a very important area within the evaluation phase, and one which also seems to relate back to areas within the planning phase; a sound knowledge of the primary curriculum for example, and the

philosophy which underpins it are necessary in identifying whether the right objectives have been set for the lesson and whether these have been achieved successfully, based on the way the lesson was planned (selection of activities, sequencing, time allocated etc.). Considering all the views discussed in this last section, it appears that there is a strong link between the teacher’s background knowledge and the evaluation phase as will be further discussed in more detail.

#### **4.3 SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS FOUND WITH THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

Considering the statistical results shown in the tables above, one could assume that experience and INSET might be the reasons for the different responses between the samples. Based on this assumption, ANOVA and Post hoc tests were applied within sample 1 (in-service teachers) in order to check whether the years of ELT experience or participation in INSET have influenced their views on the content areas they consider necessary. Results from the first test, using experience as the independent variable, indicated that there is no significant difference in any of these areas with the exception of grammar, which is why only the relevant results will be presented below.

**Table 4.3a – Statistical significance within sample 1 as regards grammar teaching**

Variable 1	Mean/Std.D	Variable 2	Frequency	Mean	Std.D	Sig.
Group 5 = N: 7 (24-30 years)	3.71 / .756	Group 1 (1-5 years)	205	4.54	.614	.004
		Group 2 (6-10 years)	50	4.56	.664	.006
		Group 3 (11-15 years)	19	4.63	.496	.007
		Group 4 (16-22 years)	15	4.73	.458	.003

It is interesting that the results indicated in the table above show that those in group 5 (24–30 years of ELT experience) rated the teaching of grammar lower than all the other groups, which means that this was an area that they did not consider particularly important. This may imply that because they have a good knowledge of grammar themselves, they do not consider this an area that they need training on.

Results from the second test, with INSET as the independent variable, indicated that there is a significant difference only in the area of teaching English through games and drama.

**Table 4.3b - Statistical significance within sample 1 as regards teaching English through games and drama**

Training		No training		Sig.
Frequency	Mean	Frequency	Mean	
183	4.67	108	4.40	.003

Considering the above results, it seems that those who have been involved in some kind of INSET rated this area higher than those who have not. This could probably be due to the fact that this is the most common area that is discussed in in-service lectures/seminars or displayed in the form of demonstration lessons.

#### **4.4 PARTICIPANTS' SUGGESTIONS**

At the end of the questionnaire, there was a question asking participants to add any comments if they wished. Similarly, during the interviews there was a final question which asked participants to make any suggestions regarding the undergraduate programme of primary teacher education in relation to English language teaching. A number of comments and suggestions were shared by the majority of the participants from both samples and these were classified into the following groups:

- Being aware of some theory which underpins the teaching/learning of a FL but only to some extent.
- Being exposed to more practical ideas and less to theoretical concepts.
- Being familiar with current methodologies related to TEYL (only in-service teachers).
- Dealing with mixed-ability classes (only the in-service teachers).
- Being familiar with a list of activities and material that help them teach the language in an interesting but also effective way.
- Planning around the current English textbook.
- Attending a language improvement course which will be planned around communicative activities rather than grammar and syntax.

Even though some of the participants' comments sometimes contradicted the statistical results, overall it seems that there is some consistency between the findings obtained from all three data collection instruments, which adds to the rigor of the findings.

## **4.5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS RELATED TO RESEARCH QUESTION 1**

The above findings reflect a view of knowledge as largely experiential in that it is rooted in our memories of schooling (Lortie 1975), and socially-constructed as it is shaped by other socio-cultural and educational factors which exist outside formal learning (Waters 2005). As stated in the literature, teachers' professional knowledge base comprises personal theories (*knowledge of the teachers*) and public theories (*knowledge for the teachers*) the latter being the main focus of this chapter.

The first section below (4.5.1) is a discussion of the participants' personal theories and of the factors which have proved to have affected teachers' beliefs and practices. The following sections (4.5.2 & 4.5.3) discuss the participants' perceived difficulties and expectations which have been identified by this study. These have shed light on the public theories which are perceived as the most essential ones to be acquired by prospective primary FL teachers. This chapter ends with conclusions in relation to the research question 1.

### ***4.5.1 Factors affecting teachers' beliefs and practices***

The present study primarily suggests that both practising and prospective primary teachers, start out their teaching careers with several common preconceptions related to the language learning and teaching process, which are mainly implicit but rather influential and thus very powerful. These, along with experience and other contextual factors (workload, traditional textbooks, time limitations, and pupils' English background/ability), seem to exert great influence on the decisions teachers



take regarding the planning, implementation and evaluation processes, even though these may sometimes contradict their actual beliefs of effective language learning.

### **Early learning experiences**

Teachers' emerging personal theories from this study clearly indicate that while they confidently claim to be following a communicative methodology as promoted in the primary curriculum, in terms of activities and material, the majority of the participants still hold firmly to the belief that grammar is central to language learning and only explicit grammar teaching can make the new content understood to the learners, a finding, which parallels the findings of two other studies conducted by Richards et al. (2001) and Johnston & Goettsch (2000).

There was also evidence that fluency is considered more important than accuracy at this level, pointing to the fact that communicative activities develop young learners' (YLS') positive attitudes towards English language learning because the focus is on passing on their message and on interacting with their classmates and not on producing accurate sentences based on the teacher's correctness. However, once again, their comments which followed seemed to contradict their reported beliefs. While they valued the importance of fluency, they expressed some kind of disbelief in the effectiveness of the communicative methodology. Their comments seemed to implicitly suggest that lack of grammar knowledge leads to fragmented language learning as fluency requires both knowledge about the language and ability to use it. It then becomes evident that even though they all acknowledged the importance of oral speech as the main skill to be developed, they acknowledged even more the importance of being taught the grammar, even if this was not overtly expressed.

Such a finding is supported by other relevant studies (Mohamed, 2006; Richards et al., 2001).

Pre-service teachers, on the other hand, seemed to be less doubtful in relation to the effectiveness of the communicative approach and more critical of the traditional grammar-based approach they had been exposed to as learners, a finding which parallels Mattheoudakis' study (2007). Their comments revealed a need to avoid teaching grammar because their own experience of these aspects of L2 had been negative and its effects, as they pointed out, are still evident in the difficulties they are still facing with the language (i.e. limited vocabulary, lack of confidence in oral speech).

An assumption supporting some of these notions, such as the primacy of grammar and the importance of accuracy/fluency, can be accounted for, on the basis of the participants' previous experiences as language learners, considering the fact that they were all Cypriots, whose language education background focused on the instruction of the formal aspects of the language. Discussion of the aforementioned findings indicate that there is a strong link between participants' language learning experiences and their conceptions of effective language teaching; while in-service teachers tend to adopt or support certain instructional strategies on the basis of their *positive* language learning experiences, pre-service teachers choose to avoid them on the basis of their *negative* language learning experiences.

### **Exposure to the reality of classroom teaching**

Considering that they all share a very similar language learning background, one could argue that their different and rather contradicting views may be attributable to professional experience gained via hands-on-practice. Exposure to the realities of FLT may lead teachers to adopt or reject initial beliefs regarding what is effective, that is, what works and what does not. Allied to this argument, Breen et al. (2001:495) observe that experienced teachers appear to develop a personal repertoire of tried and preferred practices. On the other hand, lack of such exposure, as in the case of pre-service teachers, may lead them to adopt certain beliefs, which however, cannot be taken for granted before practice takes place. Argyris and Schon (1974: 6-7) make reference to teachers' espoused theories and theories-in-use and explain how these exist side by side.

“When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives allegiance, and which, upon request, he communicates to others. However the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-use, which may or may not be compatible with his espoused theory”.

It seems that in-service teachers' espoused theories which are related to pupils' wants and preferred learning approaches as well as the expectations of the syllabus conflict with their theory-in-use which is related to their experiences as teachers and learners. The above argument could be an indication that what is reported to be true in theory is not always compatible with its practical application

(Wei-Pei, W. 2008; Mohamed, N. 2006). It is logical then, that student teachers may not hold the same views after they have been exposed to real teaching.

What has been discussed so far seems to support the arguments regarding the great influence exerted by the teachers' prior learning experiences on their beliefs about effective language teaching and learning and subsequently on their actual practices (see section 2.3.1 for references).

### **Other contextual factors**

There is evidence of other contextual factors which also appear to influence these teachers' practices and often create tensions between their beliefs and actual practices (Pennington & Richards, Tsui cited in Borg, 2006:86). Such factors are mixed-ability classes, as well as the current textbook, which is rather old-fashioned and follows a grammar-based approach. Another factor which seems to hinder teachers' applications of more communicative activities is associated with the pupils' low level of English which teachers believe requires explicit teaching. The time available for English language teaching does not leave space for much creativity either, which leads teachers to follow the textbook rigidly, adopt techniques that they use in the teaching of other subjects or rely on their prior language learning experiences. Finally, the teachers' workload leaves them very little time to prepare for the new approach they are completely unfamiliar with, the latter being a major concern shared by the majority of the participants who feel that considerable time is required for the preparation of a more learner-centred approach to teaching, which they do not have at their disposal. Many teachers expressed the desire to conduct more communicative lessons but appear to lack

the expertise especially in relation to grammar teaching and the confidence to actually carry these out, fearing classroom management problems.

Regardless of the importance given to grammar teaching by the two samples, similarities between them were evident in relation to how grammar should be taught even though these varied again in relation to the sources of their concerns. There were mixed signals about how the teaching of grammar should be approached; despite the fact that in-service teachers seemed to acknowledge the benefits of the communicative approach in teaching other aspects of the language, they have *failed* or *avoided* or *both*, to teach grammar communicatively. The first case could be related to their unfamiliarity with the new approach in teaching grammar, since no one has received any formal instruction in relation to communicative grammar teaching (Richards et al., 2001; Wei-Pei, 2008). This unfamiliarity along with the strong views they held in favour of the traditional 'conscious' teaching of the grammar seemed to be the main reasons that communicative grammar teaching was absent from any of these teachers' lessons.

Pre-service teachers' concerns regarding the same issue were not clearly articulated; they firmly believed that grammar should not be taught traditionally but when they tried to explain how they would teach grammar or how they did (those with experience) there was little evidence of implicit grammar teaching. Some of them even admitted that, even though they would not want to involve their pupils in explicit explanations of grammatical rules, they would most probably do it because they don't know any other way to do it. What all of this suggests is that there is a considerable confusion about the relationship between communicative language

teaching (CLT) and the teaching of grammar which seems to be perceived by the participants as one which involves less grammar teaching and practice which is based on playful activities rather than the traditional fill-in the gaps activities. I believe that participants' stance towards grammar teaching is partly attributed to their ignorance of the principles of CLT and to their lack of familiarity with the aims of the primary English curriculum as well as to their personal theories related to the importance of grammar as previously discussed.

Even though it was not within the scope of this study to examine the factors which may bring about change in teachers' practices, an identification of these is an indication of the possible sources of the teachers' concerns and difficulties.

#### ***4.5.2 Participants' perceived difficulties***

Findings have clearly indicated that the participants' difficulties in relation to language teaching stem from lack of relevant initial teacher education which failed to equip them with the knowledge and skills essential in teaching their subject-matter. Their reported difficulties appear to be mainly associated with their oral fluency, in few cases their knowledge about the language with reference only to explicit knowledge of the grammar, their unfamiliarity with FL methodology and relevant activities, and their unfamiliarity with the use of the CLT especially in relation to grammar teaching.

#### **The teachers' lack of linguistic competence**

Data from this study have proved that the most important aspect of language teachers' knowledge base is their linguistic competence; this seems to be closely related to teachers' confidence in using the target language extensively in class, hence to their ability to provide rich language input as well as to their ability to use the language flexibly

to facilitate pupils' understanding. The teachers' decisions regarding the planning of a lesson, its implementation and evaluation are therefore greatly influenced by the extent to which teachers are linguistically competent.

### *Lack of oral fluency*

Primary teachers' high proficiency in the target language has been considered a prerequisite for effective language teaching by all the participants, a finding which is also supported by a number of other studies referred to in the literature (Mewald 2001; Jimenez Raya & Hewitt 2001; Butler 2004; Bondi & Poppi 2007; Kalebic 2005; Gahin & Myhill, 2001; AL-Mekhlafi, 2007). Teachers' concerns regarding their own proficiency seem to be more related to features of communicative competence rather than with English as an academic subject. Target language use in the classroom both as a means of communication as well as a means of instruction was among the top areas in which participants felt themselves to be inadequate and to be in need of education, with the former being given more emphasis. They were aware of their deficiencies and expressed the need to improve their oral speech and to receive training on the use of techniques for developing oral language as posited by current methodological thinking.

These concerns and perceived needs may be due to the fact that they were all taught English in a similar way, which focused on language as a code and with little to no emphasis on communication.

This study reveals that there is a connection between the teachers' oral fluency, and the extent to which they use the target language communicatively in the classroom. When asked about their worries in relation to language teaching, participants from both

samples highlighted a lack of confidence and occasionally 'fear' and 'anxiety' of having to use the TL as a means of communication in the classroom. They seemed to have experienced difficulties mainly with classroom talk, that is to give instructions, to introduce a new activity, and generally to make genuine and spontaneous use of the FL during the lesson. Similar difficulties were also reported in the studies conducted by Wei-Pei (2008) and by Raya & Hewitt (2001). Some admitted that this inability and at the same time insecurity they felt in relation to FL use made them resort to their L1, or repeat the instructions as indicated in the teacher's book as this did not leave much space for language mistakes. Others, on the other hand, attributed their reluctance to use the FL mainly to the pupils' low level rather than their own proficiency; they explained that whenever they tried to introduce any kind of communicative activity, pupils would either fail to understand the point of the activity when this was explained in English or have difficulty producing accurate sentences, which also led them to translate the instructions and to rely more on the textbook.

In relation to the first case, it is evident that poor or insufficient command of English can cause teachers to lose self-assurance, self-esteem and inevitably professional status, especially considering the fact that the majority of pupils in Cyprus attend private lessons given by specialist language teachers, who the pupils can use as a benchmark with which they can compare their school teachers. The teachers' inability to use the FL extensively and confidently in class for purposes other than the ones indicated in the book will not only undermine the teacher's credibility in the classroom but also deprive the learners of a good language model which the teacher ought to represent. As for the second case, even though proficiency was not explicitly perceived as a difficulty by some



participants, their learners' difficulties may be an implication of their own inability to use the language more flexibly, that is, to paraphrase or simplify it so that pupils can understand it. This seems to be related to Bruner's theory of scaffolding which views 'language' as the teacher's most important tool in facilitating the children's SLA by providing linguistic models, prompting them to expand sentences and generally supporting their oral production. Anything that teachers plan and do in the classroom need to be verbalized and classroom interaction is crucial to the success of L2 learning. The above perceived difficulties of the participants also seem to coincide with some of the organizational strategies identified by Coyle, Valcarcel & Verdu (2001:150) which concentrate on different aspects of classroom management, most of which require the use of the foreign language as it is again suggested by the curriculum. It could therefore be assumed that teachers' effectiveness in managing the FL classroom could also be seen in relation to their fluency in the target language and the extent to which they feel comfortable in using it.

Lack of oral proficiency seems to also inhibit them from applying the principles and techniques associated with communicative language teaching as promoted by the primary English curriculum which supports the view that language should be used for communication and is seen as a social tool which speakers use to make meaning. Communication is a form of social interaction and as such it involves a high degree of unpredictability and creativity, which cannot be achieved unless the teacher has a high level of oral proficiency; this will allow her to introduce activities which according to Dewey (see section 2.4) should be meaningful to pupils and thus enable them to interact with others in the classroom encouraging purposeful and genuine use of the FL.

Maximum use of the language being taught is thought to be an essential way of creating real communication in the classroom and maximizing opportunities for acquisition. *Real* communication and *genuine* use of the FL, however, should not be confused with mere engagement of pupils in *pre-determined* oral activities which may require them to produce some kind of guided oral speech. I feel that the effectiveness of the latter is dependent on the teacher's ability to create opportunities for real communication and interaction among pupils, which means that knowledge of oral activities as requested by the participants will not serve much unless the teacher is communicatively competent herself.

Considering all the above, one could argue with certainty that teacher's fluency and knowledge of the appropriate classroom language is one of the main problems often encountered by today's primary language teachers who are expected to comply with the principles of CLT, a finding which is supported by other studies (Butler, 2004; Wei-Pei, 2008). Any discussion of the knowledge and skills required for the different phases of the teaching act becomes less valid if the language proficiency level of the teachers themselves is inadequate. It is important however, to realise that it is not just a matter of language proficiency, but also of the specific needs of classroom language, that most teachers have not been prepared for during their initial education. Bondi & Alessi (2002) argue that [these] teachers may find themselves with a limited repertoire and a limited awareness of the importance of classroom language [until they are actually involved in real language teaching] as has become evident from this study; classroom talk was perceived as a major difficulty and expressed as a need for training only by those who have experienced language teaching.

### *Lack of declarative knowledge*

However, by no means can it be deduced that fluency in the target language on its own guarantees effective language teaching; while it relates to rich quality input in the classroom, and the teachers' confidence and management skills, it proves inadequate when it comes to dealing with more complex areas of language teaching which may require teachers to draw on their explicit knowledge of the language, a finding which is supported by Shuir (2009) and Tuzel & Akcan (2009). One would probably wonder why a primary teacher needs to have such knowledge since she is 'discouraged' from providing conscious explanations of any grammatical items or from using basic terminology. Possible difficulties as the ones reported by the participants, should, however, be cause for concern. Since results from this study primarily interest the Cyprus context, the fact that children start learning English in private institutes earlier than they do at school, should be taken into serious consideration. These pupils, following an exam-oriented approach outside school, come to school with a fairly good knowledge of the grammar. This puts extra pressure on the teachers who are expected to have at least some basic knowledge of the grammar, which will enable them to respond to these pupils' unexpected queries.

### **Lack of Pedagogical Content Knowledge**

In-service teachers' concerns regarding their pupils' difficulty in understanding the new content when this is taught in the FL are also cause for concern; firstly, the fact that all of the interviewed in-service teachers have reached the GCE level successfully suggests that this difficulty does not relate to their language

proficiency. Banking on this assumption, one could go further to assume that pupils' difficulties in relation to understanding the FL may not be attributable to their low level of English as perceived by their teachers, but to these teachers' inability to communicate this knowledge. Participants reported cases where they had difficulty making the new content accessible to weak pupils whose level of English was rather low. Another difficulty reported was teaching 4<sup>th</sup> graders, as their limited knowledge of English made it hard for them to follow the lesson which most of the times ended up quite boring. It could therefore be argued that the teachers' role does not lie solely on their language proficiency or their knowledge about the target language but also on their ability to transmit what they know about that language (KAL), in a way which will ensure pupils' understanding. This inability seems to be related to teachers' lack of PCK, whose importance has been emphasised in a number of other studies (Tsang & Rowland, 2005; Ellison, 2007; McNamara, 1991; Roth, 1989).

### **The importance of teachers' language awareness**

Andrews (2001), however, draws our attention to the distinction between a teacher's knowledge about the language (declarative knowledge) and the teacher's awareness of the language, arguing that the former should be part of the subject-matter while the latter should be considered as a major sub-component of PCK or subject-specific pedagogy for the context of this study, forming the bridge between subject-matter knowledge and the teacher's ability to make effective use of this knowledge. Relevant textbooks and teacher's manuals in Cyprus provide detailed explanations and terminology of the new content and of the methodology through which this content is expected to be taught,

which means that teachers can be informed to some extent about the features of the new content and, with some use of their pedagogical knowledge, they are likely to succeed in explaining it in a pleasant and even comprehensible way. However, while explicit grammatical knowledge, relevant terminology and knowledge of subject-specific methodology are likely to equip the teacher with the image she is expected to 'display' and the knowledge needed to cover the particular lesson as outlined in the syllabus, she will fail at the same time to scaffold pupils' language level and consequently push them beyond their current level of development. In other words, KAL seems to be more related to those tasks which are undertaken as part of lesson preparation whereas Teacher language awareness (TLA) relates to other tasks which occur as spontaneous interventions, in response to classroom events.

It is evident that KAL and knowledge of didactics, while essential parts of the teacher's knowledge base, are not sufficient on their own to ensure that the teacher will deal with the new content with ways which are most conducive to learning. Such ways, according to Thornbury (1997) and Andrews (2001), involve choosing appropriate examples, using the appropriate level of language for different classroom purposes, selecting the right activities and material and adapting these to pupils' level where necessary and generally mediating any kind of input available to the pupils. The importance of TLA in relation to effective language teaching seems to be supported by the findings of this study as well as by Tuzel & Akcan's findings (2009). In-service teachers who now have some kind of knowledge regarding activities that can be used in the FL classroom to teach a specific lesson, acquired from different sources (INSET, teacher's book, material banks, ready lesson plans prepared by inspectors and advisors), express some kind of confidence

and satisfaction as to how they *now* carry out an English lesson compared to how they did at the very beginning but at the same time report difficulties similar to those mentioned by Andrews and Thornbury above. Apart from this, when they refer to the pupils' attitudes towards their lesson they describe their enthusiasm when involved in playful activities but their boredom and difficulty in dealing with the lesson when it comes to teaching them grammar or writing. These are an indication that simply exposing learners to L2 input from various sources as the ones mentioned above is not sufficient unless it is shaped by the teacher and made accessible to the learners. In order to do that, teachers need to have an awareness of the aspects which need to be emphasized, modified or further practised based on their learners' needs and the requirements of the syllabus. It is also worth noting that their satisfaction regarding the effectiveness of their teaching seems to be associated with the positive impact this has had on their pupils' attitudes towards the lesson rather than its impact upon what is learnt.

Andrews (2001) posits that, in the absence of TLA, the teacher is more likely to show insufficient engagement with the language content and be more concerned with the affective dimension of her teaching, that is, with engaging the interest of her pupils. This clearly shows a move away from language teaching and a focus on primary teaching, something which has also been made explicit from the data drawn from this study. Participants from both samples have placed a strong emphasis on the importance of creating a pleasant class atmosphere which will foster the development of pupils' positive attitudes towards the English lesson pointing to the use of games and fun activities but at the same time ignoring the specificity of the language component in making effective use of these. This was especially evident from the pre-service teachers,

who argued that sustaining motivation in the language classroom is very important but the means to achieving this should be no different from those used in an L1 class. These findings, which are similar to those drawn from Raya & Hewitt's study (2001), indicated that teachers conceive teaching primarily in terms of positive interpersonal relationships, that is, the pupils' feelings towards teaching and learning, rather than the effects of their teaching on pupils' language learning. Such an indication does not mean to undervalue the affective goals of education but they should not overemphasise or consider them in isolation to what is to be learnt either. This means that while motivation is a key factor associated with effective language learning, teachers should not ignore the importance of the language component in sustaining this.

There seems to be a clear link between the language use made by teachers in the FL classroom, the amount of mediated input available to learners and progress in the foreign language. This link clearly indicates the different roles played by the teacher: a provider of input, a facilitator of communication, a linguistic model, a manager of the learning process, an instructor and a mediator, all of which place the role of 'linguistic competence' in the centre of the above classroom procedures. Considering what has been discussed so far, one could argue that in the absence of TLA, procedural and declarative knowledge of the language combined with input from various sources is likely to lead to knowledge of didactics rather than pedagogy, as these are described in 2.4.4 & 2.5.5. Driscoll et al. (2004:43) note that:

“The purpose of resources is to provide support for teaching and learning [but that] any resources – whether they are teaching programmes, material, textbooks - need to be mediated by the

teacher, who must be sufficiently confident in the language and in pedagogical skills to make effective use of them”.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, there is no doubt that linguistic competence as well as TLA are the core competences that need to be acquired in a LTE programme. Lack of these has resulted in teachers' negative emotions of low-confidence, frustration and anxiety which, in turn, prevent them from providing valuable language input to learners, leading them to rely on textbooks and on their existing teaching skills and at the same time ignoring the objectives of the curriculum. The teachers' background knowledge becomes even more important if we consider it in relation to the planning phase, which as previously mentioned, is associated with the teachers' decision-making skills. It is evident that the teachers' informed decisions regarding the four areas listed in the planning phase are affected by the quality of teachers' linguistic competence as well as their knowledge of the primary English curriculum. These will enable them to plan a carefully thought of lesson with activities and tasks which are most appropriate in terms of learners' age, level, previous learning and which at the same time serve the desired learning outcomes specified by the syllabus. The way the lesson will be planned will subsequently inform the way it will be taught and evaluated. Hence, LTE programmes should be more concerned with equipping prospective teachers with competences which will enable them to develop their analytical skills and a reflective approach towards teaching and not just with competences which are perceived as essential by the teachers due to their direct, explicit link to the teaching of the new content as discussed below.



### **4.5.3 Participants' expectations**

Considering the results drawn from this study relevant to the teaching act, it is obvious that participants place more emphasis on the areas included in the first two sub-categories of the implementation phase rather than those within the planning phase. Needs regarding skills for teaching the different language areas were perceived as essential by the participants. However, data from the interviews revealed that what they actually need is information *about* activities for teaching these areas according to the new curriculum rather than the knowledge and skills which will enable them to develop their own activities.

In other words, they ask for information in relation to the didactics of the language, which will enable them to plan a proper lesson and be able to provide the right answers where necessary (Wright & Bolitho, 1993). Their reported needs clearly indicate a static approach to language teaching which requires the acquisition of predetermined knowledge and skills, ignoring the constituents necessary for making informed decisions about the effective planning, implementation and evaluation of the lesson (see section 2.2.1). Their comments reveal a need for training which Widdowson (1997) describes as solution-oriented as opposed to a need for education which is also described by Widdowson, Ur (1996) and Moore (1998) as a problem-oriented process which involves the development of theories, awareness of options and decision-making abilities.

#### **Information about child-friendly activities**

Participants seem to appreciate the value of including playful activities like games and drama in their lessons, stating that they contribute significantly to children's L2

learning. They ask for ready-made activities which will enable them to plan an 'effective' lesson in terms of time management, degree of coverage and the expected approach to language teaching without much effort on their part; such activities seem to determine how much time and attention should be dedicated to specific language items, which means that they indirectly familiarize teachers with the learning objectives to be achieved and the time to be spent on each activity. However, what they fail to realise is that, if they are to use them in a way that contributes effectively not only to the overall enjoyment of the lesson but also to the lesson objectives, they will need to have a solid background knowledge which will enable them to make appropriate selection and use of these activities. This finding reveals a mismatch between participants' implicit needs (see sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.2) and their expectations.

### **Need for classroom 'solutions'**

Even though in-service teachers are more concerned with activities which relate to current methodologies and pre-service teachers with activities which simply relate to the teaching of different language areas, it is evident that both samples' needs centre around the transmission of knowledge of 'classroom solutions' rather than the knowledge and skills leading them to the development of such solutions, a finding which is supported by Moon & Boullon's study (1997). This is also evident from the fact that, while they demand classroom activities related to the development of pupils' oral competence as well as to their motivation as promoted by the curriculum, they place less emphasis on activities which require more effort on their part. For instance, using activities which promote intercultural understanding depends on their

pupils' cultural background as well as their own knowledge of other cultures. This may require them to look for such information and adapt the activities accordingly. The same could be assumed about cross-curricular contents, since this also requires adapting or creating relevant materials/activities as these may not be found in the textbook. While this assumption may be true, participants' reasons for not considering these activities so important (workload as well as time limitations regarding the English lesson) should not be ignored.

### **Dealing with mixed-ability classes**

Perceived needs regarding the area of dealing with mixed-ability classes were especially felt by in-service teachers and pre-service teachers who were involved in real language teaching. Raya & Hewitt (2001), who reported a similar finding, make a link between this need expressed by the participants and Feiman and Floden's impact stage, when teachers become concerned about their effect on pupils. However, participants' feelings of frustration in their inability to motivate or manage the classroom when dealing with such classes were more indicative of their own well-being and thus more related to Feiman and Floden's survival stage when teachers are preoccupied with their own adequacy in conducting the lesson (see Raya & Hewitt, 2001:95). A further assumption that could be made at this point is that exposure to classroom realities raises awareness of issues that need to be addressed during initial education while failure to experience real teaching may lead prospective teachers to ignore important areas and turn their attention to areas that are perhaps not so important. The importance of raising teachers' awareness via

practical work is therefore one that should be taken into serious consideration when designing LTE programmes as this will be further discussed in the next chapter.

### **Assessing young language learners**

Assessing young language learners is again perceived as an area which ignores the specificity of the language component and is seen as being no different from YL assessment in other subjects, as long as the teacher is aware of the different means available for assessing young learners. According to the primary English curriculum, assessment of students in primary education should be seen as the blending of two major issues: the 'what' and the 'how'. Participants, however, seem to be paying attention only to the latter ignoring the importance of the former. This is again an indication of the participants' lack of subject-matter knowledge which as Andrews (2003:82) notes, "has often tended to be taken for granted in any initial Teacher Education programmes". Subject-matter knowledge as described in chapter 2 (linguistic competence and knowledge of the aims and objectives of the curriculum), seems to be closely related to 'what' aspects of the language should be assessed and which means (how) could be used to assess them.

### **4.6 CONCLUSIONS**

Participants' goals are clearly product-related which indirectly shows lack of autonomy in their own teaching. This lack of autonomy and expectations of easily trainable competences which focus on the product rather than the process seem to reflect the broader educational system in Cyprus which is centralized and follows a more top-down approach to learning. The effectiveness of education has always been measured on the basis of tests, exams and grades which have been

dependent on the successful memorization and implementation of teachers' input. Emphasis has always been placed on the 'product', that is, the grade, as the expected learning outcome and the only contribution to learning made by the learner. Similarly teachers aim at displaying effective teaching techniques (the product of the teaching process) with little to no interest in the process of developing them or the learning theories which underpin them. Considering that these teachers have been educated under a system with an emphasis on top-down directionality, it would be naïve and unrealistic to expect them to be concerned with anything else other than the technical aspect of information transfer at least in the early stages of their career (Raya & Hewitt, 2001:93).

Overall, participants' needs appear to be more pragmatic and practical, related to didactics, which implies familiarity with techniques and a wide range of activities that they could use to teach their subject to all pupils of the same age, a finding which parallels Moon and Boullon's (1997) study. This means that the knowledge base which is perceived as essential by practising and prospective teachers is connected to *subject-specific methodology* rather than *subject-specific pedagogy*. More specifically, participants demand knowledge and training on pre-determined procedures that they can use in their lesson but at the same time ignore or are unaware of the knowledge and skills leading them to *the art of teaching*. Data from this study have indicated that the latter will only be possible even in the long run, if prospective teachers are equipped with knowledge which will enable them to use reason soundly and to be capable of skilful performance. Such knowledge seems to be closely related to a teacher's background knowledge which comprises teachers'

personal theories as well as those public theories which inform their decisions regarding planning, implementation and evaluation of the lesson. This finding clearly views both types of theories as integral components of a teacher's knowledge base to be included when designing an ELT programme.

Another observation that can be made is that participants' perceived needs centre around the relationship between positive attitudes (both theirs and their pupils') and their teaching. What they fail to see is the relationship between teaching and learning, attributing their pupils' low level of achievement to these pupils' language ability. In other words, they do not acknowledge that, even if low level of language proficiency does play a role in the process, it should not be always regarded as the only reason. Teachers should take this as an opportunity to identify their own weaknesses and consider changing their teaching in ways that are more likely to have a direct impact on pupils' learning. This would seem to suggest a more reflective approach to their teaching education.

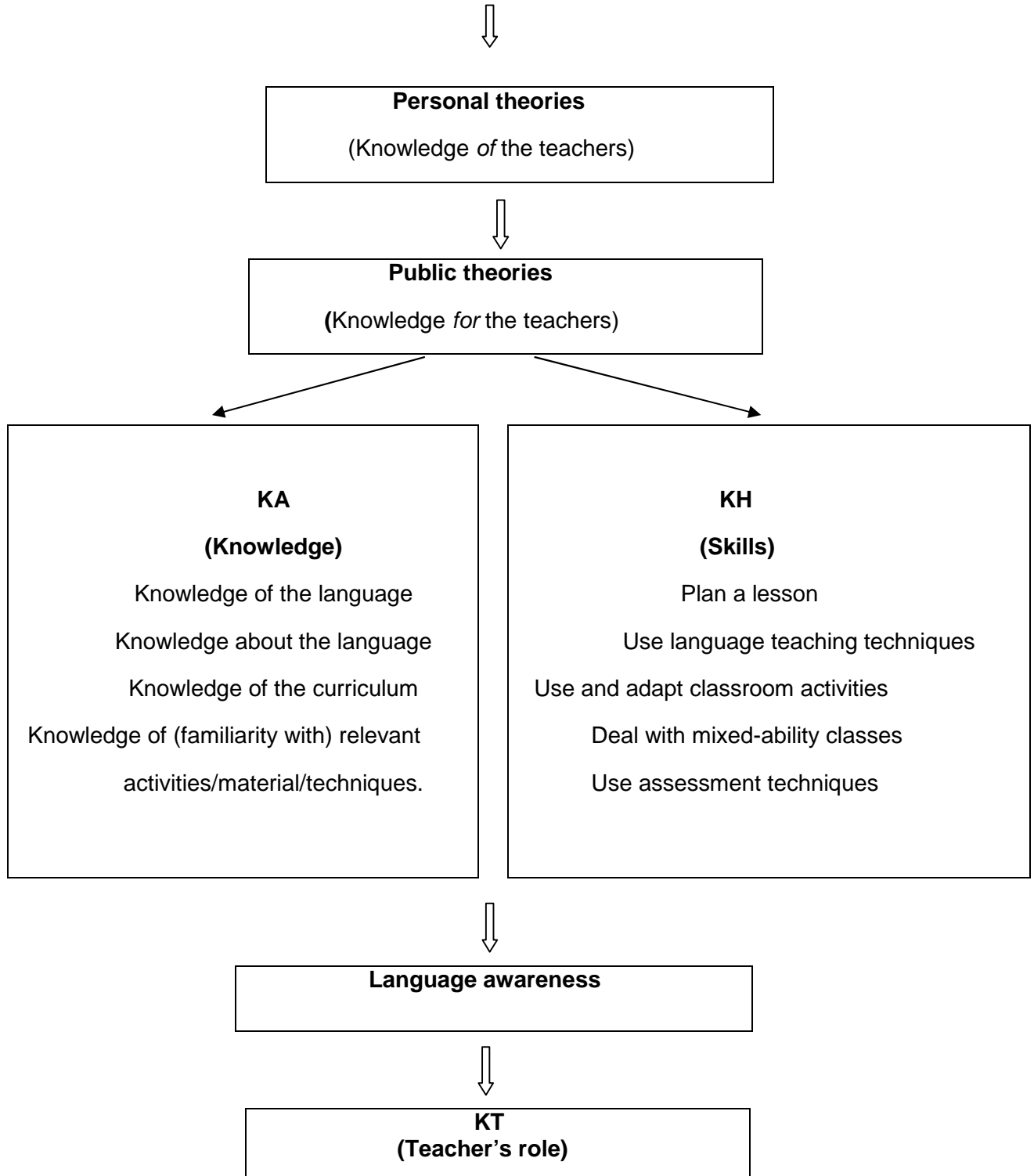
Teachers' experience and exposure to INSET seem to be important factors in teachers' awareness of essential content areas related to language teaching. This is evident from the fact that in-service and pre-service teachers with some experience in ELT express concerns regarding current methodologies, mixed ability classes, time management and classroom talk as opposed to those with no experience, whose needs were more associated with survival skills rather than needs related to the implementation of the curriculum. Apart from this, in-service teachers who attended in-service seminars rated the use of games and drama more highly. This could probably be due to the fact that this is the most common area that is

discussed in in-service lectures/seminars or displayed in the form of demonstration lessons, something which has important implications for the role of training in raising teachers' awareness, an issue that will be discussed in chapter 5.

#### **4.7 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

In an attempt to organise what has been discussed so far under the headings suggested by Malderez and Wedell (see section 2.5.2), I have come up with the following model which outlines my own perception of what should constitute a primary language teacher's knowledge base based on my understanding of the relevant literature and the findings of this study.

**PRIMARY LANGUAGE TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE BASE**



**Figure 4.1: Primary language teachers' knowledge base**



This model places personal theories at the top of the diagram since they are an integral part of what teachers know about language learning and teaching before any kind of training or education occurs. The public theories that have been identified as essential components of their knowledge base as shown above are related to knowledge which refers to *the what* of the language teaching, and skills which refer to *the how* of language teaching (Freeman, 1989:36). In other words, KA refers to the areas which language primary teachers should know about in relation to their subject-matter whereas KH has to do with their ability to use their KA in order to communicate the new content to their pupils through the use of subject-specific methodology. However, as discussed earlier, TLA is the element which informs teachers' pedagogical actions and seems to be more related to Malderez and Wedell's third category of knowing to (KT), or subject-specific pedagogy as used in this study. The teachers' role, as this has been described earlier in this chapter, should therefore be seen as the outcome of the interaction between TLA and the rest of the components in the diagram and not as knowledge and skills to be acquired via formal instruction. According to Malderez & Wedell (2007:25), "there can be little point in knowing about things and knowing how to do things if you cannot actually use this knowledge / these skills in the right place at the right time to support learning". Such a view seems to reflect Vygotski's theory of ZPD which sees the teacher as "the knowledgeable participant [within the leaning process] who can create supportive conditions in which [the pupil] can participate, and extend his or her current skills and knowledge to a higher level of competence" (Donato, 1994:40).

Reaching a conclusion regarding the required competences that should be acquired by primary teachers in relation to language teaching is undoubtedly an important step to be taken when designing a relevant programme. It is however, of equal importance to also investigate how prospective teachers can be provided with adequate opportunities to acquire such competences. This will be the topic discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

### **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I present the findings drawn from the questionnaires, interviews and focus groups in relation to research question 2, which is concerned with teachers' knowledge growth, that is, their learning to teach. The data are then discussed, with reference to the review of selected literature. Reference is made to data from both samples as in the previous chapter.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2:** What are the perceptions of the participants regarding the instructional practices they have experienced in their pre and in-service education and the extent to which these practices promote teacher learning?

Since the questions in the questionnaire and interviews were not of the same nature, I have decided to present first the statistical results obtained from the questionnaires and then the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and focus groups. The results from all three data collection instruments will then be compared and contrasted before ending this chapter with a discussion of the findings and conclusions in relation to research question 2.

#### **5.2 PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON THEIR PREFERRED INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES**

Relevant to research question 2, the following question was included in the questionnaire:

- Which of the following instructional practices do you think could prepare you best to teach English in primary state schools in Cyprus? (q. 14 for in-service teachers and q. 6 for student-teachers).

The following table (5.2) shows the participants' responses in relation to this question.

**Table 5.2 - Participants' views on their preferred instructional processes**

Variable	Lectures	Workshops	Demonstration lessons /observation	Discussion between cooperating teachers and trainees	Teaching real classes	Working with a mentor	Discussion between trainees
<b>In-service teachers</b>	73 (24.7%)	238 (80.4%)	272 (91.9%)	97 (32.8%)	248(83.8%)	210 (70.9%)	16 (5.4%)
<b>Pre-service teachers</b>	39 (31.4%)	84 (67.8%)	105 (87.7%)	90 (72.6%)	100 (80.6%)	75(60.5%)	72 (58%)

It is evident from the table above, that demonstration lessons were given the highest score by both samples. Participants agreed on the effectiveness of teaching real classes and chose this as one of their preferred ways of being taught. Workshops were also among the four most important instructional practices chosen by a great number of in-service teachers (n=238) and a smaller but still significant number of 84 pre-service teachers. Findings seem to initially indicate that participants do not agree on their fourth choice; in-service teachers claim to benefit a lot from working with a mentor while pre-service teachers believe that discussions between cooperating teachers and trainees would be more beneficial. However, pre-service teachers may consider the cooperating teachers as mentors, which imply more similarity than contrast in the findings between the two samples. In

addition, while the majority of pre-service teachers place great value on discussions between trainees, this was given very little importance by the in-service teachers.

### **5.3 PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON THEIR INITIAL EDUCATION**

The first question which participants from sample 1 (in-service teachers) were asked at the interview in relation to the second research question was the following:

- To what extent did what you learnt in your teacher preparation programme match your current teaching practice?

This question was asked in order to get an idea about the extent to which participants found their initial teacher education effective in preparing them to teach. It was my belief that their responses in relation to the reasons attributed to the programme's (in) effectiveness would give me useful insight into what helps them learn.

Participants' comments in relation to this question seem to suggest that they did not find much value on the theoretical modules of the programme as opposed to the more practical ones.

#### ***5.3.1 Theory versus reality***

The majority of the participants (T2, T1, T3, T5, T6, T4, T8) commented in a negative way on their pre-service education programme. They noted that there had been an overemphasis on theory which did not always match reality and that theory and practice were not adequately integrated in the programme. They

claimed that there was a considerable gap between the theory learnt at university and the realities of teaching practice and that there should have been more opportunities for practice and less theory. Two of them (T4, T8) also argued that the courses they had attended at university aimed at improving their knowledge of the subjects of the primary curriculum and not their skills in teaching these subjects. Participant T8 was particularly critical of the value of her initial education in contributing to her teaching practice arguing *“I felt really stupid that I had wasted 4 years to study when I could have easily gone into teaching without this preparation”*.

Another participant (T3) also pointed to the emphasis given to theory during her initial education arguing that while everything sounded so perfect in theory, when it came to putting this in practice, she realized that what she had been taught was really a utopia. She went on to explain that university teachers failed to take into consideration the context in which teaching took place (big classes, lack of instructional materials and teachers' workload), something which clearly indicated the limitations of relying just on theory.

Participant T9 sounded less critical of his initial education, arguing that even when lessons were mainly based on lectures, there was still some kind of practical involvement on their part, which made them more meaningful and relevant to their subsequent teaching.

Participant T7 had a completely opposite view from the rest of the participants. He stated that his initial education at the PA had sufficiently prepared him for the

teaching profession as it involved real teaching on the part of the student-teachers.

### ***5.3.2 Applying the theory***

The following question was asked in both the individual and focus group interviews and related to the participants' views on the most useful modules they (had) attended during their initial education. The relevant question was:

- Which of the modules that you (have) attended during your teacher education programme do you feel have prepared you the most for actual teaching?

Participants' responses regarding this question were unanimous in that they all seemed to find much more value in the modules which required some kind of involvement on their part. The majority of the participants from sample 1 (T5, T7, T8, T9, T6) and from sample 2 (S1, S2, S3, S5, S9, S10, S11) emphasised the importance of being involved in a number of activities which they could then implement in their lessons in schools. They all felt that having to carry out these activities themselves was an enjoyable and a rewarding experience as it gave them a clear understanding of how the activity would be taught, which consequently led to a boost in their confidence to teach.

Participant T5 made specific reference to the modules of Art and Music, explaining that during these modules she was taught how to play different musical instruments, how to paint and create instructional materials for the reinforcement of different subjects; such activities, as she commented, enabled her to teach the subjects of Art and Music with more confidence as she could easily adapt them to

her pupils' level. Others (T8, T9, T5, T6, S8, S10) made reference to the module of Math and Physical Education stating that they were taught in the same way as they would be expected to teach in schools. Participants S2 and S3 referred to the module of Science because they had been shown how to carry out experiments and at the same time how to teach these to their pupils. They also argued that being involved in the learning process made them enjoy the lesson more and prepared them for teaching the particular subject.

Participants T3, T8, T9 and T2 and S10 also stressed the importance of their active involvement in the classroom activities, without, however, undervaluing their being taught the theory. Participant T3 referred to herself as a 'theory person', explaining that she could get a lot from theory as long as she found it relevant and interesting. However, she then admitted that all the theory she had learnt about how to teach a subject was reinforced during her teaching practice in schools. Participants T9, T5, T8 and S10 said that they had found other modules quite useful because they involved both a theoretical and a practical part which they considered quite important. They explained that while there was a lot of lecturing in some of the modules, practical work always followed which helped them make sense of the theory.

Three of them (T5, T9 & S11) also appeared to greatly value working in groups to prepare a presentation or a lesson plan while others (T2 & T3) said that being involved in microteaching was a worthwhile experience. What they all seemed to have agreed on was the value of receiving feedback from their classmates, the value of follow-up discussions and sharing of ideas. S11 commented:



*“The lesson I enjoyed the most was mainly in the form of a lecture which often involved group work or was followed by discussion, something which I found particularly helpful. I believe discussion should be part of every lesson because students have the chance to express their views on certain issues and learn from the views of the others”.*

Even though participants’ responses to the question which related to the more theoretical part of their initial education (the modules they attended) varied in relation to the importance laid on theory, they all agreed that what they had found particularly useful was their active involvement in the lesson. This finding seems to coincide with the great importance given to workshops as indicated in table 5.2 above.

#### **5.4 PARTICIPANTS’ VIEWS ON THEIR TEACHING PRACTICE EXPERIENCE**

The next questions which were asked to both samples were related to their views of their teaching practice (TP) which they (have) experienced during their initial education.

- To what extent did the teaching practice during your initial education prepare you for your current teaching? (In-service teachers)
- To what extent do you feel that teaching practice prepares you for the realities of actual teaching? (Pre-service)

These questions primarily sought to investigate the extent to which participants felt that exposure to real teaching during practicum prepared them for the realities of primary teaching. It also aimed at identifying potential gaps, weaknesses or strengths of the teaching practice as perceived by the participants. I thought that

an identification of these would provide me with useful insight into what helps teachers learn to teach.

Data gathered from these two questions were particularly insightful as they revealed some of the factors which may have contributed to the (in)effectiveness of the teaching practice as perceived by the participants. Such factors were a) the opportunity they had to test theory and b) the (in) sufficient support they had from their mentors, whether these were the cooperating teachers or the TP supervisors.

#### **5.4.1 Testing the theory - A worthwhile experience**

Participant T1 said that teaching practice had helped her much more than the modules she had taken at the PA which, as she claimed, were too theoretical whereas participant T4 said that she had not been helped at all because during her teaching experience she only had to teach two subjects and was not observed by anyone. The rest of the participants from sample 1 (T3, T8, T5, T6, T7, T9) felt that their teaching practice (TP) had helped them to a great extent and referred to it as the most worthwhile experience in their teacher education programme. A similar view was also expressed by participants S6, S7 and S10, who stressed the importance of having been given the opportunity to put into practice what they had learnt in theory. Participant S6 commented:

*“When you asked us before which modules we enjoyed more, I couldn’t think of a specific module because I don’t think I would have benefitted from any of these if it hadn’t been for the teaching practice”.*

A similar comment was also made by participant S7, who argued that during teaching practice she had the opportunity to watch how the subjects of geography and religious education were taught and then to teach them herself. She found this very helpful because the particular subjects were too theoretical at university and she would never feel confident to teach them if she had not been given that opportunity.

#### **5.4.2 (In)sufficient support from mentors**

What was particularly interesting, however, was the fact that all the participants from sample 1 mentioned above attributed the usefulness of the TP to the support they had from the cooperating teacher whose class they had taken over rather than to the opportunity they had to put into practice what they had learnt in theory. This support as shown in their comments below was in the form of advice, suggestions or feedback preceding or following their teaching:

*“Teaching practice helped me to a great extent, because I was lucky enough to cooperate with a really helpful classroom teacher”. (T8)*

*“The most important aspect of the teaching practice is the chance you have to talk with the cooperating teacher, to get some advice or feedback on your lesson”. (T9)*

Two of them (T6, T7) felt that they had also benefited from their university teachers who were specialists in the lesson they would teach on that particular day. What they found useful was the fact that these teachers would discuss their comments with the student-teachers at the end of the lesson, sometimes in the presence of the classroom teacher. Regarding the importance of university teachers, views were different among the rest of the participants from sample 1; two of them (T1, T4) did

not make any reference to the role played by the university teachers during their practicum, which may imply that they did not contribute significantly to their teaching experience, while participants T3, T2 and T9 seemed dissatisfied with the support they got from them. They claimed that these teachers had not really helped them improve in any way because the purpose of their visits in schools was to give them a grade that was often followed by very little or no feedback which did not really serve much. The need for feedback was reinforced by one participant (T9), who referred to the 'really useful' feedback and advice he received from his music teacher, which, as he claimed, enabled him to teach a really good music lesson even though music was one of the subjects he was not particularly good at. Participant T8 was also critical of the kind of feedback she had received from the university teachers, which had nothing to do with the way she had delivered the lesson but on aspects that, she believed, would not be useful once she started teaching in schools.

*"I don't remember getting any constructive feedback from any of my teachers. They often made comments such as 'why did you sit during the lesson?' or 'why didn't you wear tracksuit when you knew that you would teach PE?' you know things that you will find out yourself once you begin to teach".*

Similar comments were also made by participants S1, S2, S3, S9 and S11 from sample 2, who argued that, even though TP could be a really useful experience, it was not, because they did not receive any constructive feedback from the TP supervisors who were not the same teachers who taught them the lessons they were going to teach. The TP supervisors were also negatively criticised by the five participants, who argued that the fact that these people were not specialized in the

subjects they were asked to evaluate prevented them from giving student-teachers any useful advice or feedback on the methods or activities they used which were specific to the particular subject. They rarely gave them any feedback and, when they did, it was in the form of a grade or of vague comments on their overall approach such as “good lesson today” or “not very good today, you could have done better” but without really getting into more detail. This, as they claimed, did not leave much space for improvement because they were never aware of what aspects of their teaching needed to be improved and which ones went well. One participant commented

*“Personally, I would like the TP supervisors to give us more constructive feedback. For example, I would like to know the criteria based on which I am evaluated. Getting a grade which I don’t know what represents is not helpful at all! It’s really not a matter of getting A, B or C but a matter of knowing how the supervisor ended up giving me this grade”. (S3)*

Another shortcoming of the TP reported by participant S11 was the fact that the only feedback she received (and this on very few occasions) was from the TP supervisor because the classroom teacher was never in class when she delivered the lesson. This was really a problem, as she stated, because even if she tried to avoid similar mistakes or follow his advice for improvement, there was nobody there the next lesson to tell her if everything went well that time or if any other difficulties came up.

Participant S9 was also dissatisfied with the classroom teacher who gave her no freedom regarding teaching material or teaching approach which meant that she could not really try out things that she had learnt at university.

Disappointment with the classroom teacher was also expressed by participant S5 who said that she would have preferred to receive feedback on her teaching in a more encouraging way, in a way that would have helped her correct her mistakes and improve and not in a way that would underestimate her.

Considering the aforementioned comments of the participants from both samples, it is evident that, while they all think of teaching practice as an important component of their teacher education programme, they all seemed to agree that its effectiveness depends to a great extent on a number of factors, making specific reference to support and constructive feedback from mentors as well as to more freedom regarding the preparation and implementation of the lesson.

## **5.5 MAKING TEACHING PRACTICE AN INVALUABLE EXPERIENCE**

After discussing the effectiveness of their teaching practice, all participants were asked to give their opinions on the following question:

- Do you feel there is anything that would make the practicum more beneficial for future teachers involved in language teaching?

Data regarding this question were really insightful and some of the suggestions were greatly supported by the majority of the participants from both samples. The most commonly reported suggestions centred on three areas, namely the role of the

classroom teacher, the role of feedback and the suitability of the teaching practice supervisor.

### ***5.5.1 The role of the cooperating teacher***

All participants from sample 1 and participants S1, S5, S8 and S11 from sample 2 pointed out that cooperation between student-teachers and classroom teachers should be an integral part of the practicum. They all agreed that the classroom teacher was in a better position to help prospective teachers because, unlike university teachers whose feedback was mainly based on the theories they taught, classroom teachers could provide them with advice and feedback which were based on their own experience and thus closer to reality. Specifically, participant T8 argued that the classroom teacher's feedback was more objective than that of the university teachers because her experience in primary teaching enabled her to predict possible difficulties that may be encountered during the lesson and provide useful advice on how these may be prevented or overcome, always taking into consideration her pupils' level and abilities. Similarly, participant T6 said that there was a big gap between the theory learnt at university and actual teaching practice in schools, arguing that it was the classroom teacher who could really tell student-teachers what really went on in classroom and how to handle pupils. Participant T9 had a slightly different view regarding the role attached to the classroom teacher. He also agreed that student-teachers could gain a lot from the classroom teacher, who should, however, act as an advisor rather than the prime educator for future teachers involved in language teaching. He went on to explain that most primary teachers who were currently teaching English were not adequately trained and therefore not

suitable to educate others; he argued that university teachers had the knowledge whereas primary teachers had the experience so both could contribute significantly to the education of future teachers.

Considering the great importance placed on the role of the classroom teachers during the teaching practice, participants T9, T2, T5 thought that the latter should be well-informed of what was expected of them during the time that student-teachers took over their classes; they claimed that the extent to which classroom teachers were willing to cooperate responsibly with the student-teachers largely depended on the school principal.

### ***5.5.2 The role and suitability of the TP supervisor***

Another area of concern that a significant number of participants perceived as one that needs to be taken into serious consideration and one that needs to be considered for future improvement was associated with the suitability and role of the teaching practice supervisors. All participants from sample 2 except S2 and S4 agreed that university teachers who supervised student-teachers during their teaching practice should be subject-specialists in order to be able to provide them with useful feedback and advice that should be unique for the subject they taught on the day they were being observed. Participant T5 was also rather critical of the feedback and advice student-teachers received from university teachers, arguing that their lack of experience and expertise in primary teaching made them unable to give them useful ideas about the lesson that would also be feasible in practice. Although participant T9 did not make special reference as to who should be the TP



supervisor, his comment was of similar nature, since he emphasized that the person who would be responsible for supervising student-teachers needed to be carefully selected in terms of qualifications and expertise in the particular subject, thus in their ability to provide useful feedback.

### ***5.5.3 The role of feedback***

The type of feedback received during teaching practice was something that seemed to be given great importance by some participants (T8, T9, T5, T7, S2, S3), who expressed the need for more 'constructive feedback'. Participant T9 explained that the purpose of being observed by university teachers should not be a matter of getting a grade but a matter of becoming a better teacher, which is why he believed that student-teachers should not be assessed in the first weeks of their teaching practice but rather advised. This would make this experience less stressful and student-teachers would be more concerned with their teaching than the grade. This view was also supported by participants S2 and S3, who stated that their biggest problem during teaching practice was the fact that they never received any comments for their teaching but only a grade; as it was unclear what this represented, it was unlikely to be helpful for improvement. Participants S2, T7 and T5 also thought that a good way of receiving useful feedback from the university teachers would be for discussion sessions to be organized during the period that the practicum took place in which student-teachers could meet with their TP supervisors, discuss their feelings, views and difficulties and generally share ideas about the whole experience.

Other suggestions also associated with feedback, but perhaps in an indirect way, had to do with possible cooperation between the classroom teacher and TP supervisor. Participants S11 and T5 thought that such cooperation would be particularly useful because a discussion between the two following a lesson would enable them to compare their views on possible weaknesses or strengths identified. Participant T5 argued that this could be particularly useful for university teachers who might get a more realistic idea of how much of what is learnt at university is feasible in practice and therefore what their expectations of their students should be.

Participants T6 and T7 thought that peer observation during teaching practice is a really rewarding experience as student-teachers have the opportunity to give and receive feedback on their teaching and generally share their experiences, exchanging views and ideas in a less stressful classroom environment. Both participants argued that feedback from their peers would be reinforced if there were a discussion after the lesson between student-teachers, the TP supervisor and the classroom teacher.

#### ***5.5.4 Further suggestions***

The importance of being given the opportunity to teach all subjects of the primary curriculum and at different levels was emphasized by four participants (T2, T9, S1, S9), who stated that both the content and the approach of teaching 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders for example was very different. Participant T9 particularly referred to the subject of English, arguing that teaching English to 4<sup>th</sup> graders who were in their first year of learning English at school and were probably not yet comfortable with the language might be more difficult than teaching 6<sup>th</sup> graders who were more likely to

have a relatively good knowledge of English. He therefore considered it important for student-teachers to be given the chance to teach all levels at least once during their teaching practice.

Participant T2 commented that it would really help if student-teachers could watch more than one teacher teach the same lesson; this, as she explained, would enable them to compare how different teachers taught and perhaps come to understand that while a particular approach or certain activities might work perfectly with one, they might not work with another. This, she believed, would help them develop critical thinking and obtain a more realistic view of what actually went on in real classrooms. Finally participant S9 pointed out that, student-teachers should be given more freedom in relation to materials and teaching approach rather than strictly follow the teacher's instructions, because only then will they be able to make sense of the theory they learnt at university.

## **5.6 SUGGESTIONS REGARDING THE EFFECTIVE PREPARATION OF PRIMARY LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

After giving their views on how the teaching practice should change for the benefit of future language teachers, participants were asked to give further suggestions in relation to possible changes to the undergraduate programme of teacher education.

The relevant question was:

- Apart from the teaching practice experience, how do you think prospective teachers should be taught about language teaching?

Responses in relation to this question indicated that participants viewed observation followed by discussion, microteaching and sharing of ideas as activities that would contribute effectively in the process of learning to teach a foreign language.

### ***5.6.1 Observation followed by discussion***

The great majority of participants from sample 2 (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S8, S9, S11) and five participants from sample 1 (T2, T3, T5, T6, T9) thought that student-teachers are likely to understand theory better if they have the chance to see it implemented and argued that it would be particularly useful if, during their pre-service education, they were given plenty of opportunities to watch how a lesson is done in practice. Participants T2, S8, and S9 thought that it was very important that student-teachers could observe a number of lessons given by primary teachers. Participant T9 argued that it would be very important if there were cooperation between university, the Pedagogical Institute and schools, and student-teachers could attend some seminars in the form of demonstration lessons given by teacher trainers or by the inspectors of English. Being aware of the limitations of watching a real lesson in schools, some participants suggested alternative solutions. Participants T3, T5 and T6 said that it would help if student-teachers watched the university teacher implementing the theory he had taught them while taking the role of the primary teacher and the student-teachers the role of the pupils; this, as T3 explained, would give student-teachers the chance to interrupt the lesson, ask for further explanation, clarification and even be involved in games and playful activities just like in a real primary classroom. Participant T5 said that in this way student-teachers could be actively involved in the lesson rather than be passive observers

since they would have the opportunity to personally experience what was suggested in theory by the teacher. Other participants (S1, S2 and S11) felt that watching a class on DVD as part of the lesson and then discuss this with their teacher and peers would be equally effective.

Regardless of the variety, what was common among these suggestions was the emphasis given to follow-up discussion. All participants thought that student-teachers would make more sense of the lesson they watched if they were involved in a 'fruitful', 'constructive' discussion where they could share their views and even discuss alternative ways of delivering the lesson.

### ***5.6.2 Microteaching***

Another suggestion made by some participants (T6, T7, S2 and S11) was related to microteaching, with student-teachers taking on the role of the teacher and teaching a lesson they prepared to their student colleagues. In this way, they would be given many opportunities to put into practice what they were taught and identify possible gaps or weaknesses in the lesson plans they prepared in a less threatening and stressful environment. Once again feedback in the form of a follow-up discussion between their student colleagues and the teacher was emphasised. Participant S11 also proposed video-taping student-teachers while giving a lesson during their teaching practice and then being watched and evaluated by their colleagues/peers.

### ***5.6.3 Sharing of ideas / working together***

Four participants from sample 2 (S2, S3, S5 and S11) argued that student teachers should be given the opportunity at university to become familiar with the English textbooks used in schools. They all claimed that it would help to a great extent if

student-teachers were given a copy of a unit in the textbook and were asked to work in groups. Participant S3 said that student teachers could suggest and justify alternative activities that could be used, discuss possible strengths or weaknesses of this book and offer different lesson plans for each unit. Similarly, participant S2 said that student teachers could be given lots of practical ideas and scenarios which they would then discuss in groups and come up with ideas on how to best approach them. He added that a classroom discussion would be very useful in evaluating the approach adopted by each group, discussing problems and suggesting solutions.

The following section will deal with participants' views on their in-service training, so that a clearer idea about *what* helps them learn can be achieved.

### **5.7 PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON THEIR IN-SERVICE TRAINING**

This section deals with in-service training and it therefore concerns only participants from sample 1 (in-service teachers). The following questions were asked in the interviews with the purpose of identifying which instructional approaches used in their in-service training they felt they had benefited from most.

- What were the instructional approaches used in the in-service training you have attended?
- To what extent do you feel you have benefited from these instructional approaches?

Only 8 out of 9 participants responded to these questions as one of them (T9) had never attended one. It should also be mentioned that some participants have

attended more than one seminar which is why their comments would vary according to the type of in-service training they referred to.

Participants referred to the different approaches they were exposed to during their in-service training pointing to the strengths and weaknesses they attached to them.

### ***5.7.1 Workshops***

The practical application of the theory which was encouraged in workshops was emphasized by participants T2, T5, T6 and T8. They all agreed that the practical nature of these workshops helped them to a great extent in their learning to teach and boosted their confidence because they had the chance to try out the new activities before implementing them in their classrooms. They also argued that the fact that they were given the chance to implement what they had been taught in theory right after it had been shown or explained to them was particularly useful because it also gave them the chance to ask the trainer for possible clarifications and even discuss alternative activities. Participants T2 and T8 pointed out that they remembered everything they had learnt during the practical part of the workshops they had attended whereas they remembered very little and often ignored what they had learnt during the theoretical parts of these workshops. Participant T5 referred to a workshop she had found specifically useful; she said that this workshop was in the form of microteaching, which meant that the trainer acted as the teacher and the trainees took the role of the students and this, as she claimed, had helped her understand how she would use all the new information in her lessons.

### ***5.7.2 Seminars followed by discussion***

The role of discussion was emphasized by participants T2, T3, T4 and T8 who argued that despite the theoretical nature of the seminars they had attended, these proved to be really useful because of the discussion that followed between trainers (inspectors) and trainees; this, as they claimed, had allowed for clarification and sharing of experiences and ideas.

### ***5.7.3 Demonstration lessons***

Participants' views regarding the value attached to the demonstration lessons given by the inspectors were not completely unanimous. Two of them (T1 and T6) felt that they benefited a lot from these seminars, especially when these were followed by discussion. They admitted that they were particularly helped by demonstration lessons because these showed them how to deal with situations encountered in a real classroom as they were based on the current English books they used and also raised their awareness of a teaching approach that they had not been familiar with before and which, at the same time, they were expected to use.

Participants T2, T5 and T7 argued that, while they had benefited from demonstration lessons, they expressed some dissatisfaction regarding the extent to which such an approach was always effective. Participants T2 and T5 said that being given the chance to watch how another teacher delivered a lesson in a real class and see that some methods or activities really worked well in practice generally enabled them to implement these methods and activities in their own class with confidence. However, participants T5 criticised demonstration lessons as not being the most effective approach because they only showed student-teachers what to do in specific



situations and were often utopian that could not possibly work in reality, a view also shared by participants T7.

All three participants T2, T5 and T7 pointed out that what they found particularly useful was talking and sharing ideas with the inspectors and colleagues after the lesson was demonstrated.

Considering participants' aforementioned comments, it becomes evident that what were perceived by the participants as particularly useful were discussions between inspectors and colleagues based on sharing of ideas and experiences. Workshops were also reported as being useful in that they allowed for the practical application of the theory transmitted to them at the beginning of the workshop. Even though demonstration lessons were thought of as quite useful, their shortcomings did not go unnoticed.

In relation to the discussion below, it is important to note that teachers' responses in the context of semi-structured interviews and focus groups often led to a very different interpretation of the questionnaire-based data than might have been the case if the interviews had not been available. This was generally because the interviews and focus groups provided participants with an opportunity to expand on their questionnaire responses, often in a way that did not contradict the original response but nevertheless raised issues about it. For example, questionnaire data have indicated that demonstration lessons and real teaching were the most highly rated areas by both samples, whereas the role of the cooperating teacher was given very little value by the in-service teachers and discussion between trainees was given

a relatively low score by both samples. However, participants' responses in the interviews have clearly shown that the usefulness of demonstration lessons and real teaching lay in the follow-up discussions between their fellow-teachers or classroom colleagues as well as in the support offered by the cooperating teacher.

## **5.8 DISCUSSION**

Data presented in this chapter reveal that while participants do not reject the value of theory, they emphasize their active involvement and consider it an essential component in their learning to teach. Their comments have also indicated that learning to teach is a complex process which does not rely solely on individual interest and engagement in this process but is rather determined by the interaction of personal factors such as the (prospective) teachers' knowledge and beliefs about language learning and teaching (as discussed in 4.5.1 in the previous chapter) as well as other situational factors such as expectations, demands and feedback from key actors in the university and public school settings. Their comments were geared towards the role played by the TP supervisors, the cooperating teachers and their student teacher peers/colleagues which signifies that they do not view learning as a process which occurs individually but one which acknowledges and values the involvement of significant others. Such findings lead to Dewey's assertion that students can only learn by 'directed learning', that is, by applying the concepts they are trying to learn in a social context which enables them to construct knowledge together through conversation and interaction with others (see section 2.4).

Participants' responses regarding the various activities that they considered (in)effective in their learning to teach seem to reflect McGrath's process categories

of *feeding, showing, throwing* and *leading* (1997). According to McGrath, within the first two categories the trainer is the only source of knowledge whereas the other two are more trainee-oriented as trainees are expected to work with the knowledge they receive from the trainer and from other sources as will be discussed in the following sub-sections, construct new knowledge and gain a better understanding of it. Although McGrath divides them into trainer-centred and trainee-centred, I would argue that it depends to a great extent on those involved in the training of prospective teachers to make any of these process categories trainer or trainee-oriented as will be discussed in the sections that will follow.

#### ***5.8.1 The process of feeding***

Both pre-service and in-service teachers believed that practice was more important than theory, arguing that theory on its own did not guarantee a good performance and that knowledge was acquired by doing. This view that they all held seemed to have derived from their experiences of their initial education and consequently to the value they had attached to it. All the participants except one (T7) were uncertain about the value of their initial education in contributing to their teaching practice and expressed dissatisfaction with the balance of theory and practice or the integration between the two. Such finding seems to be supported by a number of other relevant studies (Dagarin & Andraka 2007; Peacock 2009; Doval & Rial 2002 and Mattheoudakis 2007). Participant T7, who was one of the two in-service teachers who graduated from the Pedagogical Academy, felt that his initial education had adequately prepared him for the realities of classroom teaching arguing that all the

theoretical modules he had attended at university had always been followed by their practical application in school.

The rest of the participants thought that very few of their university modules had been of any practical use and this largely depended on the teacher's approach and his/her personal view of how learning takes place. That is, the teachers who conducted their lessons purely in the form of lectures probably felt that rich background knowledge of the subject-matter was all that was needed by teachers in order to teach effectively. However, participants had a different view and felt that by no means did learning about their subject-matter or about teaching their subject-matter in university classes provide them with the knowledge and skills or the confidence to use this knowledge effectively in the school classroom expressing the need for being given opportunities to see how all these theories they learnt could work in practice. Allied to this point Doval & Rial (2002) stated that one of the basic problems confronting the initial education of primary teachers in Spain was that of judging to what extent university programmes should be trying to improve student-teachers' own performance in the subject-matter and to what extent they should be trying to improve their skills in teaching their subject-matter to their prospective school children (p.283). There were a few other university teachers, however, who appeared to believe that learning involved 'doing' and therefore provided student teachers with more practical ideas and opportunities to put these into practice as part of the lesson. Participants' comments indicated that the modules which had been taught by such teachers had been much more enjoyable and meaningful and thus more relevant to them.

It was also particularly interesting that some participants admitted that the reason they had found little value in theory was because its practical use had not been made explicit to them, a finding which is supported by Collin's article (1996) where he stated that some practitioners were skeptical about the value of theory and questioned its relevance, mainly because they did not know how to use it. Another point emphasized by some participants was that theory often reflected a utopian lesson as it ignored the complexities of its context and was therefore rarely applicable in practice, something which empowers the classical and persistent division between theory and practice.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it could be deduced that teacher education programmes in Cyprus are too theoretical and detached from context and are thus perceived as ineffective by the participants in preparing prospective teachers for the realities of the classroom. Schon (1983, 1987) argues that professionals rarely simply 'apply' theory in their practice stating that while theoretical knowledge does play a part, it does not unambiguously determine the behavior of the teacher since the latter decides on the basis of all kinds of situation-related components. The philosophy which underpins these programmes seem to be more associated with McGrath's process category of feeding and the applied science model where theory is learnt during university lectures and is therefore detached from the context in which it takes place. According to Day (see section 2.7.2), teacher educators working with this model seem to be more concerned with communicating content rather than attending to how prospective teachers transform that content into pedagogical practice. In a very interesting article, Johnson (1996)

argues that when student teachers are not participating in teaching while studying about teaching, they do not have the opportunity to experience firsthand the situated and interpretative nature of real teaching (p. 768), an argument which is clearly supported and reinforced by the participants' comments in this study.

### ***5.8.2 The process of showing***

A way of gaining a better understanding of the theory reported by the participants was teaching observation; by this they did not only make reference to the teaching observation done in schools as part of the practicum but also to any opportunities they could be given to observe a lesson or a method/technique/activity being implemented by someone whom they considered 'an expert'. This could mean observing a lesson given by a primary teacher, observe a demonstration lesson conducted by the university lecturer/teacher trainer or even watch a recorded lesson on DVD. They all felt that it was easier to understand and remember any received theory when they were shown how this was put into practice. Apart from this, they argued that this could also be an opportunity to get ideas from more 'experienced' or 'knowledgeable' others.

While showing to student teachers examples of teaching practice sounds a great way of familiarizing them with the technical skills of the craft, it does come with a number of shortcomings and limitations. Teaching observation in schools is an approach that is promoted in teacher education programmes in Cyprus but whose aim seems to be shortsighted; student teachers are asked to observe a number of lessons in schools before going into actual teaching with the aim of gaining a better understanding of how experienced teachers conduct their lessons, something which

inevitably suggests an *unquestioned* faith in whatever these teachers do. However, these lessons as shown in chapter 1 are done by teachers who are rarely experts and hardly trained to teach English. This means that student-teachers are likely to adopt the wrong techniques used by some of these teachers, which they will then transfer into their own classroom. Allwright and Bailey (1991: 28) note that “[what] happens in the classroom is crucial to language learning” and argue that observation of authentic classroom practice is necessary if teacher trainers are to provide training programs that meet the real needs of teachers. However, classroom-based observation is likely to be of little real value unless it is based on robust criteria derived from an understanding of what constitutes effective classroom practice. Such an understanding seems to be largely dependent on the skills and support the TP supervisor provides student teachers with while engaging them in effective observation tasks.

While demonstration lessons are more reliable in the sense that they are usually carried out by experts, they were criticized by participants as being utopian and limited in scope, as they only showed them examples of specific situations which worked within a particular context (the inspector and one classroom or the university teacher/teacher trainer and the trainees). Such an approach reflects the craft model where knowledge is acquired by observing and replicating others’ behaviours and at the same time ignoring the influence of the context within which a particular activity takes place.

Richards (1996:14) insists on the importance not only of including teaching observation in training programmes, but also of ensuring that there is adequate

discussion of it, an argument that is supported by the findings of this study. Participants stressed the importance of being involved in post-observation discussions with their teacher and peers where comments and ideas for alternative activities could be shared as a way of evaluating the effectiveness of what was observed instead of passively adopting a set of prescribed techniques and activities. This would be an important step to be taken in any teacher education programme whose aim is to produce what Williams (1994) refers to as *thinking professionals*.

### **5.8.3 The process of throwing and the role of significant others**

According to McGrath (1997), the process of throwing is associated with exposing student teachers to actual teaching which can occur through 'teaching practice' where teachers are required to teach students in real classrooms, or in 'simulated practice' as when the student teachers engage in peer teaching. As Smith & Lev-Ari (2005) argue, while learning about teaching is possible in the theoretical modules, the knowledge of teaching can only be acquired by active engagement in teaching, a view supported by the findings of this study. Experiential practices were perceived as the most important components in the process of learning to teach. Participants felt that if student teachers were given the chance to apply the theory both in school settings during their practicum or in university classrooms (in the form of microteaching or the practical application of activities), they would be enabled to make more sense of the theory and see what was feasible and what not when put into practice.



## **Teaching practice**

For almost all participants the practicum was considered to be one of the most important experiences in their learning to teach. For every student teacher this is the critical period during which the transition from student to teacher occurs, which is probably why it is considered one of the most important components in teacher education programmes. Equal importance is also given by teacher educators who assume that once pre-service teachers have completed their required course work, they will be able to transfer their knowledge into effective classroom practices (Johnson, 1996:30).

However, participants' reported feelings in this study after they had been placed in schools for their practicum indicated that they did not 'interpret' the practicum as a learning opportunity but as an assessment period during which their successes depended on the extent to which they managed to teach the lesson in a way that was considered 'right' by the TP supervisors and their mistakes were turned into low grades rather than learning opportunities. This finding is supported by Calderhead (1988), Dobbins (1996) and Bailey (cited in Malderez, 2009:259) among others.

Participants showed dissatisfaction with the infrequent visits of the TP supervisors in schools, their limited knowledge of the subject-matter they were supposed to give feedback on and most importantly the lack of constructive feedback they received from them. Lesson plans, which student teachers had to prepare for all the subjects they taught, seemed to have been the major source for determining student teachers' grades. Verbal feedback was rarely given but when it was, it centred around the aspect of general pedagogy and classroom management issues.

Subject-specific pedagogy was almost absent from the feedback provided by the TP supervisors. The comments they gave were generally brief and superficial and the worst was that they often contradicted the views of the subject specialist who taught the subject at university. This lack of agreement between the TP supervisors and subject specialists confused student teachers as to what was considered right and what was expected of them. Participants felt that this pattern was related to lack of content and content-specific pedagogy due to limitations in the TP supervisors' knowledge base in relation to the subject-matter. Similar findings were also found in the studies of Borko & Mayfield (1995) and Nilsson & Van Driel (2010). This inevitably turned the practicum into a stressful, disempowering and unproductive experience for participants whose aim became to please 'significant others' in order to get a good grade which made their transforming into a teacher a difficult and sometimes impossible task to be accomplished. It was evident from the participants' comments that they felt they would have benefitted more from discussions in which they would have had the chance to explain and discuss their views and perceptions of their teaching. In other words, they preferred the supervisors' feedback to be more constructive and reflective in a supportive and non-threatening way, a finding which was also found in a study carried out by Hyland and Lo (2006).

Another negative aspect reported by the participants regarding the role of the TP supervisors had to do with the fact that the latter were unfamiliar with the students and the school context, thus unsuitable to provide useful feedback. With a few exceptions the university supervisors were reported as having played a limited role in the process of learning to teach. Their role seems to reflect the knowledge-

transmission model to teacher learning rather than that of social-constructivism supported in this study. They seem to be dominant figures who are 'in control' of the learning process while student teachers are the passive listeners who are expected to agree with their opinion and ultimately follow their prescription, or at least give this impression. These findings were consistent with the studies of Hyland and Lo's (2006) and Gebbard & Oprandy (1999) which found that the pre-service teachers accepted the dominant role of supervisors in the feedback process due to the assessing roles the latter held, which forced pre-service teachers to accept their comments rather than disagree and negotiate with them. This clearly fails to view the TP supervisor as a teacher *educator* (Richards, 1990) capable of providing a supportive environment with enhanced learning opportunities where student teachers are helped to identify areas for development, to become willing to investigate themselves and their teaching, to become better at noticing and to develop complex, insightful and 'robust reasoning' (Wiles & Bondi, 1991; Scaife and Scaife, 1996; Bailey, 2006; Mason, Johnson cited in Malderez, 2009: 260).

Bearing the obvious dissatisfaction expressed by the participants regarding the limited and unproductive mentoring received by the TP supervisor, they tended to view cooperating teachers as having more experience and wisdom and therefore placed more value on the support and guidance received by them. They seemed to believe that prospective teachers could be helped to a great extent by working closely with a cooperating teacher and stressed the importance of receiving verbal feedback as opposed to grades given by the TP supervisors. The importance of cooperating teachers on student teachers' professional development was also

highlighted by Saffold (cited in Pekkanli, 2011:601) who claims that “functioning as experts, cooperating teachers provide authentic, experiential learning opportunities through modeling and through their actions and articulated ways of thinking, they teach new teachers effective skills and strategies”. Because of the significance attached to the cooperating teachers’ contribution in the process of helping student teachers learn to teach, participants stressed the importance of them being adequately trained and willing to responsibly take on their mentoring roles.

Apart from that, participants of this study argued against the prescriptive nature of the practicum which allowed no flexibility in approach and materials; on the contrary, it seemed to serve as an opportunity to use those prescriptive practices outlined during lectures or those which they were ‘dictated’ to perform by the TP supervisor or the cooperating teacher, most of the time without any form of observation or feedback. The need to be given more freedom to take risks, experiment and generally put into practice the full range of theories they have learnt at university, was therefore expressed. Similar findings were found in the studies of Doval & Rial (2002) and Mattheoudakis (2007). Johnson (1994:47) posits that if the aim of teacher education programmes is to provide student teachers with opportunities to experience real teaching, then teacher educators should make sure that student teachers are granted a reasonable amount of control over what and how they will teach, so that they can test their emerging conceptions of teaching.

Although being told what to do by their mentors and being given more freedom in relation to materials and teaching approach were perceived as particularly helpful

during their practicum experience, the need to gain a deeper understanding of the teaching process was evident as will be discussed in the following section (5.8.4).

### **Microteaching**

Participants also commented on the usefulness of simulated practice, considering the fact that it was impossible to try everything they learnt at university during their practicum bearing the limitations (cooperating teacher, TP supervisor, limited time, likelihood of teaching different levels and subjects). Despite the fact that they acknowledged its decontextualised, unrealistic nature, they still perceived it as a useful way of testing the theory in a safe environment (Richards & Farrell, 2011).

They also pinpointed that microteaching could turn into a meaningful and invaluable learning experience if it occurred in a guided but at the same time supportive learning environment where student teachers could discuss, share their teaching experiences and exchange ideas in a less threatening learning environment. Forbes (2004) investigated the effectiveness of a reflective model of peer feedback in the professional growth of teachers. The results underlined the fact that interactive peer feedback serves to provide participating teachers with a sense of support and companionship as well as the opportunity to give and receive technical feedback. He adds that “the reciprocal nature of peer feedback fosters communication and trust, serving to alleviate isolation and burnout and eventually leading to confidence in risk-taking and professional growth” (p. 221).

The importance of peer feedback highlighted by the participants has undoubtedly important implications for the teacher educator’s role and his ability to engage

students in constructive post-observation tasks. Structured in this way, microteaching sessions are likely to raise student teachers' awareness of knowing and doing, increase an emphatic understanding of students as learners, and teach observation and feedback skills (Allen & Ryan; McIntyre, McLeod & Griffiths, Wabda cited in Legutke & Ditfurth, 2009:213).

What was particularly interesting in their comments was the fact that they felt that, while the aforementioned approaches (teaching practice and microteaching) could contribute invaluablely to teacher learning, they would be fragmented if the support and guidance given by those involved in their education was insufficient and had little bearing on their real needs. These comments revealed that they were not solely concerned with developing their practical classroom know-how but also with developing an understanding of particular issues through reflection and evaluation (Ellis, 1997).

#### **5.8.4 The process of leading – Promoting collaboration and reflective feedback**

Participants' comments revealed that they did not view knowledge as being limited to accumulating information or to practicing the received knowledge but as being shared, negotiated and co constructed in an environment which allows for a discursive reflection on what and how *they* or *others* have taught. Therefore, their conceptions on how a teacher's knowledge develops did not reflect a need for a prescriptive approach to teacher learning as indicated in the previous chapter but a more reflective one which is based on discussion and sharing of ideas.

Such a stance to teacher learning is consistent with the stance taken in this thesis in that teacher education programmes should provide student teachers with the skills which will enable them to become reflective, critical and most importantly autonomous professionals. This means that the key role played by their mentors (TP supervisors, cooperating teachers) should not be seen as a controlling but as an enabling one leading the trainee to the art of teaching or subject-specific pedagogy as this is described in section 2.6. In other words, the mentors' role should be to help student teachers probe and discover their awareness and understanding of what activities are effective for specific topics and for specific groups of learners rather than simply help them acquire a prescriptive teaching methodology. This, according to the findings of this study, can be achieved through collaboration between those interested in the learning to teach process (TP supervisors, cooperating teachers, peers, student teachers) and on the opportunities given for reflective feedback.

It has been widely agreed in the literature that the feedback which the student teachers receive during the observation and in the post-observation feedback sessions about their practices in both the school and university classroom by either TP supervisors, cooperating teachers or peers, should be reflective in nature in order to serve as a bridge between theory and practice (Pajares, 1992; Peacock, 2001; Yuksel, 2011). As this study has indicated, feedback that is not based on reflection, is judgmental, serves short-term goals (grades), is intended to confirm the way of delivering the lesson on particular days and is therefore meaningless, stressful and ineffective. Reflective feedback, on the other hand, is a kind of

feedback which promotes internal questioning on pre-service teachers' practices and which aims to integrate personal theories, theoretical knowledge and classroom experience, on both individual and collective level (Orland-Barak; Richards & Lockhart; McEnemy et al. cited in Yuksel, 2011:39).

Reflective feedback however, not only involves the individual reflecting on his/her own practices but it also promotes reflection as part of dialogue between the giver, either the TP supervisor, the cooperating teacher or the peer and the receiver of feedback, and in this context, it supports the principle of collaborative learning.

As Knezevic & Scholl (1996) posit, collaboration gives student teachers an opportunity for heightened reflection which encourages them to articulate their tacit knowledge, thus becoming cognizant or aware of the personal theories they bring with them to the teacher education programme and which are likely to impede any changes in their views or teaching practices, as was discussed in chapter 4. Similarly He (2009) argues that "without adequate communication between mentors and pre-service teachers regarding teaching expectations and beliefs, pre-service teachers leave teacher education programmes ill-prepared to negotiate potential conflict between their beliefs and reality of teaching, leading to dissonance and resistance to adaptation" (p. 264). However, the aim of reflection should not be solely seen as a way of helping student teachers unveil their personal theories but as an integral part of any raising-awareness activities that form part of teacher education programmes. According to Ellis (1997:27), "the assumption which underlies the use of awareness-raising activities is that the practice of actual teaching can be improved by making student teachers aware of the options open to



them and the principles by which they can evaluate the alternatives". Allied to this premise, Freeman (cited in Bailey, 2007:36) argues that one acts or responds to the aspects of a situation of which one is aware. This argument is supported by participants' comments in relation to the feedback they received, which failed to make them aware of their deficiencies or strengths and consequently of any changes required in order to become better teachers. Similar findings were also reported in the studies of Doval & Rial (2002) and Mohamed (2006), where participants said they had rarely been observed while teaching in schools and received no feedback on their teaching, which is why they remained unaware of their inadequacies and could not improve their teaching.

The role and importance of an awareness-raising component in teacher education programmes was investigated and highlighted in a study carried out by Tuzel & Alkan (2009) who found that systematic language awareness activities which occurred under the guidance of TP supervisors and cooperating teachers have helped student teachers gain confidence in risk-taking and identify their needs and problems in a more focused way.

Bearing in mind the aforementioned discussion, one could argue that the process options involved in the process categories of feeding, showing and throwing reflect the applied science or craft model to teacher education which are considered more trainer-oriented contrary to the argument made by McGrath. It has become evident that the role adopted by the mentors is what makes all of these process categories trainer or trainee centred. Findings from this study have shown that mentors (TP supervisors and most cooperating teachers) in Cyprus act within the two models to

TE mentioned above, in the sense that they expect student teachers to follow their 'prescriptions' and 'advice' passively even when they provide them with opportunities to experience teaching, something that was not perceived particularly helpful by the participants. Participants need to be exposed to more collaborative, awareness-raising tasks which will enable them to make more sense of the teaching act and eventually take responsibility for their own teaching. This evidently makes the process category of 'leading' an integral part of any teacher education programme where mentors are expected to act as mediators, enabling student teachers to construct their personal knowledge.

## **5.9 CONCLUSIONS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH QUESTION 2**

These findings may suggest that teacher education programmes offered in Cyprus are insufficient and need to be modified, taking into serious consideration student teachers' voices in relation to their needs and preferred ways of learning to teach in order to make them more purposeful and more relevant.

This study has shown that while the participants' learning processes were varied in relation to the value they attached to the importance and usefulness of more traditional approaches like observation, modeling and practising, they all expressed a dependency on the inputs from TP supervisors, cooperating teachers, peer dialogue and previous learning experiences while considering lectures (theory) of having little value in their learning to teach.

Similar to those of Tauer (1998) and Nilson & Van Driel (2010), these findings support the notion that mentoring serves as a catalyst in (prospective and in-

service) teachers' process of learning to teach. They are also consistent with the final argument made in chapter 2 that emphasizes the need for the induction of awareness-raising activities during initial teacher education programmes which will enable student teachers to form meaningful links between relevant educational theory and actual practice as a way of addressing and reconstructing their personal theories. What appears to be vital in developing teachers' awareness about their teaching is the opportunity to reflect on their own practice, analyse behaviour, articulate objectives and evaluate outcomes. However, this, as discussed above, is not a process which occurs individually but one which requires mentors to set up peer observation opportunities, to encourage discussions and to generally engage student teachers through dialogue and reflective feedback. In this way teachers can gain an understanding of their practice from an external perspective and, as a result, learn from their own teaching experiences in a way that may not be possible through self reflection alone. The findings of this study thus stress the value of mentoring and peer collaborations in gaining better understandings of teachers' beliefs and actions.

Based on the participants' comments an evident need has been revealed to move beyond a model of teaching based on knowledge-transmission from the expert to the trainee and on the concept of the apprenticeship of observation which treats learners as passive receivers of knowledge. Instead, their perceived needs seem to reflect a more holistic approach to teacher education where learners are 'assisted' to develop themselves to the fullest extent possible so that they may ultimately construct their own knowledge and subsequently teaching style (Larsen-

Freeman; Britten cited in Pennington, 1997:133). As Richards & Nunan (1997) point out, such a stance to teacher education requires teacher educators to reassess their current practices and examine afresh the assumptions underlying their own programmes and practices. Indeed, the role of supportive, suitably-qualified and credible mentors has been emphasized. It has become evident that teacher educators or mentors as currently employed in this context used in this study must have a sound knowledge of the subject-matter they are supervising, knowledge about subject-specific methodology which will enable them to provide useful feedback, skills in engaging student-teachers in awareness-raising activities in meaningful and non-threatening ways as well as enthusiasm and willingness to perform their mentoring roles responsibly. University teachers should also make sure that there is a reasonable balance in their teaching approach between theory and practice. This means that mentors' suitability and ability to create functional learning and teaching environments are crucial in *leading* student-teachers into becoming reflective, critical, autonomous professionals, prepared for the complexities of the teaching profession.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

#### **6.1 CONCLUSIONS**

The results clearly indicate that the existing teacher education programmes in Cyprus are, in many aspects, problematic, especially in relation to English language teaching, which is the main area of concern in this study. There appears to be a high level of dissatisfaction among pre and in-service teachers with their language teaching training which was either absent from their initial teacher education or incompatible with the requirements of the primary English curriculum advocated by the Ministry of Education. Even in-service teachers who have undergone some form of recognised training programme in the teaching of English (PA graduates, MA holders, in-service training) are not necessarily wholly familiar with the national curriculum guidelines or fully aware of what is meant by the recommendation in these guidelines that their teaching should be communicative. What they do appear to be aware of is the expectation that they should use English as much as possible in the classroom and should attempt to make their lessons as interesting as possible. However, creating interesting lessons and at the same time relying heavily on textbooks that follow a more traditional approach and are thus incompatible with the approach they are required to adopt is an impossible task. Using English as much as possible in the classroom while maintaining a largely teacher-centred approach due to time constraints, workload, lack of adequate training in current language teaching methodologies and a repertoire of useful instructional language,

is a potentially problematic strategy. Attempting to cope with a situation in which learners arrive at school with very different levels of English due to the private lessons they attend or their different cultural backgrounds can result in teachers' feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Clearly this is a situation that calls for urgent and remedial action.

Participants' reported needs were indicative of a static approach to language teaching which requires the acquisition of pre-determined practical ideas rather than the theoretical aspects of teaching. However, by no means should this undervalue or reject the value of theory and the mastery of trainable skills; despite participants' explicit needs which reflected a more knowledge-transmission view of learning, their implicit needs showed evidence of the importance of theory and reflected a constructivist view of learning. The findings have also indicated that, for participants, knowledge is shared and co constructed through interactions with key actors (TP supervisors, peers, cooperating teachers). Such findings should underscore the need for raising student teachers' awareness of the relevance of theory in their overall education by providing them with continuous support in both the school and the university settings to form links between the theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching. This, in turn, will enable them to view theory critically rather than accept it passively.

The findings of this study can be used for future planning in many areas but primarily in the field of initial teacher education. Even though this study is concerned with the initial preparation of prospective primary teachers as regards English language instruction, the findings drawn in relation to teacher learning could be used as a

contribution to the development of more learner-centred instructional approaches in the teaching of any subject-matter within teacher education curricula.

## **6.2 IMPLICATIONS**

Initially it seems that it is important for those responsible for the content of teacher education curricula to realize the significance of the English subject in today's primary schools and therefore their responsibility in providing prospective teachers with the required training which will enable them to respond to the needs of teaching English to young learners. This would mean the inclusion of relevant modules which would cater for the needs of prospective teachers as identified in this study, and would, at the same time, be in line with the guidelines and requirements of the primary English curriculum.

### ***6.2.1 Developing student teachers' communicative competence***

Based on the findings of this study, I suggest that student teachers attend two language improvement modules in the first two years of their studies which will not only focus on the development of their grammatical competence but also on the development of their communicative competence. It seems that, for most participants, FL competence was one of their main concerns, especially when it came to using the foreign language as a means of communicating content and generally managing the classroom. The content of the language improvement modules should be relevant to the areas covered in the primary English curriculum as well as to specific classroom language which will enable prospective teachers to deliver their lesson and respond to their pupils' language-related questions

confidently. A course like this could have the added side-effect, if taught well and communicatively, of introducing or further reinforcing, teaching approaches/methods/techniques – the student teachers would experience them as students and could be asked to reflect on them as teaching methods.

### ***6.2.2 Developing student-teachers' Knowing About***

In addition to a good level of language fluency, student teachers should have access to didactic knowledge. Participants in this study showed reluctance or avoidance in adopting the communicative approach in their teaching while showing an 'unwanted' dependence on the textbook, because of factors such as busy schedule, unfamiliarity with the primary English curriculum and the methodologies suggested by it. I would therefore argue for a compulsory module to familiarise student-teachers with the theoretical principles of language teaching and the content and philosophy which underpins the English primary curriculum. This will help them gain a better understanding of how their subject-matter should be taught and of what methodologies they are expected to adopt when they go into teaching in schools. Another compulsory module should be offered in their final year which will aim at familiarizing student-teachers with a repertoire of instructional strategies, as summarized at the end of chapter 4, and most importantly at developing their subject-matter pedagogical skills

### ***6.2.3 Developing student-teachers' Knowing How***

The most important conclusion drawn from this study is that student-teachers should be given more opportunities to develop practical competencies. While this



implies that much of what teachers need to know and be able to do can only be learned in the context of practice, it does not mean that the development of this knowledge and skills should only take place in schools. It does mean offering student-teachers powerful learning opportunities which are more oriented around the practical tasks of teaching and the context of teachers' work. This, as indicated in this study, can be achieved, in both the school and the university settings, through observations, and real and simulated practice. The importance of helping student-teachers develop their practical 'know-how' is not in doubt, especially in the early stages of their teaching career. However, simply exposing student-teachers to such instructional practices would mean encouraging them to rely on whatever practices will enable them to survive in the future when they go into real teaching, paying little attention to whether or not they represent 'best' practice and most importantly without them gaining a deep understanding of their own teaching experiences.

#### ***6.2.4 Raising student teachers' awareness***

Dewey (1938) warns that preparation is a treacherous idea when applied to education. He believes that every experience should prepare a person for later experiences of a deeper, more expansive quality. He argues that "education should not use the present simply to get ready for the future and that only by extracting the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future" (p. 49). Related to Dewey's argument, findings from this study have shown that student-teachers need to raise their awareness of the teaching process, develop the ability to observe and reflect upon others' and their own

teaching in order to make sense of their learning experiences. This calls for teacher educators (university lecturers and TP supervisors) to provide opportunities for experiential learning, focused observations of self or others, interaction, and reflective activities followed by discussions and feedback, in a context where learning is constructed and understood in collaboration with others involved in the learning to teach process (university teachers and supervisors, peers, and cooperating teachers).

As indicated in the previous chapter, the teaching practice was considered by the participants to be the most invaluable experience in terms of learning to teach. However, this experience will only be valuable if it is meaningful and relevant to student-teachers' needs and expectations. This primarily requires student-teachers to learn how to observe an experienced teacher in different subjects and be able to distinguish between the general pedagogical skills used by the teacher and his/her pedagogical skills in relation to the subject-matter he/she is teaching. Additionally, I believe that it should be made compulsory for student-teachers to gain teaching experience in all the subjects of the primary curriculum including English during their practicum. In relation to English, having to prepare lesson plans and implement them in a real teaching situation would undoubtedly be a worthwhile experience; it will give teachers an idea of how teaching a foreign language is different from teaching other subjects and help them eradicate possible misconceptions that fluency in the target language is all they need to teach at primary level. Apart from this, it will help them, *if* they have the right support, to

form links between the theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching and will be in a better position to view theory critically rather than accept it passively.

### **6.2.5 A change in mentors' roles**

Viewed within the Cyprus educational reality and culture of teaching, the results of this study have made it evident that the transmission model of teaching is still prevalent in teacher education programmes, despite attempts made by individuals (university lecturers, TP supervisors, and cooperating teachers) to introduce a more flexible, interactive approach to teacher learning. It seems that policy makers and course designers speak of learner-centred approaches while at the same time continuing to use methodological routines that are too prescriptive and allow little to no flexibility. If the teachers' job is no longer considered one of imparting knowledge then the job of those involved in the education of these teachers should be of similar nature; in other words, they should practise what they preach, and convince their students that what they 'advise' can really work in practice. For teacher educators this move to trainee-centredness means a corresponding move away from their prescriptive, assessing roles to the adoption of more assisting, mediating roles (Wiles & Bondi, 1991; Scaife and Scaife, 1996; Bailey, 2006; Mason, Johnson cited in Malderez, 2009: 260; Richards, 1990). University lecturers should modify their teaching approach if necessary, in order to develop student-teachers' teaching and subject-matter pedagogical skills. TP supervisors should put more effort into visiting and supporting student-teachers who teach English by providing them with as much feedback as possible regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their lesson, instead of simply assessing it with a

grade or a comment on their overall pedagogical approach. Part of the supervisor's role, as Bailey (2007) points out, is also to help novice teachers make connections between the material in their training courses and the classroom contexts they face (p. 240-241). This inevitably requires TP supervisors to have a sound knowledge of the subject-matter they are supervising and of appropriate subject-related methods and activities, which means that subject-matter university specialists would be in a better position to supervise their students during the teaching practice. Finally cooperating teachers should take more responsibility for their advisory roles and should be made aware that their presence in the classroom and their continuous support of the student teachers are essential components in their preparation (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987). They should also be more flexible and allow or even encourage student-teachers to experiment with new methods and ideas. It would also be advisable for both TP supervisors and cooperating teachers, whose role, I believe, is the most crucial in the process of helping student teachers learn to teach, to be provided with some kind of training for their supervisory and mentoring roles. Such changes in mentors' roles reflect a constructivist approach to teacher education; an effective mentor should use skilful questioning to dig out teachers' personal theories, showing trainees (practising teachers & student teachers) ways to filter or interpret training interventions or input "so that it fits in with their framework of thinking about teaching" (Roberts, 1998:27).

Finally, we should acknowledge the fact that good communication and cooperation between those involved in the education of prospective teachers is important. He

(2009) views mentoring as a collaborative effort between university teacher educators, cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers. This implies that there should be ample opportunities for discussions and exchange of ideas in both school and university settings. Continuing collaboration between these two settings is a necessity for the improvement of the Teacher Education programme and it requires strong leadership from the university mentors and the school principles to implement and support these changes. The results of this study also highlight the importance of listening to the voices of those directly involved in primary language teaching (teachers and student-teachers) and to consider the difficulties that they face within the teaching process. Encouraging them to reflect on and interpret the teaching situations they are engaged in is surely a fundamental basis for quality in Teacher preparation programmes.

### **6.3 THE WAY FORWARD**

Drawing on the results generated from this study and considering the current educational system in Cyprus, I would suggest that the initial stages of the pre-service teacher education could continue to be based on trainer-centred models, as novice teachers are in need of basic teaching competence. The acquisition of basic theories and the modeling of 'contextually appropriate' methods, materials and strategies may give them a certain amount of confidence, an essential component for dealing with language teaching in a real context. The next step would be to provide them with authentic and meaningful opportunities to form links between the theory they learn in lectures and readings with what they do during their practicum. To attain this, trainees need to be helped to develop their reflective

skills early in the programme, which will enable them to construct their own theories and practices that are personally significant and relevant to them.

Considering the above, pre-service education, as I understand it, can pursue both equipping and enabling perspectives (Prabhu, 1987b); it can equip teachers with effective skills and methods to apply in the language classroom but at the same time lay the seeds for further development (Ur, 1996). The education and professional development of every teacher needs to be seen as a lifelong task and the purpose of initial education should not be to provide these teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for a life-time of teaching but rather to prepare them to be lifelong learners, which will eventually make them better teachers. I therefore advocate a balanced approach, which views teaching in terms of what Richards (1998:48) calls, a 'developmental continuum of conceptions'. Such an approach to language teacher education seems to prepare for student teachers' predictable short-term needs through the process of training as well as their unpredictable career of lifetime needs through the process of education.

#### **6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

For the purposes of this study, school teachers were interviewed in order to provide information regarding what they perceive as essential to know regarding language teaching and how they feel they learn best. In other words, they were treated as learners of language teaching in the context of primary schools. Nevertheless, the results of this study throw light on another role for teachers: that of the advisor, the helper, the mediator. Thus, future research could be conducted to explore how these teachers perceive their role in the preparation of prospective

primary teachers, what their expectations of the student teachers who take over their class are, and how they deal with student teachers during teaching practice. Such research might contribute to the understanding of aspects that need to be taken into account in the process of preparing cooperating teachers for this role.

Other studies would also be useful in investigating cooperating teachers and TP supervisors' post-observation feedback to student teachers and the reaction of the latter to this feedback. This would improve mentors' abilities in dealing with student teachers and at the same time improve the student teachers' educational classroom experiences.

A final recommendation would be to explore the reality of the practicum experience from the perspectives of cooperating teachers, TP supervisors and student teachers through observation and focus groups. This would allow a deeper understanding of how the same experience is perceived differently by those involved and would provide further insights into teacher learning and into conditions which facilitate and/or hinder this learning.

## **6.5 A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE**

As a practising teacher, I feel I have benefitted greatly from this research. Prompting participants to reflect on their experiences as language teachers and learners and articulate their thoughts and beliefs about language learning and teaching has made me realise that my own teaching has been largely influenced by my own language learning experiences and it therefore comes with a number of shortcomings. Such a realisation makes me more aware of the value of reflection

in preparing my students and at the same time more sensitive to their needs. This, in turn, is likely to bring more rewarding outcomes in the long run.

In relation to the findings of this study, an identification of primary teachers' needs as regards the 'what' and the 'how' of their initial education seems necessary to ensure that those involved in language teaching receive the kind of education they actually require. Although the findings of this research concern directly the Cypriot situation and are limited because of scale, they have validity in that they are likely to have broader applicability beyond Cyprus, especially in countries where early foreign language learning forms part of their educational agenda. Developing primary teachers' language teaching knowledge and skills while considering the various types of support they receive during their pre-service education form part of a wider endeavour to ensure quality in early foreign language learning, an objective set by the European Union (see section 1.1). I therefore hope that this thesis makes a contribution towards achieving these aims.

It is therefore imperative for the Ministry of Education and Culture to become committed to producing competent language teachers for Cyprus primary state schools who can respond to an increasingly changing and demanding European society where multilingualism is now a requirement for success and thus one of the priorities of its member states.

Since the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for any educational reform at tertiary level, I feel that for any of the above changes (section 6.2) to take place, a more flexible policy is needed, which implies a change to the leadership



style adopted by the Ministry. As mentioned in chapter 1 the current educational system in Cyprus is centralized and is characterized by decisions imposed top-down, information transmission and lack of collaboration among stakeholders. However, as discussed in the literature and the findings of this study, the goal of teacher education should not be to tell (prospective) teachers how to teach but to educate them to reason soundly about their teaching as well as to help them make explicit their needs and concerns for teaching; this can only be achieved with their active involvement in the learning to teach process and the support of significant others. This calls for the inclusion of the various stakeholders involved in the education of primary teachers, namely the Ministry, inspectors, academics, the Pedagogical institute, the school principles and most importantly the student teachers and the teachers themselves in the process of curriculum evaluation and educational reform. Only then will any attempts for pre-service provision be likely to have the desired, long-term effects.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### FRAMEWORKS FOR THE KNOWLEDGE BASE OF LANGUAGE TEACHERS

#### Shulman (1987)

- Content knowledge (knowledge of the subject you are teaching)
- General pedagogical knowledge (classroom management and assessment techniques)
- Curriculum knowledge
- Pedagogical content knowledge (the techniques for teaching your subject)
- Knowledge of learners and their characteristics
- Knowledge of the educational context
- Knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values (goals of education within the society)

#### Day (1991)

- Content knowledge (knowledge of the subject-matter)
- Pedagogic knowledge
- Pedagogic content knowledge
- Support knowledge

#### Richards (1998)

- Theories of teaching
- Teaching skills
- Communication skills
- Subject-matter knowledge
- Pedagogical reasoning and decision-making
- Contextual knowledge

### **Fradd & Lee (1998)**

- Knowledge of academic content (knowledge of language acquisition process, knowledge of subject area content, knowledge of culture and pragmatic language use)
- Knowledge of pedagogy (curriculum and instruction, assessment, technology)
- Knowledge of students, schools and communities (the classroom context, the school context, the community context)

### **Freeman & Johnson (1998)**

- The teacher-learner (knowledge of themselves as language learners)
- The social context (schools and schooling)
- The pedagogical process (the nature of language teaching, pedagogical thinking and activity, the subject-matter and the content and language learning)

### **Yates & Muchisky (2003)**

- Subject-matter knowledge (knowledge of how language is organized and how languages are learned)
- Knowledge of available options for language teaching
- knowledge of assessing learners' language

### **Richards & Farrell (2005)**

- subject-matter knowledge
- pedagogical expertise
- self-awareness (knowledge of oneself as a teacher)
- understanding of learners (understanding of learners' learning styles, needs, ways of making content more accessible to learners)
- understanding of curriculum and materials
- career advancement

## **Malderez &Wedell (2007)**

### *Knowing about*

- subject-matter
- how the subject is learnt
- the school and its policies, accepted norms and procedures within the education system
- their students, their background and needs
  
- strategies for managing their ongoing learning, the existence of professional organizations and support networks, journals in their subject area

### *Knowing how*

- use strategies to support pupils and their own learning
- notice important features of classrooms and organizations
- promote conditions which support the learning processes
- assess learning
- relate to students, other professionals, parents and colleagues
- fulfil other professional obligations
- access and use new ideas and /or theories to think, plan and /or assess

### *Knowing to*

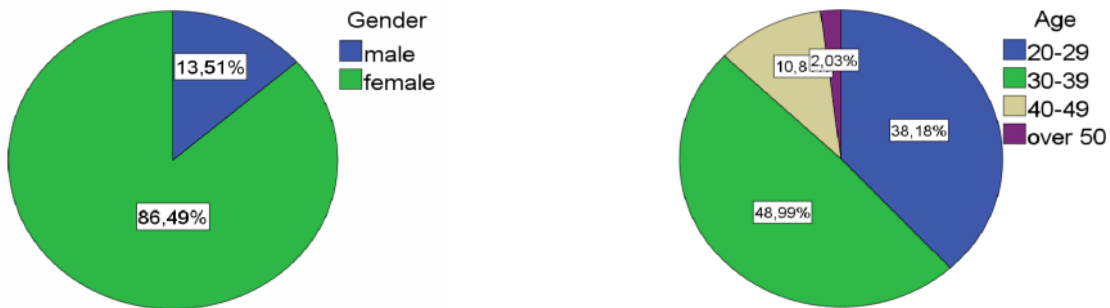
- Intuitively and instantaneously use what they know at just the right moment, and in just the right way to support the learning of their particular learners, in their classrooms

## APPENDIX B

### Participants' profiles (Questionnaires)

#### Sample 1 (In-service teachers)

#### Personal information

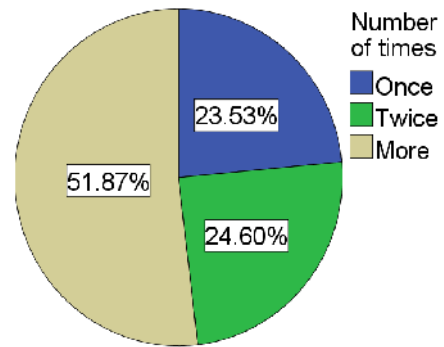
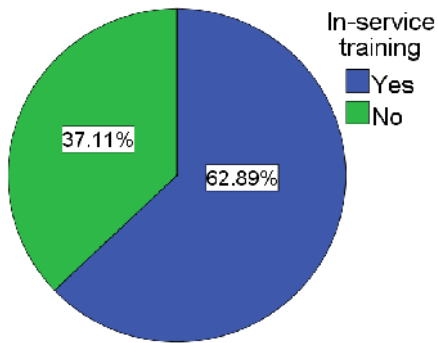
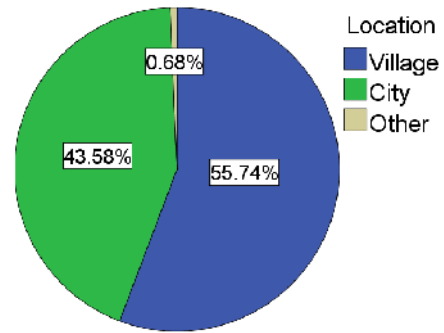
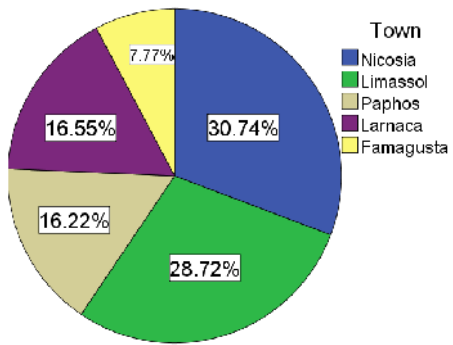


#### Academic information

Variable	Sub-variable	Frequency
<b>Qualifications</b>	MA TEFL/TESOL	42 (14.2%)
	MA Linguistics	9 (3%)
	MA English Literature	6 (2%)
<b>English background language</b>	English-speaking university	63 (21.2%)
	English language-related degree	<b>60 (20.2%)</b>
	English proficiency exam	156 (52.7%)
	None	17 (5.7%)
<b>English-related module during initial education</b>	Yes	246 (83.1%)
	No	49 (16.6%)

## Contextual information

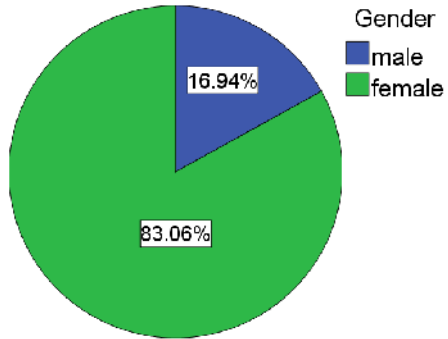
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Sub-variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Teaching experience</b>	1-5	80 (27%)
	6-10	77 (26%)
	11-15	47 (15.8%)
	16-20	59 (19.9%)
	21-25	11 (3.7%)
	26-30	6 (2%)
<b>English Teaching experience</b>	1-5	205 (69%)
	6-10	50 (16.9%)
	11-15	19 (6.4%)
	16-22	15 (5%)
	24-30	7 (2%)
<b>Reasons for teaching English</b>	An ELT- related degree	60 (20.3%)
	Showed an interest	144 (48.6%)
	No available teacher	88 (29.7%)



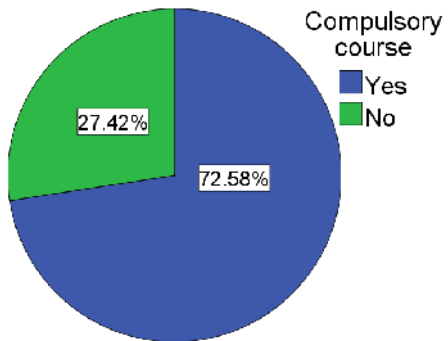


## Sample 2 (Pre-service teachers)

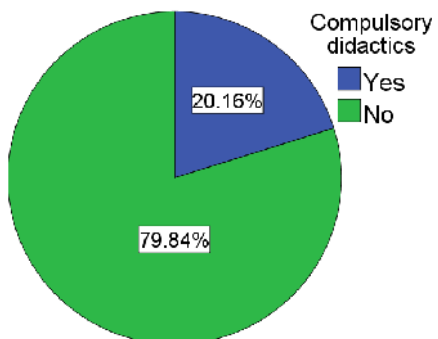
### Personal information



### Academic information



### Contextual information



## APPENDIX C

### Participants' profiles (Interviews)

Below I give a brief overview of the participants to whom I will refer later during the presentation of the interview data. The information given on the table below about sample 1 which consists of 9 in-service teachers reflect the criteria of my selection as these were outlined in more detail in section 3.9.1 in Chapter 3.

**Description of sample 1 - In-service teachers**

Participants	Institution attended	English during their initial education	Years of teaching experience	Experience In teaching English	INSET
T1	PA	Language improvement/TEFL	17	7	Never
T2	UCy	Language improvement	10	5	More than twice
T3	UCy	_____	9	7	More than twice
T4	University of Ioannina	_____	8	4	twice
T5	UCy	Language improvement	5	2	once
T6	UCy	Language improvement	6	6	More than twice
T7	PA	Language improvement/TEFL	10	3	once
T8	UCy	Language improvement	3	2	Never
T9	UCy	Language improvement	7	4	Never

## Description of sample 2 – Pre-service teachers

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Year of study</b>	<b>English language course at university</b>	<b>Taught English during practicum</b>
S1	3rd	Language improvement	Yes
S2	3rd	Language improvement	Yes
S3	3rd	Language improvement	No
S4	3rd	Language improvement	No
S5	3rd	Language improvement	Yes
S6	4th	Language improvement	Yes
S7	4th	Language improvement	Yes
S8	4th	Language improvement	Yes
S9	4th	Language improvement	No
S10	4th	Language improvement	Yes
S11	4th	Language improvement	No

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Inspectors' Interview questions**

1. Based on what criteria is a teacher assigned to teach English in primary state schools?
2. Do the same criteria apply for those who use the CLIL approach in all day schools?
3. Who are considered 'qualified' to teach English in primary schools?
4. What do you think of the preparation student teachers receive in relation to language teaching during their initial education at university?
5. Is there any kind of in-service training / support available for these teachers?
6. What is usually the content of these seminars?
7. Based on what criteria are the participants of these seminars chosen?
8. Having observed a number of teachers giving a lesson, have you identified any problems in their teaching?
9. Based on these needs, what kind of pre-service education should future language teachers at this level receive in terms of content?

## APPENDIX E

### In-service teachers' questionnaire

Dear Colleague,

My name is Stella Kourieos and I am currently working as an English instructor at Frederick University in Limassol. This questionnaire is part of a research project conducted for the degree of Doctor of Education in TESOL, at the University of Exeter in UK, supervised by Dr Jill Cadorath.

The purpose of my research is to explore the pre-service provision for the primary ELT teachers in Cyprus and suggest alternatives for future improvement and application. This research will be based on the views of the teachers as well as the views of the inspectors. I therefore consider your honest replies and overall contribution of great value to this study.

I am therefore kindly asking you to complete the following questionnaire, which will not take you more than 10 minutes to complete. All your responses will be treated confidentially and no one except me will have access to the information that you provide. Neither your name nor the name of your school will be used in any reporting of the research as questionnaires will be filled in anonymously.

**I would be grateful if you returned the questionnaire to the headmaster/headmistress who will return it to me.**

For any questions concerning the questionnaire or generally the research project, participants can call me on 99425520 or email me at skourieos@cytanet.com.cy.

Please note that the Ministry of Education and Culture of Cyprus has formally approved this research.

Thank you in advance for your precious time and collaboration.

Stella Kourieos

Please circle the appropriate response or write in the required information. For some questions, you may choose more than one response.

## SECTION I

### *Personal information*

1. Gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  
2. Your age is
  - a. 20 – 29 years old
  - b. 30 – 39
  - c. 40 – 49
  - d. Over 50

### *Academic information*

3. Apart from a BA in Primary Education, do you hold an MA in
  - a. TEFL / TESOL
  - b. Linguistics
  - c. English Literature
  - d. Other
  
4. What background in English language do you have?
  - a. I have studied in an English-speaking university.
  - b. I have a degree related to English language teaching.
  - c. I have passed an English proficiency exam
  - d. None of the above

5. Did you have to attend any English courses as part of your studies?
- a. Yes
  - b. No

***Contextual information***

6. Teaching experience: ..... years.
7. Teaching English experience: ..... years.
8. Have you been assigned to teach English because:
- a. You have a degree related to English language teaching
  - b. You showed an interest in teaching English
  - c. There was not an English language teacher available
9. Is the school where you are currently teaching in:
- a. Nicosia
  - b. Limassol
  - c. Paphos
  - d. Larnaca
  - e. Famagusta
10. Is the school where you are currently teaching located in a:
- a. Village
  - b. City
11. Have you had any kind of in-service training related to the teaching of English to children?
- a. Yes
  - b. No

12. How many times have you attended an in-service training programme?

- a. Once
- b. Twice
- c. More

## SECTION II

### *Views on Primary language teachers' preparation*

13. After teaching English at primary level, which areas do you feel that prospective primary teachers who will teach this subject in Cyprus primary schools should be knowledgeable about? Give a score 1 to 5 according to your assessment of how necessary the following are for their training. Please circle the corresponding number: 1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = enough, 4 = very, 5 = very much

Teachers should have knowledge about:

- Teaching writing 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching grammar 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching vocabulary 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching listening 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching reading 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching speaking 1 2 3 4 5
- Games specific to foreign language teaching 1 2 3 4 5
- Textbook/material evaluation 1 2 3 4 5
- Adapting materials to the pupils' level 1 2 3 4 5
- Designing instructional materials 1 2 3 4 5
- Dealing with mixed-ability classes 1 2 3 4 5
- Storytelling 1 2 3 4 5
- Activities for oral practice 1 2 3 4 5
- Using technology 1 2 3 4 5
- Using activities which promote intercultural understanding 1 2 3 4 5



- Using language as an instrument of communication 1 2 3 4 5
- Using the foreign language as a means of Instruction 1 2 3 4 5
- Planning a lesson 1 2 3 4 5
- Motivating young language learners 1 2 3 4 5
- Assessing young language learners 1 2 3 4 5
- Theories of how languages are learned 1 2 3 4 5
- Integrating cross-curricular contents 1 2 3 4 5
- The Cyprus Primary English curriculum 1 2 3 4 5

14. Which of the following do you think should be used in teacher education programmes? Circle the **four** most important ones.

- Lectures
- Workshops
- Model teaching in real situations (demonstration lessons)
- Discussion between practising teachers and trainees
- Teaching real classes
- Working with a mentor
- Informal discussion between trainee teachers

15. Is there anything else you would like to say that wasn't mentioned in the questionnaire?

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16. Would you be happy to follow up with an interview?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If yes, please COMPLETE the attached form.

## Consent Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone no(s): \_\_\_\_\_

### Preferred contact time: (please tick)

- 08:00 – 11:00 a.m.
- 11:00 – 02:00 p.m.
- 02:00 – 05:00 p.m.
- 05:00 – 08:00 p.m.
- At any time

I understand that your free time is very limited and I would like to stress that:

- the day, time and venue will be arranged according to your convenience
- the interview will be completed within one single meeting
- the interview will be one hour long
- the interview will be recorded with your consent, so that I can listen to it again carefully afterwards and transcribe the data
- the study does not examine individuals and your answers will be analysed with absolute confidentiality and anonymously.

I have been fully informed about the purpose of this research project and I would like to follow up with an interview. I understand that the above details will not be used for any other purposes and any information I give will be treated with the strictest confidentiality. I also understand that I may withdraw information at any time without giving reasons or being disadvantaged.

Signature

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Date

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## APPENDIX F

### In-service teachers' questionnaire (Greek)

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## **APPENDIX G**

### **Pre-service teachers' questionnaire**

Dear student,

The purpose of my research is to explore the pre-service provision for the primary ELT teachers in Cyprus and consider the implications for future development of this provision. This research will be based on the views of practicing teachers and student-teachers, as well as the views of the inspectors and the advisors of English. I therefore consider your honest replies and overall contribution of great value to this study.

I am therefore kindly asking you to complete the following questionnaire, which should not take more than 10 minutes. All your responses will be treated confidentially and no one except me will have access to the information that you provide. Neither your name nor the name of the University where you are studying will be used in any reporting of the research, as questionnaires will be filled in anonymously.

For any questions concerning the questionnaire or the research project in general, you can email me at [skourieos@cytanet.com.cy](mailto:skourieos@cytanet.com.cy).

Thank you in advance for your precious time and collaboration.

Stella Kourieos

Please circle the appropriate response or write in the required information. For some questions, you may choose more than one response.

## SECTION I

### *Personal information*

1. Gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female

### *Academic information*

2. Have you attended a compulsory English language improvement module at the University where you are studying?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
3. Is there a course on the **teaching of English** at the University where you are studying?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
4. Is there a compulsory/elective module on English language instruction at the University where you are studying?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

## SECTION II

### *Views on Primary language teachers' preparation*

5. Give a score 1 to 5 according to your assessment of how necessary the following areas are for your training as prospective teachers who will teach English in the primary schools in Cyprus. Please circle the corresponding number: 1 = not at all, 2 = little, 3 = enough, 4 = very, 5 = very much

- Teaching writing 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching grammar 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching vocabulary 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching listening 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching reading 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching speaking 1 2 3 4 5
- Games specific to foreign language teaching 1 2 3 4 5
- Textbook/material evaluation 1 2 3 4 5
- Adapting materials to the pupils' level 1 2 3 4 5
- Designing instructional materials 1 2 3 4 5
- Dealing with mixed-ability classes 1 2 3 4 5
- Storytelling 1 2 3 4 5
- Activities for oral practice 1 2 3 4 5
- Using technology 1 2 3 4 5
- Using activities which promote intercultural understanding 1 2 3 4 5
- Using language as an instrument of communication 1 2 3 4 5
- Using the foreign language as a means of Instruction 1 2 3 4 5
- Planning a lesson 1 2 3 4 5
- Motivating language learners 1 2 3 4 5
- Assessing young language learners 1 2 3 4 5

- Theories of how foreign languages are learned 1 2 3 4 5
- Integrating cross-curricular contents 1 2 3 4 5
- The Cyprus Primary English curriculum 1 2 3 4 5

6. Which of the following do you think should be applied in teacher education programmes? Circle the **four** most important ones.

- Lectures
- Workshops
- Model teaching in real situations (demonstration lessons)
- Discussion between practising teachers and trainees
- Teaching real classes
- Working with a mentor
- Informal discussion between trainee teachers

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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## APPENDIX H

### Pre-service teachers' questionnaire (Greek)

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, μ μ email [skourieos@cytanet.com.cy](mailto:skourieos@cytanet.com.cy).  
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## SECTION II

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$\mu$  1-5  $\mu$   $\mu$

$\mu$   $\mu$   $\mu$  : 1 =  $\mu$  , 2 = , 3 = , 4 = ,  
5 = .

:

- 1 2 3 4 5
- $\mu\mu$  1 2 3 4 5
- 1 2 3 4 5





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- $\mu$   $\mu$
- $\mu$   $\mu$

18.  $\mu$  ;  $\mu$

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## APPENDIX I

### In-service teachers' interview questions

#### SECTION I

##### EFL learning experience

- Can you tell me about your experience of learning EFL prior to your formal studies at university?
- To what extent do you feel you have benefited from the language improvement side of the English modules you have taken at university?
- What impact, if any, has your experience as a language learner had on the way you teach now?

##### Beliefs about Language Learning

- After teaching children English for ..... years, what kinds of activities do you feel help your pupils learn better?
- Which do you think are the most important skills for a primary language student to acquire?

##### Experience of Language Teaching

- Can you recall any difficulties that you have encountered throughout your ELT career?

## **SECTION II**

### **Views on initial Education**

- Which of the modules that you attended during your teacher education programme do you feel have prepared you the most for actual teaching?
- To what extent did what you learnt in your teacher preparation programme match your teaching practice?
- To what extent did the teaching practice during your initial education prepare you for your current teaching?
- Do you feel there is anything that would make the teaching practice more beneficial for future teachers involved in language teaching?

### **Views on in-service training**

- What were the instructional approaches used in the in-service training you have attended?
- To what extent do you feel you have benefited from these instructional approaches?

### **Suggestions**

- Apart from the teaching practice experience, how do you think prospective teachers should be taught about language teaching?
- Do you have any suggestions regarding change to the undergraduate programme of primary teacher education in relation to English language teaching?

## APPENDIX J

### Pre-service teachers' interview questions

#### SECTION I

##### **EFL learning experience**

- Can you tell me about your experience of learning EFL prior to your formal studies at university?
- To what extent do you feel you have benefited from the language improvement side of the English modules you have taken at university?
- Would you use any aspects of your EFL experience with your own pupils?

##### **Beliefs about Language Learning**

- Which do you think are the most important skills for a primary language student to acquire?

##### **Experience of Language Teaching**

- Can you recall any difficulties that you encountered when you taught English during the practicum?

## **SECTION II**

### **Views on initial Education**

- Which of the modules that you have attended during your teacher education programme do you feel have prepared you the most for actual teaching?
- To what extent do you feel that teaching practice prepares you for the realities of actual teaching?
- Do you feel there is anything that would make the teaching practice more beneficial for future teachers involved in language teaching?

### **Suggestions**

- Apart from the teaching practice experience, how do you think prospective teachers should be taught about language teaching?
- Do you have any suggestions regarding change to the undergraduate programme of primary teacher education in relation to English language teaching?



ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
ΥΠΟΥΡΓΕΙΟ  
ΠΑΙΔΕΙΑΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΥ

ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ  
ΔΗΜΟΤΙΚΗΣ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗΣ

Αρ. Φακ.: 7.19 48 6/26  
Αρ. Τηλ. 22800661  
Αρ. Φαξ : 22420277  
E-mail : [ddo@moec.gov.cy](mailto:ddo@moec.gov.cy)

3 Μαρτίου, 2010

**ΕΠΕΙΓΟΝ – ΜΕ ΤΗΛΕΦΩΝΙΟΤΥΠΟ (25735001)**

Κυρία Στέλλα Κουριέως  
Μετοχίου 9, Διαμ. 102  
3117 Αγία Φύλα

**Θέμα: Διεξαγωγή έρευνας με εκπαιδευτικούς δημοτικών σχολείων**

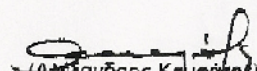
Αγαπητή κυρία Κουριέως,

Έχω οδηγίες να αναφερθώ στη σχετική με το πιο πάνω θέμα αίτησή σας προς το Κέντρο Εκπαιδευτικής Έρευνας και Αξιολόγησης, που υποβλήθηκε στις 27 Ιανουαρίου 2010, και σε συνέχεια της ταυτίριθμης επιστολής μας με ημερομηνία 17 Φεβρουαρίου 2010, να σας πληροφορήσω ότι εγκρίνεται το αίτημά σας για διεξαγωγή έρευνας με εκπαιδευτικούς δημοτικών σχολείων, με θέμα «*Αξιολόγηση της αποτελεσματικότητας του υφιστάμενου προγράμματος προετοιμασίας δασκάλων που επιθυμούν να διδάξουν το μάθημα των αγγλικών*», την παρούσα σχολική χρονιά 2009-2010. Η απάντηση του Κέντρου Εκπαιδευτικής Έρευνας και Αξιολόγησης σας αποστέλλεται συνημμένα για δική σας ενημέρωση.

2. Να είναι βέβαια, ότι πρέπει να εξασφαλιστεί η άδεια των διευθυντών/διευθυντριών των σχολείων που θα επισκεφθείτε, εκ των προτέρων, ώστε να ληφθούν όλα τα απαραίτητα μέτρα για να μην επηρεαστεί η ομαλή λειτουργία των σχολείων. Η έρευνα θα πρέπει να διεξαχθεί με ιδιαίτερα προσεγμένο τρόπο, ώστε να μη θίγεται το έργο των εκπαιδευτικών, το σχολικό περιβάλλον ή οι οικογένειες των μαθητών και όλες οι δραστηριότητες που θα αναπτυχθούν πρέπει να εμπέπτον μέσα στα πλαίσια που καθορίζονται από το Αναλυτικό Πρόγραμμα. Οι εκπαιδευτικοί πρέπει να λάβουν μέρος στην έρευνα στο μη διδακτικό τους χρόνο. Σημειώνεται, επίσης, ότι τα πορίσματα κρίνεται απαραίτητα να είναι ανώνυμα και ο πληροφορίες που θα συλλεγούν να τηρηθούν απόλυτα εμπιστευτικές και αποκλειστικά και μόνο για το σκοπό της έρευνας.

3. Η παρούσα έγκριση παραχωρείται με την προϋπόθεση ότι τα πορίσματα της εργασίας, θα κοινοποιηθούν μόλις αυτή ολοκληρωθεί, στη Διεύθυνση Δημοτικής Εκπαίδευσης για σχετική μελέτη και κατάλληλη αξιοποίηση.

Με εκτίμηση,

  
(Αλέξανδρος Κουριότας)  
για Γενική Διευθύντρια

Κοιν.: Π.Α.Ε. Επαρχιακά Γραφεία Παιδείας  
: Επιθεωρήτριες Αγγλικών, Επαρχιακά Γραφεία Παιδείας  
ΑΤΑΤ ΕΡΕΥΝΕΣ



Υπουργείο Παιδείας και Πολιτισμού, 1434 Λευκωσία  
Τηλ.: 22800600 Φαξ: 22420277 Ιστοσελίδα: <http://www.moec.gov.cy>

**APPENDIX L**  
**Permission for conducting the research study**  
**(Translation from Greek)**

Ministry of Education and Culture  
Telephone: 22800661  
Fax number: 22428277

Management of primary Education

March 3, 2010

Ms Stella Kourieos  
9 Metochiou street, flat 102  
3117, Agia Fyla

Subject: Approval for conducting research among primary school teachers

Dear Ms Kourieos,

In reply to your request to the Education Research and Evaluation Centre on January 27, 2010, I would like to inform you that your application to conduct a research study during the current academic year 2009-2010 under the following topic: 'An investigation into the preparation of teachers for language teaching at primary level: Implications for an initial Language Teacher Education programme in line with the European framework' has been approved.

The following research, however, can only take place under certain conditions. You should receive an approval from the head of each school and the teachers who will participate in your research, in advance, so that the schedule of these schools will not be affected. The content of the questionnaire/interview must not offend teachers' work, the school environment or pupils' families. In addition, teachers should not complete

the questionnaire during teaching time. The questionnaires must be filled in anonymously and any data collected should be confidential and used for no purposes other than the purposes of your research.

Finally the current approval has been given under the condition that on completion of your study, the findings will be made available to the Department of Primary Education for further study and potential utilisation.

Yours sincerely,

Alexandros Kouratos



## APPENDIX M

### Collection of quotes/data from the interviews relevant to my findings (sample)

#### ➤ Beliefs about teaching grammar

**“To be honest, especially when it comes to teaching grammar, there are times that I would rather use either, both approaches, or, just the traditional one.** I feel that when I teach grammar using the communicative approach, there are children who find it hard to understand the new grammar introduced to them...and even those who seem to understand, I believe it's because they are already familiar with this grammar because of the private lessons they attend. I would be happier to use the traditional method when I have to introduce a new grammatical point and then involve them in more communicative activities for consolidation. **Vocabulary can be taught communicatively, but when it comes to grammar I'm really not sure.** (T3)

“I explain the rules and also tell them to remember some adverbs or words which will help them identify which tense to use. **I can't see how grammar can be taught differently**”. (T6)

“There are of course communicative activities which you can use to teach a tense but **at some point you need to do it a bit traditionally**; you have to write the verbs on the board, explain to them how they change, why and so on. **You need to explain them, because through games they might not get the point**” (T8)

“One of my biggest problems was teaching grammar. I didn't know **how to explain it in an interesting way**”. (S7)

➤ **Beliefs about language learning/teaching**

“Well I generally **like languages and I am good at them** so whatever approach was used wouldn't be a problem for me”. (T6)

**“I believe that learning a foreign language involves some kind of talent.** Even very good pupils may not be good at English. I have colleagues who are excellent teachers, they graduated from university with really high grades, and yet they cannot say a word in English. I really think it's a matter of talent to a great extent. **I learnt to speak good English without knowing any of these theories”.** (T4)

“I don't think that knowing the theories of language learning will help you teach better. **Teachers need more practical examples and not so much theory”** (T8)

“I realize that teaching spelling might be boring for a great number of students but I still believe that lack of it takes us backwards; instead of finding ways to facilitate and thus improve language learning **we ignore the rules and we create gaps.** I also understand that the lesson should be fun and enjoyable at this age but this shouldn't be our only aim. When I first started teaching English deep inside I couldn't accept that teaching young learners means being constantly involved in playful activities”. (T6)

“I see now how my daughter learns English at school and it's so much better. **They learn to communicate first and this, I think, is what we lacked when we were taught. I wish I had had more opportunities for oral practice”.** (S9)

- **Difficulties encountered throughout their ELT careers /during their practicum (Implications for lack of PCK / unfamiliarity with the communicative approach especially when it comes to grammar teaching)**

“When I first started to teach English, it was hard for me to **prepare a lesson plan based on the communicative approach** as I was told in a completely different approach from the one I experienced as a language learner”. (T3)

“I have difficulty **teaching grammar using the communicative approach** because on the one hand I believe that if I don’t explain it explicitly in the same way I was taught, they won’t learn or understand and on the other hand, when I do that, they are simply not interested’. (T2)

“**Grammar is so hard to teach!** It’s difficult for children to understand the structure of a language other than their own, while vocabulary is much easier to teach, you know you can use pictures, or objects for example; with grammar though, it doesn’t work like this. I remember when I tried to teach them the possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns, how hard it was to make them understand the difference. Of course I had to use the traditional method to teach those, that is, I explained them explicitly and in Greek. Of course if you write a couple of examples on the board they will eventually understand, but perhaps this won’t be easy for everybody. (T3)

“I had no problem teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade pupils because they could understand everything I said in English and had no problem following the book. **However, now that I am teaching 4<sup>th</sup> grade pupils whose English is not very good, I find it quite hard to deal with the lesson**”. (T1)

“**The most difficult thing for me was to cope with mixed-ability classes** as I’ve told you before. This is **still a problem** of course but I am more able to handle this now. Another thing was that when I started teaching English I had to teach in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade which meant I had to start from scratch...and **my problem was actually using the new approach**”. (T9)

**“Writing is the most difficult skill for me to teach.** Even in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade where I had some really good students I found it really hard to teach them writing”. (T6)

“I didn’t really have any difficulties with teaching or explaining something to my students. **The only difficulty I had was how to deal with mixed-ability classes. There are always two kinds of students; those who attend private afternoon lessons and those who don’t.** This means that the first group of students knew much more than what was taught in class and were often bored and the second group was completely unfamiliar with the foreign language”. (T7)

**“I had difficulty with activities I could use to teach children English.** Ok I had no problem teaching them and I knew some activities I could use but after some time I had no more ideas. **I needed a bigger repertoire of child-friendly activities. Another** aspect of language teaching that I found hard was **how to make them understand new grammar.** I mean I explained them over and over again the same thing and they just didn’t understand” (T8)

**“I couldn’t estimate the time needed for each activity** and this was quite hard because I didn’t know how many activities I had to prepare and what to include in my lesson plan. Another thing was that **I didn’t know what to tell them or how to introduce each activity.** Another difficulty was my **lack of knowledge of oral activities.** Because following the book, meant doing exercises one after another, and this is something I wanted to avoid. However, I was completely unsuccessful. Sometimes **they just didn’t give me the answer I expected and then I couldn’t continue the activity**”. (S2)

“I wish I had had some knowledge about **how to design instructional material and activities** for the English lesson”. (S6)

**“Managing your time** is one of the most difficult tasks and I believe this can be achieved in time with experience”. S7

## APPENDIX N

STUDENT HIGHER-LEVEL RESEARCH



Graduate School of Education

### Certificate of ethical research approval

#### STUDENT RESEARCH/FIELDWORK/CASEWORK AND DISSERTATION/THESIS

You will need to complete this certificate when you undertake a piece of higher-level research (e.g. Masters, PhD, EdD level).

To activate this certificate you need to first sign it yourself, and then have it signed by your supervisor and finally by the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee.

For further information on ethical educational research access the guidelines on the BERA web site: <http://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/category/publications/guidelines/> and view the School's statement on the 'Student Documents' web site.

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**READ THIS FORM CAREFULLY AND THEN COMPLETE IT ON YOUR COMPUTER** (the form will expand to contain the text you enter). **DO NOT COMPLETE BY HAND**

---

Your name: Stella Kourieos

Your student no: 560027521

Return address for this certificate: 9 Metochiou street, flat 102, 3117 Limassol – Cyprus

Degree/Programme of Study: EdD in TESOL

Project Supervisor(s): Dr Jill Cadorath

Your email address: skourieos@cytanet.com.cy

Tel: 00377 99425520, landline: 00357 25354667

---

I hereby certify that I will abide by the details given overleaf and that I undertake in my dissertation / thesis (delete whichever is inappropriate) to respect the dignity and privacy of those participating in this research.

I confirm that if my research should change radically, I will complete a further form.

Signed:..... Stella Kourieos .....date:.....11/11/2009.....

---

*NB For Masters dissertations, which are marked blind, this first page must **not be included** in your work. It can be kept for your records.*

---



# Certificate of ethical research approval

Your student no: 560027521

---

**Title of your project:** An investigation into the preparation of teachers for language teaching at primary level: Implications for an initial Language Teacher Education programme in line with the European framework.

**Brief description of your research project:**

Following the entry of Cyprus into the European Union and based on the philosophy which underpins the language policy in Europe, the island has been investing heavily in both the promotion and reinforcement of foreign language learning. However, despite the great efforts, major changes and improvements in the area of English language learning in primary state schools, no significant changes have been evident as regards the preparation of English teachers at this level. Therefore the particular study aims to evaluate the existing Primary Teacher Education programme by highlighting potential gaps, weaknesses or strengths as perceived by those directly affected (prospective and serving primary teachers who teach English in State primary schools in Cyprus) and estimating its effectiveness on the overall preparation of primary language teachers. Considering this and the fact that no similar studies involving primary language teachers have been conducted so far in Cyprus, I believe that this study will offer useful insights into the field of pre-service ELT education for teachers at the primary sector and contribute to the design of a more effective programme.

**Give details of the participants in this research (giving ages of any children and/or young people involved):**

- The two inspectresses of English in Primary schools
- Two advisors of English in Primary schools
- All teachers who teach English in Primary state schools.
- A sample of student-teachers from all the four universities in Cyprus where the programme of Primary Teacher Education is offered. Their age will range from around 18-24.

**Give details regarding the ethical issues of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality (with special reference to any children or those with special needs)**

As the interviews cannot be anonymous, participants will be asked to sign a consent form which will assure them that their responses will be treated confidentially and that they have the right to withdraw any information if they wish to. On the consent form, permission for recording the interview will be also asked. Participants will be asked to fill in the questionnaires anonymously. A cover letter will be attached to the questionnaire explaining the purpose of the research project as well as containing information about anonymity and confidentiality.



**Give details of the methods to be used for data collection and analysis and how you would ensure they do not cause any harm, detriment or unreasonable stress:**

Phase one of this research aims to survey the inspectors' and advisors' views on the weaknesses and needs of primary teachers who teach English and their views on what their initial preparation should entail. For this phase semi-structured interviews will be used. Bearing in mind the research questions and based on the data gathered from these interviews, the second phase will involve the formulation of questionnaires which will offer prospective (student-teachers) and serving primary teachers who teach English a "voice" in order to express their own views and needs regarding the provision of pre-service training. At the same time their answers will provide useful feedback about the content of an effective ELT programme. These questionnaires will involve ratings scales, given options and allow for fuller responses if required. In-depth semi-structured interviews will be then conducted with some of these teachers who will agree to be interviewed.

Quantitative data (questionnaires) will be put into the SPSS statistical package to allow for statistical analysis of the information. With the consent of participants, interviews will be recorded and then analysed using content analysis. Differences among views of participants will be explored and cross comparisons made with regard to what kind of knowledge and skills prospective primary teachers should have in order to become effective EFL teachers in the context of Cyprus state schools and how these can be acquired during formal education at pre-service stage.

Data collection is planned to take place between December 2009 and December 2010. After obtaining official permission from *KEEA* (Education Research and Evaluation Centre) to undertake research among teachers of English in primary education, questionnaires will be posted to all primary state schools in Cyprus (only to the second cycle where English is taught) and then hand delivered to the teachers who teach English by the school principal. The teachers will complete them anonymously at their own convenience and without mentioning the name of their school. Then the self-administered questionnaires will be posted to me by the assistant principals, using the stamped envelope enclosed.

Included in the questionnaire there will be a question asking respondents if they would be interested in a follow up interview. This requires a simple  $\surd$  to a yes or no box and those who respond yes will be asked to leave their name and contact details. I will then contact them by phone to arrange a time for the interview.

As all participants are native Greek speakers, interviews will be conducted in Greek involving minimal stress (as far as language-related stress is concerned). Having gained the participant's consent in writing I will use a voice recorder for the recording.

All of the interviewed participants will be asked to validate interview transcripts by checking the accuracy of my translation, as well as interpretations of interviews.

**Give details of any other ethical issues which may arise from this project (e.g. secure storage of videos/recorded interviews/photos/completed questionnaires or special arrangements made for participants with special needs etc.):**

The recorded interviews, questionnaires will be stored securely up to the completion of the study, and they will be destroyed afterwards. Names of participating teachers will remain pseudonymous.



Give details of any exceptional factors, which may raise ethical issues (e.g. potential political or ideological conflicts which may pose danger or harm to participants):

N/A

*This form should now be printed out, signed by you on the first page and sent to your supervisor to sign. Your supervisor will forward this document to the School's **Research Support Office** for the Chair of the School's Ethics Committee to countersign. A unique approval reference will be added and this certificate will be returned to you to be included at the back of your dissertation/thesis.*

*N.B. You should not start the fieldwork part of the project until you have the signature of your supervisor*

**This project has been approved for the period:** December 2009 **until:** December 2010

**By** (above mentioned supervisor's signature): J. Cadzath **date:** 13/4/10

*N.B. To Supervisor: Please ensure that ethical issues are addressed annually in your report and if any changes in the research occurs a further form is completed.*

**SELL unique approval reference:** D/09/10/77

**Signed:** B. Norwell **date:** 20/4/10  
Chair of the School's Ethics Committee

This form is available from <http://education.exeter.ac.uk/students/>



APPENDIX O



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

[Signature]
.....
(Signature of participant )

....15 / 12 / 09.....
(Date)

Sophie Ioannou-Georgiou.....
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s):.....+357 99425520.....

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

.....
OR

.....

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.



APPENDIX P



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

CONSENT FORM

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

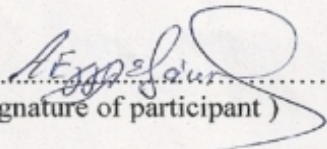
I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

  
.....  
(Signature of participant )

..12 / 01 /10.....  
(Date)

...Androulla Englezaki .....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact phone number of researcher(s):.....99425520.....

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

.....  
OR

.....

## References

- Al-Mekhlafi, A. (2007). The development of Prospective EFL Teachers' Specialist Language Competencies in UAE Universities. *University of Sharjah Journal for Shari'a Sciences & Humanities*, 4(1), 1-27.
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