

## Vulnerable Social Groups and Dictionary Use in Language Learning at School: A Case Study of Roma Pupils in Greece

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**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this study was to explore the relationship of Roma pupils with dictionaries in the context of learning Greek as their first language and German as a second foreign language at school. The study involved sixty-five (65) Roma pupils from the Municipality of Alexandria in Greece, who completed a researcher-designed questionnaire regarding their use of dictionaries at home and at school. While participants recognized the importance of dictionaries in language learning, their actual usage of Greek and German dictionaries remained limited. Additionally, findings revealed a lack of formal instruction on dictionary use within the school environment. These results contribute to the ongoing academic discourse on the role of dictionaries in language teaching and learning, underlining the need to strengthen the vocabulary competence of Roma pupils. This issue holds particular significance within intercultural education, especially in the development of targeted strategies aimed at enhancing educational access and social integration for vulnerable social groups.

**KEYWORDS:** Bilingualism, Dictionary Use, Inclusion, Intercultural Education, Language Teaching and Learning

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### I. INTRODUCTION

This study lies at the intersection of intercultural education and language teaching and learning research. It focuses on the perspectives of Roma students from the Roma community in the Municipality of Alexandria in Greece regarding their use of dictionaries in Greek as a first language and German as a second foreign language. Most of the students in the study come from a settlement (Agios Georgios) in Alexandria, categorized as a "lower-middle-class settlement." These settlements are characterized by permanent homes with basic sanitary infrastructure, but their degradation is often linked to poor public infrastructure, such as road networks (Chatzidimou, Karagiannidou, Papadopoulou, Stamou & Kalogerogianni, 2023: 12-13). This context is crucial for understanding the educational and social challenges faced by Roma students. Roma pupils frequently experience discrimination and marginalization (Kyuchukov & New, 2016), compounded by educational challenges, low academic performance, and linguistic barriers. Previous studies, such as Kalogerogianni (2024), have highlighted the multifactorial challenges Roma pupils face, including educational policies, family practices, and cultural codes, which significantly influence their language competence and academic trajectories. Dictionaries are essential tools for vocabulary acquisition (Engelberg & Lemnitzer, 2004; Schneider, 1993; Zhang, Zu & Zhang, 2021), language learning, and communication (Lew, 2016). They have the potential to significantly improve linguistic competence, communicative ability, and autonomous learning among students (Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018: 33). Dictionary use requires a series of deliberate actions by learners, enabling them to become more independent and responsible in their language learning journey (Gavriilidou & Psaltou-Joycey, 2009: 12).

In Greek schools, English is the primary foreign language, followed by German (or French) as the second foreign language. Despite the recognized importance of dictionaries in language acquisition for both first/native and foreign languages (Tono, 2001), their systematic use in formal education remains limited (e.g., Chatzidimou, 2015a; Pantó-Naszályi, 2013: 249). This study aims to examine how Roma students perceive, use, and are trained to utilize dictionaries in Greek and German language education. Furthermore, it explores the extent to which formal instruction on dictionary use is provided in schools and investigates how socioeconomic factors, teacher training, and access to resources influence dictionary use among Roma students. The study also delves into cultural perceptions and expectations regarding educational tools like dictionaries, analyzing how these factors shape Roma students' engagement with them. By examining these elements, the research seeks to provide practical recommendations for teachers and policymakers to bridge the gap between dictionary availability and effective use in classrooms.

In the context of an emerging field that bridges didactics and language teaching methodology with lexicography, 'dictionary training' (Chatzidimou, 2015b) is recognized as a pivotal pedagogical, linguistic, and instructional tool. It plays a critical role in both the educational process and the broader course of language acquisition and knowledge development (Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018). A dictionary is not merely a reference resource but also a foundational instrument for language acquisition, vital in both academic and everyday contexts. Its relevance extends beyond lexicography into meta-lexicography, which advances theoretical and practical research on dictionary use (Hartmann, 2001). At its core, dictionary training refers to instructional practices and strategies aimed at developing students' dictionary awareness and reference skills. These practices enable learners to use dictionaries effectively as tools for language learning and communication. Based on specific principles, dictionary training encompasses a range of pedagogical activities designed to familiarize learners with both the content and structure of dictionaries (Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018: 29-43). These activities teach students how to utilize dictionaries for multiple purposes, including vocabulary acquisition, language accuracy, bilingual and multilingual competence, critical thinking, and digital literacy. Through this approach, it is expected that students will incorporate the strategy of dictionary use (Gavriilidou, 2012) into their learning repertoire, allowing it to support their lifelong learning process.

However, research highlights a persistent issue: dictionary users often overlook key components of dictionaries, such as prefaces, instructions, and indexes (Chatzidimou, 2007; Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018: 105). In pedagogical contexts, teaching dictionary use must include explicit instruction on navigating these components to maximize their utility, whether in print or digital formats. Moreover, dictionary training aims to cultivate independent learning skills, empowering students to view dictionaries as essential, ongoing resources for self-directed improvement and lifelong learning, as previously noted.

In the realm of pedagogical lexicography, the relationship between dictionary use and dictionary training is particularly emphasized. This connection has given rise to a specialized branch of research (Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018: 30) that focuses on:

- Teaching methods and practices related to dictionary use.
- The profile of dictionary users.
- The development of dictionary usage skills.
- The integration of dictionaries into the educational system.

The need for integrating dictionaries into education is widely recognized, alongside the importance of training both students and teachers in their effective use (Chatzidimou, 2008; Tremblay, Plante & Fréchette-Simard, 2023). In Greece, recent studies underline the critical necessity of incorporating dictionaries into the educational curriculum (Chatzidimou, 2008: 115). This includes familiarizing pupils with different dictionary types, their elements, and effective usage strategies to enhance language learning outcomes. While teachers often demonstrate familiarity with dictionary use, they frequently require structured guidance from key stakeholders— including university departments responsible for their training and educational authorities— to integrate dictionaries effectively into their teaching practices (Chatzidimou, 2015a; Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018).

A notable disparity exists between the intended pedagogical use of dictionaries in language instruction and their practical implementation in the classroom. Chatzidimou and Papadopoulou (2018: 106) highlighted this contradiction: although German language teachers in Greece recognize dictionaries as essential teaching tools, students are rarely taught systematically how to use them. Thus, from a pedagogical and didactic perspective, it is particularly important and useful that, in recent years, practical proposals for integrating dictionaries into language teaching have emerged (e.g., Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018: 161-174; Efthymiou & Mitsiaki, 2007). Dictionaries, particularly in language teaching, are crucial tools not only for native speakers but also for foreign language learners. They serve as key resources for expanding vocabulary, clarifying usage, and improving accuracy (Engelberg & Lemnitzer, 2004; Schneider, 1993). This becomes even more significant when addressing students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Research emphasizes that both printed and electronic dictionaries are essential for developing language skills and promoting lifelong learning (Dwaik, 2015; Lew, 2016; Tremblay, Plante & Fréchette-Simard, 2023). To address these challenges, comprehensive teacher training programs, student empowerment strategies, and curriculum adjustments are necessary. These initiatives must ensure that dictionaries are perceived not merely as supplementary tools but as integral resources in the language learning journey.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the views, attitudes, and practices of Roma students in Greece regarding the use of dictionaries in the context of learning Greek as their first language and German as a second foreign language. Through the analysis of their responses to a researcher-designed questionnaire, the study sought to explore the relationship and experiences of these students with dictionaries, both at home and in school settings.

**Specifically, the research addressed the following key research questions:**

1. Possession of Greek and German Dictionaries: To what extent do Roma students own Greek and German dictionaries at home? Preliminary findings suggest that dictionary ownership remains minimal in these environments.
2. Challenges in Dictionary Use: What are the difficulties students encounter when using dictionaries, and why do they rarely seek assistance to overcome these obstacles?
3. School-Based Dictionary Use: How frequently are dictionaries used in Greek and German language lessons at school, and what factors contribute to their (limited) utilization?
4. Teacher Support and Encouragement: To what degree do teachers provide guidance and encouragement for dictionary use in the classroom? Findings suggest a lack of systematic teacher support in this regard.
5. Preference for Dictionary Format: Do Roma students exhibit a preference for electronic dictionaries over printed ones, and how does this preference influence their usage patterns?

By addressing these research questions, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the role of dictionaries in the educational experience of Roma pupils. It also seeks to identify key barriers and potential areas for intervention, with the goal of promoting more effective dictionary use practices both at home and in school environments.

## III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the present study, quantitative research methodology was employed, involving the collection and analysis of numerical data to provide a comprehensive overview of the research question (Bryman, 2017). The focus was on exploring the use of dictionaries by a specific group of students—Roma students—who possess distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics. Data regarding the use of Greek and German dictionaries were collected through a structured questionnaire, specifically designed for the purposes of this research. This tool was deemed the most appropriate instrument for investigating dictionary use in educational contexts, aligning with established research practices (Nesi, 2013). The questionnaire consisted of a total of thirty-two (32) questions, which covered the demographic data of the participants (see below) and five thematic sections: a) possession and frequency of dictionary use at home, b) degree of difficulty in using dictionaries and help from the family, c) frequency of use of dictionaries at school, d) Teachers' attitudes towards using or encouraging students to use dictionaries, e) Students' attitudes towards the use of dictionaries (preference-satisfaction). Applying Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) as a measure of reliability for the questionnaire (Roever & Pakiti, 2018: 221), it was found that the alpha coefficient was 0.880, indicating that the research instrument was highly internally consistent. This analysis was conducted on the total 52 items of the questionnaire, excluding the questions related to personal data.

## IV. PARTICIPANTS

The study involved sixty-five (65) primary and secondary school students from Roma communities in Alexandria, Greece. The sample selection was based on two key inclusion criteria: a) Enrollment in German as a second foreign language classes at school. b) Attendance at partner schools participating in the “Supportive Interventions in Roma Communities to Enhance Access and Reduce Dropout from Education by Children and Adolescents in Central and Western Macedonia” project, implemented by the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki from 2021 to 2023 (<http://roma-mak.del.auth.gr>). The feasibility sampling method was chosen due to its suitability for studying critical cases, such as students from Roma communities. While this sample cannot be considered universally representative of all Roma students, it can provide valuable insights for communities with similar demographic and cultural characteristics to those in Alexandria. This sampling approach allows the findings to offer context-specific insights while maintaining relevance and transferability to similar educational and social contexts.

Regarding the student profile, the sample consisted of 52.3% girls (N=34) and 47.7% boys (N=31). Most students attended Grade 5 (43.1%, N=28) and Grade 6 (41.5%, N=27) of primary school, while notably smaller

percentage were enrolled in Grade 1 (9.2%, N=6) and Grade 2 (6.2%, N=4) of middle school. In terms of language used for communication at home, students reported that their families predominantly use a version of Romani (41%, N=25), followed by Greek (36.1%, N=22), while a smaller group indicated they use both languages (Greek and Romani) (23%, N=14). Regarding learning German as a foreign language, the overwhelming majority of students (90.3%, N=56) stated that they only study German at school, with a much smaller percentage attending German classes at a foreign language center (6.5%, N=4) or receiving private lessons (3.2%, N=2). Concerning internet access, 80.6% of students indicated they have access to the internet, while 19.4% reported no access. Finally, regarding the availability of libraries, a significant 93.5% of students confirmed the presence of a school library, while only 6.5% stated otherwise. However, the situation is reversed when it comes to home libraries, with 88.7% of students reporting they did not have a library at home, and only 11.3% indicating that they did have one.

### V. RESULTS

The data analysis was carried out using the statistical package SPSS (28 version) and in this section the data obtained from the responses of the research subjects to the questions concerning their views, attitudes and practices on the various thematic and research hypotheses of the research are presented in the form of tables. For each thematic section of the questionnaire, we present and comment on the data that we believe can contribute to the formation of a clearer and more complete picture of the research topic.

**First thematic section: Possession and frequency of dictionary use at home :** The survey data revealed that the majority of the Roma pupils did not own a dictionary for either Greek (63.1%) or German (86.2%) at home (Table 1). Among those who reported having access to dictionaries, Greek dictionaries (both printed and electronic) were used more frequently than German dictionaries. However, the majority of students indicated that they did not use dictionaries at home at all (Table 2). As shown in Table 2, 73.8% of students reported never using a printed Greek dictionary at home, and 84.6% reported the same for a printed German dictionary. Conversely, only 26.1% and 15.4% of students reported sparse or frequent use of printed Greek and German dictionaries, respectively. A similar trend was observed in the use of electronic dictionaries. Specifically, 70.8% of Roma pupils reported never using an electronic Greek dictionary at home, while 81.5% indicated the same for an electronic German dictionary. On the other hand, 29.3% of students reported sparse or frequent use of the electronic Greek dictionary, compared to 18.5% for the electronic German dictionary.

**Table 1: Dictionary Possession**

		Frequency	Percentage
Possession of a Greek dictionary	Yes	24	36,9%
	No	41	63,1%
	Total	65	100,0%
Possession of a German dictionary	Yes	9	13,8%
	No	56	86,2%
	Total	65	100,0%
Possession of a dictionary of another language	Yes	7	10,8%
	No	58	89,2%
	Total	65	100,0%

**Table 2: Frequency of dictionary use at home**

		Frequency	Percentage
Printed Greek Dictionary	Never	48	73,8%
	Rarely	3	4,6%
	Sometimes	6	9,2%
	Often	3	4,6%
	Very often	5	7,7%
Printed German Dictionary	Never	55	84,6%
	Rarely	5	7,7%
	Sometimes	4	6,2%
	Often	1	1,5%
	Very often	0	0,0%

Electronic Greek Dictionary	Never	46	70,8%
	Rarely	4	6,2%
	Sometimes	7	10,8%
	Often	5	7,7%
	Very often	3	4,6%
Electronic German Dictionary	Never	53	81,5%
	Rarely	4	6,2%
	Sometimes	4	6,2%
	Often	3	4,6%
	Very often	1	1,5%

**Second thematic section: Degree of difficulty in using dictionaries and help from the family :** The distribution of responses from the students indicated that they generally faced difficulties in using dictionaries. As expected, the level of difficulty in using both the printed and electronic German dictionaries (relative percentages: 43.8% and 32.8%, respectively) was higher compared to the corresponding level of difficulty with the printed and electronic Greek dictionaries (23.4% and 13.1%, respectively), as shown in Table 4. Furthermore, as illustrated in Table 3, the majority of students reported that they never studied the preface or instructions of either the printed or electronic dictionaries in Greek or German (68.3% and 70.3%, respectively). This lack of engagement with the provided instructions might have contributed to their difficulties in effectively using the dictionaries. Finally, most students in the sample stated that they did not seek help from family members when using dictionaries. In cases where they did seek assistance, they were more likely to turn to their mother (4.7%) or sibling (6.3%) rather than their father (3.1%) or another family member (3.1%), as shown in Table 5.

**Table 3: Level of difficulty in using the dictionary**

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
Difficulty using a printed Greek dictionary	25	11	10	3	15
	39,1%	17,2%	15,6%	4,7%	23,4%
Difficulty using an electronic Greek dictionary	35	10	4	4	8
	57,4%	16,4%	6,6%	6,6%	13,1%
Difficulty using a printed German dictionary	16	4	7	9	28
	25,0%	6,3%	10,9%	14,1%	43,8%
Difficulty using an electronic German dictionary	23	5	6	7	20
	37,7%	8,2%	9,8%	11,5%	32,8%

**Table 4: Frequency of study of preface and instructions**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Study of the preface/instructions of the printed dictionary	43	12	5	2	1
	68,3 %	19,0%	7,9%	3,2%	1,6%
Study of the preface/instructions of the electronic dictionary	45	11	6	0	2
	70,3 %	17,2%	9,4%	0,0%	3,1%

**Table 5: Frequency of help from a family member**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Mother	39	12	8	2	3
	60,9%	18,8%	12,5%	3,1%	4,7%
Father	43	14	3	2	2
	67,2%	21,9%	4,7%	3,1%	3,1%
Brother/sister	47	8	2	3	4

	73,4%	12,5%	3,1%	4,7%	6,3%
Another member of family	51	6	2	3	2
	79,7%	9,4%	3,1%	4,7%	3,1%

**Third thematic section: Frequency of use of dictionaries at school**

The distribution of respondents' answers indicated that dictionaries, whether Greek or German, were not extensively used during school lessons, particularly in German language classes (relative percentages: 67.2% and 90.6%, respectively), as shown in Table 6.

Regarding the frequency of use of printed and electronic dictionaries in class, the data in Table 7 revealed that, in Greek language lessons, the printed dictionary was sometimes used in 19.4% of cases, while the electronic dictionary was used in 9.7%. In contrast, in German language lessons, the printed dictionary was sometimes used in 11.1% of cases, and the electronic dictionary in 4.8%.

**Table 6: Using a dictionary at school**

	Yes	No
Greek dictionary	21 32,8%	43 67,2%
German dictionary	6 9,4%	58 90,6%

**Table 7: Frequency of use of the dictionary at school**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Frequency of use of the printed dictionary in Greek lessons	39 62,9%	4 6,5%	12 19,4%	4 6,5%	3 4,8%
Frequency of use of the electronic dictionary in Greek lessons	47 75,8%	5 8,1%	6 9,7%	3 4,8%	1 1,6%
Frequency of use of the printed dictionary in German lessons	52 82,5%	2 3,2%	7 11,1%	1 1,6%	1 1,6%
Frequency of use of the electronic dictionary in German lessons	54 85,7%	5 7,9%	3 4,8%	1 1,6%	0 0,0%

**Fourth thematic section: Teachers' attitudes towards using or encouraging students to use dictionaries**

According to the responses of the students regarding teachers' attitudes towards using or encouraging the use of dictionaries, it appeared that teachers did not integrate dictionaries into language lessons or encourage students to use them. This included a lack of explanation on how to use dictionaries and the absence of dictionary-based assignments aimed at familiarizing students with their use. More specifically, in terms of how often teachers encouraged students to use dictionaries, the data in Table 8 revealed that a very small percentage of teachers often or very often encouraged students to use either the printed Greek dictionary (11.3% and 6.5%, respectively) or the electronic Greek dictionary (9.7% and 4.8%, respectively). Similarly, low percentages were observed for the printed German dictionary (4.8% often and 6.5% very often) and the electronic German dictionary (9.8% and 1.6%, respectively). The data in Table 9 further showed that teachers rarely explained the use of dictionaries to students. Only 4.8% of students reported that teachers explained the use of the printed Greek dictionary to a large extent, and the same percentage applied to the electronic Greek dictionary. In the case of the German dictionaries, 4.8% of students reported extensive explanations for the printed dictionary, while only 3.2% did so for the electronic dictionary. Finally, teachers did not frequently assign dictionary-based tasks. As shown in Table 10, only 14.3% of teachers sometimes assigned tasks based on the printed Greek dictionary, and 15.9% did so for the electronic Greek dictionary. For German, these percentages were even lower, with 7.8% and 3.2% of teachers sometimes assigning tasks based on the printed and electronic German dictionaries, respectively.

**Table 8: Frequency of encouragement to use a dictionary by the teacher**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Printed dictionary – Greek teacher	32	10	9	7	4
	51,6%	16,1%	14,5%	11,3%	6,5%
Electronic dictionary – Greek teacher	34	10	9	6	3
	54,8%	16,1%	14,5%	9,7%	4,8%
Printed dictionary – German teacher	38	8	9	3	4
	61,3%	12,9%	14,5%	4,8%	6,5%
Electronic dictionary – German teacher	45	4	5	6	1
	73,8%	6,6%	8,2%	9,8%	1,6%

**Table 9: Degree of explanation of dictionary use by the teacher**

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
Printed dictionary explanation grade – Greek teacher	38	6	12	3	3
	61,3%	9,7%	19,4%	4,8%	4,8%
Electronic dictionary explanation grade – Greek teacher	44	7	8	1	3
	69,8%	11,1%	12,7%	1,6%	4,8%
Printed dictionary explanation grade – German teacher	43	4	8	5	3
	68,3%	6,3%	12,7%	7,9%	4,8%
Electronic dictionary explanation grade – German teacher	47	4	8	2	2
	74,6%	6,3%	12,7%	3,2%	3,2%

**Table 10: Frequency of assignment of dictionary-based tasks by the teacher**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
Assignments based on the printed dictionary – Greek teacher	38	12	9	1	3
	60,3%	19,0%	14,3%	1,6%	4,8%
Assignments based on the electronic dictionary – Greek teacher	40	9	10	3	1
	63,5%	14,3%	15,9%	4,8%	1,6%
Assignments based on the printed dictionary – German teacher	44	9	5	3	3
	68,8%	14,1%	7,8%	4,7%	4,7%
Assignments based on the electronic dictionary – German teacher	49	8	2	2	2
	77,8%	12,7%	3,2%	3,2%	3,2%

**Fifth thematic section: Students' attitudes towards the use of dictionaries :** The distribution of responses from the sample students regarding their own attitudes towards the use of dictionaries indicated that they had mixed views on the contribution of dictionaries to language learning. As shown in Table 11, 26.6% of the students stated that using a dictionary contributed to a great extent to better learning of Greek, while the same percentage (26.6%) believed that using a dictionary did not help at all in learning Greek. This result may be attributed to the fact that students might not associate the use of a dictionary with learning Greek, as it is likely considered their mother tongue, and they had not been trained in dictionary use during the course. However, similar findings were observed for German. Specifically, 15.9% of the students considered that using a dictionary contributed to a great extent to better learning of German, while 39.7% believed that it did not help at all in learning German. Finally, according to the data in Table 12, students in the sample expressed a preference for electronic dictionaries on mobile devices, with 48.4% favoring them for Greek and 52.6% for German, over printed dictionaries or electronic dictionaries on computers.

**Table 11: Contribution of dictionary use**

	Not at all	To a small extent	To a moderate extent	To a large extent	To a very large extent
Better learning of the Greek language	17	11	12	7	17
	26,6%	17,2%	18,8%	10,9%	26,6%
Better learning of the German language	25	7	10	11	10
	39,7%	11,1%	15,9%	17,5%	15,9%

**Table 12: Preference in dictionary type**

	Printed dictionary	Electronic dictionary on computer	Electronic dictionary on mobile
Preference – Greek dictionary	22	10	30
	35,5%	16,1%	48,4%
Preference – German dictionary	15	12	30
	26,3%	21,1%	52,6%

**VI. DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study offer significant insights into the relationship between Roma students and their use of Greek and German dictionaries, both at home and in the school environment. By analyzing the data across five thematic sections, key patterns and challenges have emerged, shedding light on broader implications for educational policy and pedagogical practices.

**1. Possession and frequency of dictionary use at home :** The data revealed a significant lack of dictionary ownership among Roma students, with 63.1% not owning a Greek dictionary and an even larger percentage (86.2%) not owning a German dictionary. Furthermore, the frequency of dictionary use at home was notably low for both printed and electronic dictionaries. These findings highlight socioeconomic barriers and limited accessibility to essential educational resources in these communities. While printed dictionaries are traditionally viewed as important tools for language acquisition, their minimal integration into daily study habits suggests gaps in both awareness and training. As an indicative point, it is worth noting that in an earlier study conducted within the Greek educational context with 192 primary school students in the city of Alexandroupolis, who were not of Roma origin, it was found that the percentage of households possessing a Greek dictionary and a foreign language dictionary exceeded 80% (Chatzidimou, 2006: 479).

The preference for electronic dictionaries, particularly on mobile devices, reflects a technological shift in dictionary use. A similar preference for electronic dictionaries over printed ones has also been observed among German language teachers in Greece, in a study involving 236 GFL teachers in primary and secondary schools (Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2017: 345). However, this preference also raises questions about users’ digital literacy skills and whether they are adequately trained to fully utilize these tools. These findings align with existing research (Tremblay, Plante & Fréchette-Simard, 2023), which underscores the importance of structured dictionary training practices to overcome these challenges.

**2. Degree of difficulty in using dictionaries and help from family :** The study indicated that students faced considerable challenges in using dictionaries effectively, with higher levels of difficulty reported for German dictionaries compared to Greek ones. Additionally, a significant proportion of students did not study the prefaces or instructions in either printed or electronic dictionaries, which impeded their ability to understand and navigate these resources. This finding appears to align with results from other studies involving different participants, such as 329 prospective Greek language teachers (Chatzidimou, 2013: 444), 185 prospective foreign language teachers (specializing in English, German, and French) (Chatzidimou, 2014: 154), and 236 in-service German language teachers (Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018: 105). Therefore, the lack of utilization of the preface and instructions—indicative of insufficient training in dictionary use—seems to affect Roma students in this study but is not exclusive to them.



The limited involvement of parents in supporting dictionary use further compounded these difficulties. Mothers and siblings were cited as the most common sources of help, while fathers and other family members were less involved. This suggests that traditional gender roles may influence parental engagement in academic support activities. At the same time, this finding highlights a phenomenon particularly common in Roma families—the absence of paternal involvement. These results emphasize the need for targeted interventions, including training sessions for both students and families, to enhance dictionary skills and encourage greater parental involvement in language education.

**3. Frequency of dictionary use at school :** The data showed a limited integration of dictionaries into classroom activities, particularly in German lessons, where 90.6% of students reported not using dictionaries at all. The frequency of dictionary use in Greek lessons was slightly better but remained insufficient. These findings suggest that teachers may not prioritize dictionary use as part of their instructional strategies. This aligns with earlier studies (Chatzidimou, 2015a), which identified a gap between the theoretical recognition of dictionary importance and its practical implementation in teaching practices. To address this, schools should incorporate dictionary-focused tasks and activities into the curriculum and provide teacher training workshops to build competence in integrating dictionaries effectively into language lessons.

**4. Teachers' attitudes towards using or encouraging students to use dictionaries :** Teacher attitudes and practices played a crucial role in determining how frequently students used dictionaries. The findings revealed that only a small percentage of teachers regularly encouraged students to use either printed or electronic dictionaries. Similarly, explicit instruction on effective dictionary use was provided by only a few educators. These results indicate that dictionary training is often overlooked in teacher education programs, leaving educators insufficiently prepared to incorporate dictionary-based learning strategies into their classrooms. This observation aligns with earlier research (Chatzidimou & Papadopoulou, 2018: 106) and highlights the urgent need for professional development initiatives focusing on dictionary pedagogy. Furthermore, teachers rarely assigned dictionary-based tasks. The absence of structured, regular opportunities for students to engage with dictionaries in meaningful ways limited their potential as valuable tools for language learning and skill development.

**5. Students' attitudes towards the use of dictionaries :** Student attitudes towards dictionaries appeared to be mixed. While some students recognized the dictionary as a valuable tool for improving their language skills, a significant portion did not perceive it as helpful. This ambivalence may stem from the lack of formal instruction on dictionary use, leading students to view dictionaries as static references rather than dynamic learning tools. Moreover, students showed a clear preference for electronic dictionaries on mobile devices over printed ones. This preference signals a shift in learning habits but also raises concerns about whether students possess the necessary digital skills to utilize these resources effectively. These findings highlight the need for modern, technology-integrated approaches to dictionary training, aligning instructional methods with students' preferences and technological habits.

## VII. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study shed light on critical issues regarding the use of dictionaries by Roma students in Greece, both at home and in the school environment. While the importance of dictionaries in language acquisition is widely acknowledged, significant barriers persist, preventing their effective use. These barriers span across socioeconomic factors, insufficient teacher training, lack of parental support, and limited integration of dictionaries into the school curriculum. One of the primary limitations of this study lies in its reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce biases in the responses. Additionally, the sample size was limited to one geographic region, restricting the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the sample to include Roma students from different regions of Greece and adopt a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights from interviews or focus groups. Addressing these limitations, the study offers several recommendations to improve dictionary use among Roma students:

- **Access and Availability:** Ensure that students have better access to both printed and electronic dictionaries at home and in school. This includes financial support for families who cannot afford educational resources and funding initiatives for schools in underprivileged areas.

- **Teacher Training Programs:** Introduce systematic training sessions for teachers focusing on dictionary pedagogy. Teachers need to be equipped with practical strategies for incorporating dictionaries into their lesson plans and creating engaging activities that encourage frequent dictionary use.
- **Parental Involvement:** Develop family-oriented workshops aimed at educating parents on the importance of dictionaries and how they can assist their children in using them effectively. Special attention should be given to empowering mothers, who were identified as the primary source of support in this study.
- **Integration into the Curriculum:** The use of dictionaries should be systematically embedded into the school curriculum for both Greek and German language lessons. Activities that promote dictionary-based tasks must become a routine part of classroom teaching.
- **Digital Literacy Skills:** As electronic dictionaries on mobile devices are preferred by students, there is an urgent need to improve digital literacy skills. Schools must offer dedicated training sessions to ensure students can effectively navigate and use digital dictionaries as learning tools.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Address cultural perceptions and biases surrounding dictionary use within Roma communities. Awareness campaigns could help emphasize the dictionary's value as a tool for self-empowerment and lifelong learning.

In conclusion, overcoming these barriers requires a multi-dimensional approach, involving teachers, parents, policymakers, and students themselves. By addressing these limitations and implementing the recommended strategies, it will be possible to unlock the full potential of dictionaries as powerful tools for language acquisition, academic achievement, and social integration among Roma students in Greece.

## **VIII. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study highlight the limited use and understanding of dictionaries among Roma students in the Municipality of Alexandria, particularly in the context of learning Greek as a first language and German as a second foreign language. While dictionaries are recognized as valuable tools for language acquisition, the students' responses revealed minimal exposure to systematic dictionary use in both home and school settings. This gap is exacerbated by the lack of explicit instruction on dictionary usage and the limited availability of dictionaries in their environments. The data suggest that although electronic dictionaries, particularly on mobile devices, are slightly preferred over printed ones, overall engagement with dictionaries remains low. Students face significant challenges in effectively utilizing these resources, compounded by insufficient support from educators and family members. These findings underscore the necessity for targeted interventions, such as teacher training programs and curricular adjustments, to integrate dictionaries as essential tools in language learning for socially vulnerable groups.

To address these disparities, schools must adopt proactive strategies to familiarize students with dictionary use. This includes not only incorporating dictionaries into language lessons but also fostering a supportive home environment that encourages independent practice. Bridging the gap between intent and implementation would allow dictionaries to serve as a bridge for Roma students, enhancing their access to educational and societal opportunities while advancing intercultural education and inclusion. Consistent with the findings of other studies (Kalogerogianni, 2024), the present study underscores the need for targeted, context-sensitive interventions that address not only linguistic barriers but also socio-cultural factors affecting Roma students' educational experiences. The insights from this research contribute to the broader discourse on effective educational strategies for multicultural classrooms. Future studies could explore similar interventions in other vulnerable communities, comparing methodologies and outcomes to develop comprehensive approaches to language teaching and learning.

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