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Primary Teachers’ Perceptions and Attitudes on the Status of Experiential Learning in Outdoor Language Teaching in Cyprus

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Outdoor education is considered to be a recent teaching approach and method in a general educational framework, which is related to learning through authentic places and different direct experiences. However, the learning process within the educational system in Cyprus is mainly based on traditional models of teaching. Despite that fact, a modified society established the necessity for a new educational curriculum, which was implemented in 2010. Thus, the current research is focused on a curriculum-related study on outdoor learning and teaching, based on experiential learning in primary schools in Cyprus. Specifically, the focal point is on teachers’ perceptions regarding the status of experiential learning within the Greek language curriculum and the possibilities of implementing outdoor language activities, in order to enhance students’ learning. Through a qualitative approach, this research included analysis of the data extracted from ten semi-structured synchronous online interviews with primary teachers. The data were analysed thematically and summarized in five themes related to the connections between outdoor learning, experiential learning and language teaching. In particular, the relevant findings demonstrated that experiential learning is mainly presented on a theoretical base through the language curriculum and that outdoor language activities, although they can enhance the implementation of more efficient lessons, are limited. The results reveal primary teachers’ basic knowledge on the field of outdoor education, as they additionally noted some important barriers of outdoor learning, such as time limitations, lack of support and the traditional way of thinking. Thus, they pointed out the necessity of applying significant changes that will support the new Greek language curriculum and its basic principles. Additionally, the teachers acknowledged several benefits of outdoor language teaching mainly related to the students’ personal and social development. The above findings contribute to the current limited scientific knowledge, concerning the practice of outdoor education in primary level in Cyprus. To conclude, the results of the specific study are focused on the perceptions of the ten participants, so they cannot be generalized. Therefore, further research on the related field would be important for a wider investigation of outdoor language learning within the Cypriot educational system.

Outlook language teaching, experiential learning, new Greek language curriculum, Cyprus, benefits, barriers, primary education, teachers’ perceptions, attitudes, experiences, critical literacy, teaching approach
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the problem

As a general truth, the Cypriot educational system calls for the need of multi-faceted changes and implementation of different teaching approaches, which respond to the requirements and challenges of the society (MEC, 2010). Additionally, the accession of Cyprus in European Union in 2004 had an important impact for many changes on cultural and educational level (Hajisoteriou et al., 2012). Thus, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC, 2010c) launched the educational reform of the current system in 2004. Nevertheless, the educational change was grounded in the summer of 2008 with the reform of a new curriculum in both primary and secondary education (Phillipou, 2010 cited by Hajisoteriou et al., 2012).

Within a European society, new discourses and theories are being highlighted and reflected upon the new curriculum; discourses related to intercultural education and multiculturalism are emerged. Accordingly, the educational school system is flooded by different theoretical and practical principles, which support those discourses. Hence, beyond other valuable philosophical aspects, the new educational curriculum is based on critical literacy and experiential learning (MEC, 2010c). According to Breunig (2005) the educational theories of experiential education and critical pedagogy are interconnected in several ways. However, critical pedagogy is based more on theoretical principles rather than practical specifications. Additionally, theory is often conceived as an abstract idea, while practice engages the part of action, which transforms the theory to actual practical implementations. Therefore, both fields of experiential education and critical pedagogy deal with an important key issue, which is their practical implementation (Estes, 2004). According to Itin (1999), experiential education is perceived more as a philosophy of education, rather than a teaching approach and strategy, while experiential learning is based on direct experiences of the individual and therefore to their empirical and practical application.

Regarding the new curriculum, critical pedagogy and experiential education are supported not only through the language lesson, but through all the teaching subjects. Consequently, critical literacy and experiential learning are enhanced respectively. However, the Cypriot educational system still principally remains on traditional teaching methods and practices, even though the recent reform of the curriculum is an attempt to incorporate a more progressive form of education. Therefore, the status of experiential learning through the Greek language curriculum is based
mainly on indoor practical activities and experiences, as language teaching is a more theoretical teaching subject. Thus, it needs to move from a theoretical to the practical basis and be on the central focus of learning beyond the lessons in the classroom.

Furthermore, an alternative educational approach, which has been the area of interest for many studies conducted within the educational sphere over the past few decades, is outdoor education. While a great deal has been written about the meaning of outdoor education, its terminology is often problematic, due to the diverse ways that researchers refer to this term. Accordingly, it is considered as a multi-faceted term within a huge historical and educational context. Briefly, outdoor education as a teaching approach and method enhances experiential learning and supports practical activities that are based on learners’ experiences and their direct interactions with the environment. Furthermore, the status of experiential learning within the realm of outdoor education is based on outdoor practical activities and learning. Nevertheless, in the Cypriot educational community, outdoor education is not a well-known teaching approach. Thus, outdoor activities are limited to scheduled educational visits, including visits to museums, parks and environmental centers. Additionally, a general view from the current educational system reveals an uncertain connection between outdoor education and language teaching, while a matching between outdoor education and mainly environmental education is apparent.

To sum up, it would be a challenge for the Cypriot educational system to deal with outdoor education through all the teaching subjects and especially language teaching. Besides, in this way the status of experiential learning would be enforced more and move from indoor practices to outdoor implementations with a parallel impulse on supporting more effective lessons and an actuation to progressive teaching methods, which is what a multicultural society needs.

**Research aim and objectives**

The current research is focused on a curriculum-related study on outdoor language learning and teaching based on experiential learning in primary schools in Cyprus. Specifically, the focus is on primary teachers’ perceptions regarding the status of experiential learning within the language curriculum and the possibilities of implementing outdoor activities, in order to enhance students’ learning and achieve the related goals. In short, it examines the possible connections between outdoor education, experiential learning and language teaching in Cypriot primary schools.

For a better guidance to the main aim of the study, the following research questions have been formulated:
1. How do the teachers interpret the connection between language teaching and experiential learning?
2. How do the teachers interpret the connection between outdoor language teaching and experiential learning?
3. What are the teachers’ practical experiences in outdoor language teaching based on experiential learning?
4. Which are the teachers’ perceptions about the benefits and barriers of outdoor language teaching?

The above research questions are connected with the three basic objectives of the current study as following:

**Objective 1:** Primary teachers’ perceptions on the status of experiential learning in language teaching (Research question: 1)

**Objective 2:** Primary teachers’ perceptions on the status of experiential learning in outdoor language teaching and their practical experiences (Research questions: 2 & 3)

**Objective 3:** Primary teachers’ perceptions on the benefits and impediments of outdoor language teaching (Research question: 4)

The answers to the aforementioned research questions are extracted by analyzing thematically ten personal interviews with primary teachers. Accordingly, the related themes are connected with the research questions and objectives of the current study, in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relevant findings.

**Research contribution**

At first, the findings of this research can be helpful for professionals in various disciplines whose expertise is related with schools in Cyprus and specifically primary language educators. In particular, by investigating the connection between critical literacy, experiential learning and outdoor education as a way to strengthen the curriculum, the teachers can structure their lessons plans based on a new philosophy, which promotes important aspects on students’ learning. Also, regarding the intersection of these aspects, it can help educators to achieve a better understanding on its significance through a language lesson. Additionally, this connection provides a different
idea of teaching language by specifying the meaning of the “extended classroom”, since the majority of the Cypriot teachers are not familiar with outdoor education.

Moreover, headmasters in Cypriot primary schools can use the findings of the research, in order to permit the implementation of outdoor language activities. Additionally, they can put forward possible suggestions and recommendations to the responsible people of Ministry of Education and Culture, who are in charge of the educational curriculum.

Furthermore, the persons with competence of structuring sampled lesson plans for the educators regarding the language field through the curriculum could be informed with different ideas and concepts. Since outdoor education, its aspects and the way of approaching different teaching subjects are new ideas for the curriculum, an outcome of these “hidden” connections, is a good starting point to follow a more open-minded path, where educators will be aware of the significant learning outcomes. Additionally, primary school inspectors could use the findings of this research to motivate teachers to use outdoor language activities, since their role is to inform and help teachers on their teaching practices through seminars, workshops and practical lessons. Therefore, it is significant that the schools need to have school inspectors, who are knowledgeable about outdoor education, so they can provide educators with experience in alternative teaching and learning approaches, through their practical training and informing.

Furthermore, beyond the educational system, the results can be helpful for the parents, who have not been updated and/or feel insecure about the implementation of activities out of the school classroom. Additionally, they can be interesting for the parents, who are open in alternatives teaching methods and therefore to promote these ideas to others.

To sum up, within the bibliographic background, it is a fact that there is a limited amount of researches concerning primary teachers’ perceptions about outdoor language teaching in Cyprus. Thus, this research is carried out with a specific methodology, in order to reveal ten primary teachers’ perceptions on outdoor education and its practices in language teaching and therefore to contribute to the current inadequate information and knowledge related to outdoor activities in primary schools in Cyprus. However, the possibility of generalizing the results is limited, since the sample is small. Hence, it cannot be representative at a general level. Despite that fact, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), the outcomes of such research can be adequate and interesting.
Summary

The current chapter presents the relevant background of outdoor education, outdoor language learning and the aspect of experiential learning through language lessons. As indicated in the introduction, outdoor education is a multi-faceted educational concept, which perceives different definitions and interpretations in the existing curriculum. In an effort to outline the term outdoor education in relation to the theoretical background of the current study, a discussion about the most appropriate definitions is carried out. Thus, the different definitions of outdoor education are framed to the related ones with the main aim of the current study and its additional parameters; experiential learning and outdoor language teaching. Furthermore, the importance of studying teachers’ perceptions within the realm of studies related to educational topics, as well as the perceptions of barriers and benefits of outdoor education are mentioned under the last heading.

The concept of outdoor education

The historical background of outdoor education

Looking back to the Stone-Age and Neolithic “revolution”, man was a hunter-gatherer and he was learning through hands-on experiences, which were related to his need of living and surviving (Harman, 2002). Therefore, man for approximately 200 agricultural generations was tied to the spoken language and the oral tradition. Continuously, this has been changed during the last three generations, where the industrial revolution replaced humans and animals as the main sources of production with technological achievements and motors primarily powered from gas energy (Stearns, 2013). Therefore, humankind faces and experiences the world of technology and passes through the industrial society to the post-modern information society (Kumar, 2005). Within this society and the realm of education the written word, the picture media and the computer technology take place (Jewitt, 2006). However, learning is always an active process, which runs through the years; what changes are the tools that someone uses to attain a better understanding of the different learning subjects.

Furthermore, the educational historic roots of outdoor education may be found among the Ionic and Greek natural philosophers that preceded Plato and Aristotle (384-322 BC) (Dahlgren
The Ionic and Greek natural philosophers strongly supported learning by doing and leaning in authentic environments, through hands-on experiences. However, Aristotle’s ideas about the importance of individual’s senses differed from Plato’s ideas (Stonehouse, Allison & Carr, 2009). Aristotle’s philosophy focus on the importance of the reality and what we perceived with our own senses. Specifically, he has a holistic view of nature, which is based on the idea that nature is connected to the real world. In an opposite site of view, Plato argues that learners can reach the reality by reflecting philosophically about different aspects. Moreover, the branches of the educational historical tree of outdoor education disclose many other philosophers and educationalists like Comenius (1592-1670), Rousseau (1712-1784), Pestalozzi (1746-1827), Ellen Key (1849-1926) and Dewey (1859-1952) (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998).

The theoretical background of outdoor education

According to Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998), when outdoor education comes in practice is an important methodological tool, while learners have the opportunity to be trained and interpret the process and phenomena within the outdoor environment through hands-on activities. In that way, they gain knowledge through an experiential process of learning, since it is thematic and interdisciplinary. The educational philosopher John Dewey (1938) said that experience and education are two concepts strongly related to the learning process. In particular, according to Dewey (1938, p. 20) “there is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education”. Hence, in this way experience is an important component of the learning process (Higgins & Nicol, 2002).

Through the existing literature, experiential learning is referred normally to a learning process based on first-hand experiences, where there is a strong connection between the learner and the different under-study subjects within an authentic and real environment (Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Hammerman, Hammerman & Hammerman, 2001; Rickinson et al., 2004; Gilbertson et al., 2006). Additionally, the concept of outdoor education supports the idea of “learning by doing”, where experience is the main key of the learning procedure. Moreover, a range of personal and social skills of the learners are enhanced (Higgins & Nicol, 2002). In that way through experiential-based activities, which are supported by hands-on learning philosophy and pedagogy, conceptual knowledge is transformed to a more compact knowledge.

Moreover, outdoor education brings learners closer to the environment and the different experiences in authentic environments. In that way, the learners come in direct contact with the
materials and they become more active participants by socializing themselves, while simultaneously they reconsider their personal connection with the nature. In particular, first-hand experiences can be practiced in different places; schoolyards, parks, gardens, zoos, city walks natural and cultural places and within the society (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998). Following, the learning process is presented from the “Kolb cycle of experiential learning” (Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Healey & Jenkins, 2000), which provides a framework of thinking about the four different stages of an activity based on experiential learning:

![Kolb Cycle of Experiential Learning](image)

**Figure 1: The Kolb cycle of experiential learning**

- **Experience something**: the first phase is related to the direct experiences (DE), where the learner comes in contact with the learning material, using his/her first-hand experiences and in that way he/she gives meaning to abstract concepts.

- **Interpreting the experience**: the second phase of the Kolb’s cycle is related to the reflecting experience (RO – reflecting observation), where the learner needs to explain what he/she had experienced.

- **Generalizing the experience** (AC – abstract conceptualization): the third phase is related to the transformation of the knowledge in a conceptualized shape of the experienced ideas, integrating them into logical theories.

- **Applying the experience** (AE – active experimentation): the last aspect is related to the way that the learner uses his/her personal experiences to test the theory and apply it in different forthcoming experiences and situations.

(Healey & Jenkins, 2000)
According to Higgins and Nicol (2002), the combination of experiential learning within authentic environments is related to the ecological consciousness that students can develop within the framework of outdoor education. Additionally, Orr (2005) suggested that students should be encouraged to take action and identify the different incoming information, in order to promote better self-independence, interdisciplinary learning and physical skills.

The different interpretations of outdoor education

Currently, outdoor education is a contemporary concept of learning and teaching, which falls within the scope of several educational systems worldwide, as it is referred to “a cultural construct, which it is defined and applied in different ways within the countries” (Higgins & Nicol, 2002 p. 1). That is because outdoor education can exist in every geographic situation and be performed by educators of various scholarly backgrounds (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998). Hence, outdoor education has not a specific group of educators or learning subjects, as it can be examined from several perspectives, based on the context of each place and its surroundings.

Following, Donaldson and Donaldson (1958, cited in Priest 1986, p. 13) gave a characteristic definition of outdoor education related to an “education in, for and about the outdoors”. Although, this definition seems to be comprehensive, it indicates that outdoor education is practiced only in an environment, which is out-of-doors. However, for many educators, activities related to local and cultural places, such as museums, could fall under the umbrella of outdoor education, even though they are conducted indoors. Additionally, the above definition limits outdoor learning in learning only about the outdoors. According to Priest (1986), the word about refers learning about the nature. However, outdoor teaching is related to different teaching subjects, since it is interdisciplinary. Furthermore, the word for refers to the purpose of outdoor education; for the future protection of the planet (Priest, 1986). This is connected with the ultimate goal of outdoor environmental education and ecological learning, which appears on learners’ knowledge about the whole ecosystem and its related problems. Thus, the direct nature experiments are widely acknowledged to enhance environmental awareness and to foster sympathetic attitudes.

Furthermore, the “Range & Scope of Outdoor Education” (Higgins, Loynes & Crowther, 1997) is visualized as a complex shape among three different concepts; outdoor activities, environmental education and personal and social development, which intersection is outdoor education. However, outdoor education is often defined as environmental education. According to Parkin (1998), the difference of environmental education and outdoor education lies to the fact
that outdoor education enhances values, knowledge and feelings by teaching in the environment, but not always about the environment. This is connected with the thematic and interdisciplinary character of outdoor education.

Additionally, Higgins, Loynes & Crowther (1997) gave an alternative definition of outdoor education, which highlights different aspects of outdoor education. Specifically, they pointed out the connection between learning books using the senses and the ability to bring into reality the story of a book. Beyond that, the main goal of outdoor education is focused on a more dynamic learning process, while students can use the natural environment and the surroundings to enhance learning. Simultaneously, they improve their relationship with the society and the environment, since they take important opportunities of direct contact with nature and real-life experiences, using their senses. Therefore, the learning outcome is strengthened and more valuable.

The interplay between sensory experience and book learning is also mentioned in the definition of outdoor education given from a group of researchers of the National Centre of Outdoor Environmental Education (NCU, 2004), which proposes that outdoor education is “an approach that aims to provide learning in interplay between experience and reflection based on concrete experiences in authentic situations”. Furthermore, they added that outdoor learning refers to an interdisciplinary research and educational field which involves:

- the learning space being moved out in the society
- the natural and cultural environment
- the interplay between sensory experience and book-learning
- and the importance of place” (NCU, 2004)

To sum up, outdoor education is not a simple concept, but it needs to be seen from different views and perspectives, in order to take into account all its important aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to look upon its different definitions related to the specific study.

**Language teaching in Cyprus**

**The new reformed curriculum**

As it is already mentioned in the introduction part, within a multicultural society, the aspect of critical literacy and experiential learning emerged and affected the theoretical background of the new curriculum and specifically language teaching. According to Ioannidou (2012) language teaching should be directed by critical inquiry along with the sociocultural approach to language
learning, as the school has the responsibility to provide students with critical thinking skills. However, individuals have to take on their responsibility of reflecting critically within a multiliterate society, as critical literacy is an important and crucial aspect for their personal and social development (Barton & Hamilton, 2000). Particularly, the students acquire the ability to express their opinion, to see behind the words and identify the way that language is used to form social relations, political and social meanings and reproduce standards (Ioannidou, 2012; MEC, 2010b).

Consequently, it is considered important and crucial that learners understand the different types of texts within the society as social products. In this way they perceive a better idea of what language is, how is being used and in which ways is being practiced and implemented, beyond the traditional books. Briefly, within the philosophy of multiliteracies, each source of information is a multi-faceted system of knowledge. Within the modern society of technology the existence of different types of texts – stable and moving images, written texts and sounds - are sources of wide-ranging learning (Cope & Kalatzis, 2000; Unsworth, 2001; Walsh, 2010). Thus, literacy is extended to a more social phenomenon rather than characterize the oral and writing skills of the individual (MEC, 2010b). Hence, the occurrence of new forms of literacy highlights the importance of critical literacy as the main guideline of the new curriculum. Additionally, according to the general aims and goals of the curriculum, students who think critically on different aspects, therefore they learn how to react within society and to appreciate better the different ethnic identities that a multicultural society consists of.

Furthermore, within the reform of the new language curriculum in primary schools, aesthetic education and theatrical education are applied as two more interactive courses, which achieve the main goals of the curriculum; individual and social development and acquisition of new skills. To sum up, language education is very important and crucial teaching subject through the curriculum and it needs to be taken into consideration, as it is highly receptive in changes (MEC, 2010b).

**Critical pedagogy and critical literacy**

For a language lesson and teaching specifically, the idea behind the philosophical aspect of the new curriculum is to convey the students with the ability to criticize different social situations and acquire the essential language skills, which are highly important for a deeper examination of different kinds of texts within their daily life (MEC 2010a; Ioannidou, 2012). As it is already mentioned before, the pedagogy of critical literacy approaches different texts within the daily life, which enhances critical thinking through connections with the sociocultural context that are practiced (Jewett & Smith, 2003).
Additionally, according to Hall (1998, p. 185), “critical literacy proposes that literacy learning involves learning to understand the socially constructed nature of knowledge and experience as expressed in written and spoken language”. Thus, the students come up with their own critical reflection regarding the characteristics of the texts and the both explicit and implicit meanings that exist, when the same text, picture, sound etc., appears within different contexts; for example the same advertisement promoted through a printed paper and an edited, short video. According to Kincheloe (2008), critical pedagogy deals with pedagogical techniques and knowledge, which support learning beyond the curriculum and the textbooks. Thus, students appreciate wider forms of learning and education in the culture such as television and internet. Within the realm of critical pedagogy, critical practitioners can bring up both a group discussion and an individual thinking about the purpose of the writers, the explicit and implicit meanings of the advertisement, the way it is presented, the influence on the audience etc. Consequently, this is constituted as a challenge to teachers and educators to reconstruct their work and adapt it to this framework (Kincheloe, 2008).

In other words, the students reflect on the understanding of the influence of each text related to the views of the writer (Mogensen, 1997). To conclude, students’ critical thinking is enhanced more through real and authentic situations, which are linked with their experiences in their daily life and not through imaginary scenarios (Comber, Thomson & Wells, 2001). Thus, the connection between experiential learning and critical thinking is crucial and important to examine.

**Experiential learning and language teaching**

Experiential learning as a teaching movement and approach appeared in the middle of 1900 in the United States, where teachers attempted to shift the incoming knowledge of a formal and abstract education into the incoming knowledge of a more experience-based educational approach (Lewis & Williams, 1994; Beard & Wilson, 2002). This refers to a remarkable change in the concept of learning; there is noticeable movement from passive to active learning, where constructivist learning models have moved from the periphery of education to the center. Thus, the teaching process changes from a teacher-centered lesson to a student-centered lesson, where teachers need to help students be involved in an experience-based learning, which is connected with their lives (Estes, 2004).

According to Estes (2004), the major requirement for the development of the learning process, is that specialists need to use learner-centered approaches, where the focus is on
students’ experiences and therefore students interact and reflect differently. Moreover, Kolb (1984) supports experiential learning as the most powerful aspect of learning, which keeps strong the connection between the theory and actual practice. Additionally, Kolb (1984) indicates that students’ involvement in authentic environments and real situations must be linked with the practical implementations within the classroom, due to the fact that the latter represents the connection between students and society; there is a need to "translate abstract ideas of academia into the concrete practical realities of these peoples' lives" (Kolb, 1984 p. 6).

Furthermore, Dewey (1938) highlights the importance of «trying» to do something, in order to figure out a problem and find possible explanations and solutions, since as he mentioned “every experience is a moving force” (p. 38). Therefore, direct experiences are the catalytic power that leads to knowledge. The specific direction from experience to knowledge reflects on the experiential way of learning, having the potential that the learning process is focused on learner’s interest and impulse, being at the same time unconstrained by the educator.

In particular, Dewey (1938) in his book Experience and Education brings up a discussion about traditional and progressive education or old and new education respectively. According to Dewey (1938), traditional education focuses on the curriculum and its cultural context by providing minimal active participation, while progressive education focuses on active participation and learning through experience. Specifically, within traditional education knowledge and skills are being transferred from teachers, who mainly use the school books as a tool for transmitting knowledge to the students. Consequently, the knowledge that students get from the books is static. Therefore, students’ role in the process of learning is limited and passive, as they don’t have the chance to be active and therefore to build the knowledge by themselves (Hansen, 2000). Thus, the necessity of a changing world is supported by “a product of discontent from traditional education, which is the rise of what is called “new education” (Dewey 1938, p. 18).

The theoretical base of new or progressive education includes a strong and important connection between learner and experiences in real life, while the impact of both in the learning process is underlined (Dewey, 1938). Therefore, this connection helps students to develop essential skills and techniques, by remaining active participants during the learning procedure. Moreover, according to Beard and Wilson (2002) the foundation of considerable learning is the interaction between self and the external environment, which refers to experiential education and learning. According to Martin, France and Zounková (2004), experiential education refers to a holistic process of learning, which combines experience with emotional and physical development.
Additionally, as many changes are reflected upon a rapidly reforming society, it is necessary to find new and different ways to gain knowledge (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Therefore, the teachers are highly responsible of students’ development and to guide the learning process to effective learning outcomes, by using different techniques and methods of teaching. Moreover, Reed (1996) in his book *The necessity of experience* highlighted the importance of experience within the society, while he separated the type of experiences to primary and second-hand experiences. According to Reed (1996), the primarily experiences refer to those that are obtainable of direct looking and listening. On the other side, second-hand experiences refer to those that individuals experience different situations from other people or through technological gadgets.

Furthermore, being focused on the Cypriot educational system, most of the teachers follow the traditional way of teaching and learning; through the textbooks and within the classroom. According to Beaudin and Quick (1995), traditionally teachers and trainers have designed learning events for special occasions and the connection between knowing and learning is not a complete process. Although, nowadays most of the teachers are using alternatives methods of teaching, which lead to a more effective way of learning, the traditional way of thinking is always in their minds. Specifically, teaching is still most of the times relying on a lecture format, as it provides students with large amount of information in short time (Wurdinger & Rudolph, 2009). Hence, students’ participation is limited, since the educators spend lot of time on talking and presenting the lesson, which is necessary from one point of view, but with limited effectiveness on the other hand. Thus, classroom-based experiential learning methods need to move beyond the traditional methods of lecture, discussion, or even demonstrations. They need to be active and experienced-based related to the participants’ previous and possible future experiences (Beaudin & Quick, 1995).

According to Lewis and Williams (1994), an experience-based approach helps developing communication skills, which give the opportunity to the students to develop teamwork skills and workplace literacy. Additionally, a reformed-based instruction enforces students’ thinking skills more than a traditional teaching approach does (Obenchain & Ives, 2006). Beyond that, students develop their critical thinking based on their own experiences (Carver, 1996). Nevertheless, the existence of a careful structured curriculum is important for the students to acquire what the educators set as learning goals both inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, the curriculum needs to be focused on students’ reflection skills, in order to help them understand better what they have experienced. As Qualters (2010) argues without reflection the educators lose a highly important opportunity to transport the outdoor experiences to the in-class learning
and so to create a more concrete and meaningful knowledge for their future. Besides, “reflection, like critical thinking, is a learned skill difficult to do well and so it needs to be taught with patience and understanding, with safety and structure” (Qualters, 2010 p. 97).

To sum up, according to Jordet (2005), an active learning process does not influence the importance of the books as useful educational means, in order to achieve students’ knowledge, since it does not entail any priority issues. Each way of learning has its own effect on students’ development. All in all, according to Beaudin and Quick (1995), outside of and inside to the schooling infrastructure there are many attention-grabbing opportunities, which need to be highlighted within the curriculum and an experiential curriculum might be the key word for effective changes.

**Outdoor language teaching and learning**

According to Stables (2006), language in education and in other social contexts transfers ideas and reflects to the reality. This refers to what Miller (1973, p. 7) mentioned about the *functional definition* for language; language is a socially shared mean for expressing ideas. Additionally, Miller (1973) referred to a *formal definition* of language, which reflects to the grammatical character of language and its rules. All in all, both definitions are significant and reflect on important aspects of language and communication.

Outdoor learning as a teaching approach is not ignoring the theoretical knowledge, but its purpose is the opposite; to enhance learning with its existence in the teaching process (Jordet, 2007). According to Jordet (2007) the school, which motivates the teachers to combine the books with outdoor learning, raises its level to a better school. Additionally, the result of this will be a more stable and a well-built package of knowledge, as well as pupils’ bodies and senses will be activated and be a natural part of the educational process. Hence, the school come up with a new challenge; the combination of an experience-based (practice) and a text-based (theory) learning process (Jordet, 2007). Moreover, outdoor learning is an *alternative classroom*, “which provides opportunities to place the teaching process in quite different ways than the text-based teaching in the classroom” (Jordet 2007, p. 11). Nature and outdoor environments outside the school are forms of alternative classrooms, which help the teacher to adapt teaching and reform learning in different ways beyond the text-based learning. In this way, the pupils use their “head, heart and hand” (Pestalozzi, 1746-1827 cited in Brühlmeier, 2010) to develop the possibilities of learning. Consequently, they achieve development in a cognitive, social and practical level (Jordet, 2007).
Furthermore, outdoor learning can be adapted and implemented in all the school subjects, since each of them can be related to outdoor learning in different ways. According to the specific research, which is focused on language teaching and the combination with outdoor learning, the latter can be incorporated in a language lesson through different ways and develop its important aspects; verbal communication, writing and literature (Jordet, 2007). Furthermore, the place of implementing different outdoor activities can be decided according to the suitability of the place related to the learning goals of each lesson (Higgins & Nicole, 2002; Hammerman, Hammerman & Hammerman, 2001).

Moreover, according to Rickinson et al., (2004, p. 5) three types of learning in the outdoor environment are related to: “fieldworks and outdoor visits”, “adventurous activities” and “schoolyard activities and community projects”. Thus, the students have the opportunity to be involved in field studies and different learning contexts. In that way, outdoor learning expands cooperation and teamwork among the students, as they need to communicate and interact between each other and be critical citizens (Dyment, 2005). Specifically, when students are outdoors need to communicate, even though in a more spontaneous way, in order to classify the collected plants that they have found in a forest or the tadpoles from the water or when they are working with space and form in nature or when they are visitors in a carpenter’s workshop. Moreover, outdoor language learning can be practiced through reading aloud, by storytelling and dramatization, as they are considered as important approaches, when a teacher is working with literary subjects in outdoor learning. Additionally, the importance of outdoor play is mentioned through many different researchers, as it offers the opportunity for the children to interact and experience themselves with nature and expand the curiosity, by expounding their feelings of enjoyment (White, 2008).

To sum up, it is a fact that language is practiced in every context and in several linguistic environments, where the learners experience themselves (Comber & Kerkham, 2007; Wray, 2006). Concerning the outdoor environment and the outdoor places, verbal communication is framed in a context, which is “quite different from the classroom setting, where communication is based upon a referring language” (Jordet, 2007). Consequently, this helps students’ both verbal and writing skills, as they reflect upon conceptualized topics based on their own experiences. Additionally, as Green (2012) argues life experiences are essential to enforce sustainability and the students face multimodal texts through realistic contexts. Furthermore, according to Fägerstam (2013), high school teachers mentioned that a relaxed environment helps student to express themselves and feel more comfortable thus communication and verbal skills are enhanced.
Previous researches on teachers’ perceptions for outdoor education

Within the realm of education and the educational researches, teachers’ beliefs and perceptions on different aspects have an important and crucial role, since they are the competent persons of applying new teaching methods and techniques, in order to improve the quality of the educational system (Richardson, 1996; Neophytou & Valianides, 2012). Moreover, according to Tsaggaridou (2008) the necessity of examining teachers’ thoughts and actions, in order to investigate the factors that affect the quality of teaching contributes to the disentanglement of different ways teaching.

Furthermore, Pajares (1992) highlights the importance of teachers’ beliefs as the focal point of educational researches and teacher education, since they can provide useful information to interpret the curriculum. Additionally, since teachers are a part of the educational system, their educational beliefs can influence self-confidence to students’ performance, self-esteem on teaching different subjects and epistemological beliefs regarding the nature of knowledge. Therefore, the teaching process is a set of explicitly and implicitly stated beliefs, due to the fact that it engages teachers’ personal choice, evaluation and external crisis. To conclude, the connection between outdoor education and the school-curriculum has several benefits and challenges, when it comes in practice (National foundation for educational research in England & Wales & Dillon, J., 2005).

The perceptions on the benefits

Previous researches about outdoor education highlight several benefits of outdoors lessons on humans’ physical health and cognition. Louv (2005) supports that outdoor environment can be useful to personal and social development, since it awakes the human senses by being in the nature. Additionally, Gilbertson et al., (2006) agree that there is a clear distinction between being in the nature and come in direct contact with the environment, instead of being indoors, even if the teacher practices the same activity. In particular, they mentioned that there is a notable and important different between learning how to canoe in an indoor swimming pool from learning how to canoe in a lake. That is because the outdoor environment enhances sensory experiences and increases the interest, as the two driving forces to a more complete learning based on their experiences. Indeed, the importance of sensory experiences within an outdoor environment is emphasized through many researchers (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998; Hammerman et al., 2001; Fjørtoft, 2001; Higgins & Nicole, 2002; Rickinson et al., 2004; Gilbertson et al., 2006; Fägerstam, 2012). Furthermore, within the context of the surrounding of the natural
environment, students by learning about the natural environment, they can develop critical thinking skills and be aware of environmental problems and natural resources (Goldenberg, 2001).

**The perceptions on the barriers**

Along with the aforementioned benefits, there are several impediments and difficulties of implementation outdoor activities, such as transportation complications, lack of funding, mandated curriculum, which leaves little opportunities for outdoor learning, lack of knowledge and informing (Neill, 1997; Rickinson, 2004; Backman, 2011). Beyond that, safety issues and risks are constituted as important impediments of outdoor education and specifically, when it is referred to adventure education (Goldenberg, 2001). Backman (2011) mentioned that based on some Swedish teachers’ beliefs among the aforementioned barriers additionally safety issues and exposure to outdoor risks discourage teachers to apply outdoor *friluftsliv*¹ activities. However, Backman (2011) mentioned that other teachers referred to a strong connection between outdoor education and safety and risk issues. Moreover, another important barrier is that outdoor education is not explicitly stated in the school curriculum and its guidelines (Backman, 2011) and therefore the interpretation of outdoor education gets more difficult.

Additionally, when outdoor education is connected with the school curriculum, there are challenges in terms of the preparation and follow-up work (National foundation for educational research in England & Wales & Dillon, J, 2005). Teachers need to be well-prepared before and after the outdoor activities. Additional issues to consider are related to students’ understanding outdoor visits as sites of learning, schools’ teachers’ confidence to teach in outdoor contexts and schools’ teachers’ awareness and understanding about outdoor learning. Furthermore, Tan and Pendretti (2010) referred to the influence that technology has on students’ learning, which makes teachers feel unsecure to limit their opportunities of learning, by taking disconnecting them from technological interactions. Besides, the impact of technology in a general level and especially in the educational level is very important, since students are strongly connected with the current technological achievements (Sharpe, Beetham & Freitas, 2010). Therefore, they can shape their own experiences and enhance learning through different modes (Jewitt, 2006).

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¹ *Friluftsliv* is a term used in Scandinavia, which based on its specific relation to the Scandinavian tradition, culture and landscape (Faarlund, 1994; Repp, 1996; Sandell, 2001 cited in Backman, 2011). The official Swedish definition of *friluftsliv* reads: living outside in the nature- and culture-landscape for the purpose of well-being or to gain experience of our natural surroundings without the demands of competition (Swedish Ministry of Environment, 2003 cited in: Backman, 2011).
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Summary
This chapter portrays the way in which the specific study is accomplished and designed. Briefly, the current study is based on a qualitative research approach through semi-structured interviews with ten primary teachers in Cyprus. The first three headings describe the research area and the main aim of the study, the selection of the participants and the method and tools, which were used for the data collection. The following heading is focused on the conduction of the research and the data collection. Additionally, the next heading describes the data analysis, after the transcription of the interviews. After that, the ethical research problems and considerations, which were taken into account during the research procedure, are pointed out. Finally, reliability and validity and methodological implications of the current study are mentioned under the last two headings respectively.

Research area and strategy
As it is already mentioned, within the Cypriot educational system in primary schools, language teaching and experiential learning is a complex practice, which needs to be addressed and approached in different ways. Although outdoor education can be one of the ways of approaching this combination, its complication increases. Thus, this study was conducted, in order to untangle this inter-related and inter-connected grid of teaching practices. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine primary teacher’s perceptions concerning language teaching and experiential learning within outdoor settings in Cypriot primary schools, based on the fact that the research is limited regarding the following interrelations (a) outdoor education and language teaching, (b) outdoor education and experiential learning (c) language education and experiential learning and (d) outdoor education, experiential learning and language teaching.

Within the scope of social research there are two research strategies; quantitative and qualitative research (Bryman, 2012; Silverman 2011). As Bryman (2012, p. 36) states “qualitative strategy can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasizes on words rather than quantification in the collection of data”. Additionally, qualitative research “relies more on the views of the participants in the study, which is the major direction for the research
questions” (Creswell 2012, p. 17). According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), through a qualitative study the researcher can examine social actions within a realistic context, contribute actively in the research and focus on participants’ actions and words. Hence, the current study is oriented towards a qualitative research strategy, based on the specific aim and research questions. Following of the paper, the sampling procedure, the research methods and the conduction of the study are explained briefly.

**Selection of participants**

The sample of this study is based on primary teachers, who are working in public schools in Cyprus. Specifically, it constitutes ten primary teachers (seven women and three men). The range of their age is between 25 and 45 years old. Additionally, they all have been in service between 5-25 years in public primary schools. Based on ethical issues, regarding the anonymity of the participants and the school institutions, no information that would be an identifier is mentioned and the integrity of the participants needs to be on the focal point of the research conduction (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Therefore, the profile of the ten interviewees is referred to some general points.

According to a qualitative research, sampling can be done through different forms; theoretical, generic and snowball sampling. All these forms of sampling techniques are under the umbrella of “purposive sampling” (Bryman, 2012 p. 418). In the current study the form of sampling refers to the purposive, by using the snowball technique. As Bryman (2012, p. 418) states “purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling, where its goal is to sample participants in a strategic way, so that the sample is relevant to the research questions that are being posed”. Furthermore, according to Bryman (2012), a research with non-probability sampling approach does not search for participants randomly, but it comes purposively. Additionally, as Bryman (2012) mentions, purposive sample might not be a random sample, but it is not either convenient to the researcher. That is because a convenience sample is available by chance to the researcher, but in a purposive sampling the researcher samples with his/her own goals in mind (Bryman 2012).

For the current study, the participants were collected through a snowball technique of sampling. According to Bryman (2012, p. 424) snowball sampling technique is practiced when “the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience and characteristics relevant to the research”. Specifically, I contacted through email three teachers
who were easily accessible; one is a former mentor, one a former teacher in the university and one is an acquaintance. Furthermore, I kept in mind that these participants were working in different schools located in different places, thus the selection was based on two reasons. Firstly to avoid the conduction of the research as a case study; if the participants would have been informed only from one person and therefore most probably selected only from one school and secondly as it was already mentioned before, to achieve a balance, by having a heterogeneous sample, including people with different experiences (Salmons, 2011). Although a non-probability sampling limits the generalizations of the extracted results (Bryman, 2012), it still provides the researcher with interesting information, which constitute the building stone of further and more extended research in the specific field (Silverman, 2001; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011)

Profile of the ten interviewees
All the participants are primary educators (seven women and three men) in different schools (nine urban schools and one rural school), teaching different subjects from first to sixth grade. Along with language teaching, the different teaching subjects are: theology, environmental education, geography, English language, physical sciences, education of life and physical education. However, it is important to mention that eight of the participants teach language among the aforementioned teaching subjects, one of them additionally teaches language to immigrant students and the last one was teaching language until the previous year, but the current year his teaching is merely focused on other subjects in different grades. Hence, all the teachers come from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Research method and tools
According to Creswell (2012), when researchers conduct a study there is a process, which follows six steps: identify a problem, review the literature, specify the purpose, collect data, analyze and interpret the data and finally report and evaluate the research. Since each study starts from identifying a topic, it is based on specific aims and questions, which need to be approached and researched by different ways of methods and tools. Hence, the researcher is the one who decides which method is the most suitable way to find out answers for the research questions or extensive results on pre-existing studies.

Additionally, Coombes (2001) agrees that, if the researcher is involved closely with small group of individuals in research process, one-to-one personal qualitative research helps to
cultivate a better understanding of the experiences that have taken place. Thus, based on a qualitative approach, this research used semi-structured online interviews, as a qualitative technique for the data collection. Since teachers’ beliefs and perceptions constituted as a major issue in this research, I found interviewing the most appropriate way to examine their conceptions in detail.

**Interviewing**

According to Salmons (2011), researchers planning for semi-structured questions articulate all or most of the main interview questions in advance and plan their sequence. According to Creswell (2012), in a qualitative study the researcher needs to have a *protocol*, and in case of doing interviews an *interview protocol*, which will remind him/her to cover the main points. Although, it helps for the conversation to be guided to the important points and not get digressed with an unstructured discussion, the *interview protocol* offers the flexibility to the researcher to arrange the sequence of the main questions as the interviews proceed. Additionally, probes questions are sub questions, which help the researcher to elicit more information from the participants during the interviews (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Creswell, 2012). Specifically, the researcher can add some questions or refine the planned list, based on the interviewees’ responses (Bryman 2010; Salmons, 2011).

For the specific research, the interview protocol was focused on seven main questions, which targeted the theoretical and practical content knowledge (questions 1,2,3,4) and the emotional (thoughts, concerns, opinions) attitude (questions: 5,6,7) of the participants in relation to outdoor education, experiential learning and language teaching (See Appendix – interview schedule p. 68). Moreover, even if the interview protocol was structured with the same main questions for all the participants, there were some prompt-questions to each of them.

To sum up, the questions were introductory, follow up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, silence and interpreting questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), combined with a demographic list of questions (sex, age, years of service, teaching grade, teaching subjects, location of the school) at the beginning of the interviews.

**Use of the computer**

The form of a semi-structure interviewing can be either face-to-face interaction or computer-assisted interaction, which is mediated by technologies, such as the telephone and the computer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Specifically, a computer-assisted interview can be asynchronous,
which is related to the communication through emails, with the interviewer writing a question and waiting for a reply, or it can be a synchronous interaction, which is related to the virtual communication and it is similar to face-to-face interaction (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Furthermore, online environment offers many modes of communication, so researchers can match the characteristics of the media to specific design requirements of their inquiry. A specific requirement in this study was its implementation within specified time. Additionally, the specific research needed to be focused on a pool of participants, which was located geographically distant from each, but the travel expenses were out of the personal budget of the researcher. Hence, according to Salmons (2011, p. 9), “when participants are in a location that limits access to outsiders, it might be possible for a researcher to have a virtual presence where a physical presence not be allowed”. Consequently, the above requirements motivated me to look for online research options, as I wanted to have a more interactive communication with the participants. Thus, the specific study was conducted through synchronous online interviews either by telephone or Skype conversation.

According to Murray (2003, p. 63), “whenever the telephone provides simultaneous video transmission, thus the researcher and the respondent see each other on a television screen as they talk, the interviews simulate more closely face-to-face variety”. However, along with Skype interviews, telephone interviews were an additional online research option of collecting data by protecting in this way the willing of participants to keep the conversation only verbally and not visually.

**Research conduction**

Before the conduction of the interviews, all the participants were informed either by phone or email about the aim of the study, confirming them about their anonymity. They were also asked if they would allow the use of audio recorder, which would make the data transcription easier afterwards. Otherwise, they have been informed that I could take notes during the interview (See interview invitation, p. 70). The above explanation to the interviewees was done, to ensure the protection of their own rights, when they are active participants in an interview (Kvale, 1996).

The interviews were carried out in March 2013. Five out of ten interviews were done through Skype and the rest through telephone conversation via a computer program. All the interviews were held within a quiet setting with no interruptions from external factors and they all lasted from 15 to 40 minutes. Since I didn’t know all the participants personally before, my first task was to establish a relationship with them. Hence, the first questions, for developing a
comfortable atmosphere for the interview, were concerned with their teaching profession. Additionally, the comfortable atmosphere prevailed through the briefing, when participants should be informed about the purpose and the procedures of the research project (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and through the debriefing as well, when they have been informed about the anonymity and protection of their personal data. The reassurance of the participants’ anonymity was achieved by using the word “# Interviewee”, where the relevant number of each participant was changing accordingly.

Furthermore, although the order of the main questions changed and participants’ answers overlapped a question or engendered more questions, all the interview topics were covered at the end. Besides, according to Salmons (2011), since interviews are a discussion between the researcher and the participant, the re-ordering of the questions does not constitute as a problem.

To sum up, after the completion of each interview, I thanked the participants for their contribution and I informed them that I could notify them the results, if they wish. All of them replied positively and expressed their interest to be informed about both the results and the suggestions of the study, in order to use them in future.

Data analysis

According to Creswell (2012) interviews within the framework of a qualitative study is a popular approach of data collection, which gives useful and interesting information. Although, the data extracted from the interviews are interesting, it is difficult to find ways to untangle them, in order to interpret them and give answers to the research aim and purpose. Thus, the selection of the method of analysis needs to be considered by the researcher. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2011) argue there is a coherent bond between the research questions and the method of analysis. Accordingly, the method of analysis need to be chosen related to the character of the qualitative research.

Additionally, the sampling procedure and the amount of the collected data influence the method of analysis. The data collected from the interviews could not only be characterized as a huge amount of information, but also as information that is stated both in an explicit and implicit way. According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009, p. 30) it is necessary to listen to the explicit descriptions and meanings, as well as to what is said “between the lines”. Moreover, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) argue that the purpose of a qualitative interview is to obtain life-world descriptions, in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena and obtain thoroughly tested knowledge. To achieve that, “it goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views and
becomes a careful questioning and listening approach between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009, p. 3). Thus, in the specific study, a watchful and in depth analysis was needed, in order to organize the information.

The chosen method of analyzing the data is thematic analysis. As Bryman (2012) argues it is a common way of analyzing qualitative data, while Braun and Clarke (2006) support that it should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis provides the researcher with basic skills, which are useful for further qualitative research conduction. For this reason, Boyatzis (1998) argues that thematic analysis is not a specific method, but a circular process of analyzing qualitative information; more specifically it is a process of decoding qualitative information. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) the different phases of conducting thematic analysis are: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining the themes and producing the report. Based on those steps, the specific study was conducted as following:

**Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with your data**

At the beginning, I familiarized myself with the data, by the process of transcribing the verbal data in Greek language. However, although such exposure increases researcher’s familiarity with the text, a deep knowledge may be confusing and enforce the researcher to “see the forest instead of the trees” (Guest & McLellan, 2003 p. 186). That’s why, according to Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87) “immersion involves repeated reading of the data, reading in an active way, and searching for meanings”. So, after the transcription of the verbal data into written form, I started reading the interviews several times moving back and forward. Although, reading and re-reading is a time-consuming process, it is important, because you gain a better understanding of the extracted information.

**Phase 2: Generating initial codes**

During the reading of each interview, I was taking notes, highlighting information for coding and summarizing them into few or single words, in order to make a list of ideas about what is included in the data and what is interesting, so I could use it to the subsequent phase. The list of ideas is referred to a production of initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Boyatzis (1998), codes in a thematic analysis identify an interesting feature of the raw data, which can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 559) code is defined as “a name or label that the researcher gives to a piece of
text, that contains an idea or a piece of information and enables the researcher to identify similar information”. Hence, at this point a long list of codes was created and needed to be organized.

**Phase 3: Searching for themes**

According to Boyatzis (1998), the identification of the themes can be either stated at explicit or an interpretative level. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined the theme as a pattern, which captures important aspects of the data in relation to the research question of the study. Thus, it is broader than a group of codes. So, at this point the step was to organize all the different codes into potential themes, in order to puzzle out the huge amount of data. Specifically, I started thinking about the inter-connections between the codes. Thus, a visual representation (mind map) was used to help me sort the different codes into themes. Some codes were divided in sub-codes and some others were deleted, as they didn’t seem to belong in any set of code (theme). Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 90) argue with this, as they stated that “it is rightly acceptable to create a theme called miscellaneous, where you put all the codes that don’t fit in your main themes”.

After that, a thematic map was created including the theme-piles with the codes. Then, I tried to find the relationship between the different themes and the different levels of themes (main and sub-themes) and match them wherein was possible. Finally, a complicated story of data with different codes and sub codes was clustered into a set of fully worked-out themes, which gives answers to the research questions.

**Phase 4: Reviewing the themes**

At this phase, I reviewed the different themes; a theme might need to be broken down into separate themes, might connect two themes together and might create new themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis is as a way of analyzing and interpreting data, by finding explicit or implicit interrelations between the different codes. At this point, more explicitly stated information was taken into account. So, at this step there is a readjustment of the themes, based on every type of information. Also, a connection between the literature review and the different themes was taken into consideration, so more interesting connections were revealed. At the end of this phase, there was a clear idea of the different themes and their in-between interconnections.

**Phase 5: Defining and naming the themes**

Following, at this stage, I defined the different themes and determined what aspect they capture, why they are important and in which points do they limit the current study.
Phase 6: Producing the report
This is the final phase of the thematic analysis, where the complicated story of the data is presented in a way that shows the strong connections between the answers of the research questions and the main aim of the study.

Table 1: Thematic analysis of the results
Ethical research problems and considerations

According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009) an interview inquiry is a moral enterprise, where the related moral issues concern the extremes of an interview inquiry. They argue that human interaction affects interviewees, and the knowledge produced by an interview inquiry affects our understanding of the human condition. Consequently, interview research is saturated with moral and ethical issues. Thus, the researcher needs to address these issues, in order to keep a balance between him/her and the participants. This balance is also based on the respect of the participants’ choice to take part in the study and the existence of confidentiality toward them. According to Kvale (1996) confidentiality in research implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed. Thus, the principle of participants’ right to keep their privacy is not without ethical and scientific dilemmas.

Beyond confidentiality, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) argue informed consent is another factor, which affects the balance between the researcher and the participants. According to Kvale (1996) informed consent entails informing the participants about the overall purpose of the research project and its main features, as well as any possible risks and benefits from their participation. Based on that, the participants have been contacted through emails or telephone and were informed about the purpose of the research by giving a brief description of the procedure. Additionally, they were informed about the main points of the study (aim, purpose, background, privacy issues) before the individual interviews start. The related information was stated briefly and comprehensively, in order to give them a clear and actual idea of the process.

Reliability and validity

Two important key issues, which needed to be considered before the choice of any research method, are reliability and validity of the research (Golafshani, 2003). As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 133) suggested “reliability is a necessary, but insufficient condition for validity in research; it is a necessary precondition of validity and validity may be a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for reliability”. Hence, it is a crucial point through the whole research process to consider those two main issues from the early stages of the research; otherwise the data analysis would be worthless (Coombes, 2001).

According to Bryman (2010) reliability refers to whether the outcomes of the research can be adapted to extended research and/or repeated and validity refers to honesty of the outcomes. Additionally, both reliability and validity can be either internal or external. Briefly, external reliability refers to the replication of the study and internal reliability refers to the existence of
more than one observer. Furthermore, internal validity is achieved, when there is a connection among the extracted data and the ideas and external validity refers to the possibility of generalizing the findings (Bryman, 2010; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Taking into account the explanation of reliability and validity, the specific study is based on internal validity and external reliability.

Although, “threats to validity and reliability can never be erased completely; rather the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention to validity and reliability throughout a piece of research” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011 p. 133). Thus, within the current study, an effort was made to balance reliability and validity, from the starting point of the research process. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) give an overview of the planning of an educational research, concerning validity and reliability, the chosen decisions around these main issues are; to determine the process of validation of the data, to decide a minimum of topics to be discussed, to subject the plans, to pilot the research, to decide questions to be asked and the method that will be used and determine the balance of open and closed questions.

To sum up, although the outcomes of the specific research cannot be generalized and this limits the external validity, the external reliability enhances the replication of the study, either to a small or large scale. However, “this is does not strive for uniformity; two researchers who are studying a single setting may come up with very different findings, but both sets of findings might be reliable” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011 p. 149).

**Methodological implications for the current study**

All studies have their limitations and this one is no exclusion. The choice of a qualitative method based on the ten semi-structured interviews was helpful for a significant understanding and focusing on the aim of the current study, but the number of participants was small. Otherwise the researcher could have gained richer data, if the number of the participants had been increased. Thus, the results of the current research rest on the specific ten teachers’ perceptions that participated and cannot be generalized for all the primary teachers in Cyprus. Nevertheless, the data extracted from the interviews meet the targets of the current study.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Summary

This chapter deals with the results of the current research. The findings are presented in five categories/themes, which were identified through the coding frame technique. They are summarized as following: 1) teachers’ views towards language teaching and experiential learning within the Cypriot educational curriculum, 2) the status of experiential learning in outdoor language teaching, 3) teachers’ practical experiences in outdoor language activities based on experiential learning, 4) the perceived benefits of outdoor language teaching and 5) the perceived barriers and limitations of outdoor language teaching. Additionally, some themes are separated in sub-themes, which are presented with the relevant interviewees’ answers. To sum up, it has been a great attempt to organize all the extracted information in an explicit and clearly-formulated way, providing the overall idea about the possible interrelations between experiential learning, language teaching and outdoor education in Cypriot primary schools. Thus, the following table is created, in order to summarize the relation between the objectives and the related themes of the research.

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<th>RESEARCH AIMS</th>
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*Table 2: The connection between the research aims and the themes*
Theme 1: Teachers’ views towards language teaching and experiential learning

The first theme indicates the views of all the teachers, who reported how they experience language teaching in primary schools, by referring on the current educational system in Cyprus. Following, they express their views regarding the existence of experiential learning within the curriculum. Thus, the specific theme is separated in two sub themes: teachers’ views towards language teaching and teachers’ views towards experiential learning.

○ Teachers’ views towards language teaching within the Cypriot educational system

In general, the majority of the participants reported explicitly the traditional way of language teaching of the current educational system. An indicative example is given below:

“Most of the teachers believe that the lesson must be done in the classroom, with the students sitting to their desks; there are teachers, who don’t put the students to sit in groups, in order to avoid the noise in the classroom. They put the students sitting 2-2 traditionally; in rows (...) and most of the time a stereotype lesson is practiced; there is a blackboard, the teachers write and the students are with no groups. They don’t practice anything, apart from the stereotype things, the standards (#Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, #Interviewee 5 agreed that the educational system enforces traditional education, because of the way it is structured: (...) “ultimately, in the Cypriot schools the lesson is organized in this way, in order to be applied within the narrow confines of the classroom”. Although, within a modified society things need to be changed and adapted in new situations, the current Cypriot educational system and language teaching are characterized as traditional. Following, at this point it is interesting to see #Interviewee’s 6 personal attitude, concerning his choice of teaching:

“Most of the times I do the lesson traditionally, for example I am the teacher, I teach and the children listen. I have only 2-3 excellent students and this happens many times. It happens sometimes. Not seldom, not often. For example, If I had a scale from 1-5, I would put 3” (#Interviewee 6)

Moreover, another important dimension of language teaching is its interdisciplinary character, which is mentioned from all the interviewees. Hence, its significance is extended through the entire curriculum. At this point two indicative examples around the specific aspect are stated:
“For example in geography lesson, we went outdoors and they had to describe the neighborhood. But, this is also linked with the language lesson; they are interconnected, especially in younger ages” (#Interviewee 1). Additionally, #Interviewee 10 agreed with the interdisciplinary character of language lesson, mentioning that:

“(…) specifically for a language lesson the emphasis is on teaching language among all the teaching subjects. Thus, it is not an integral. But, we teach language in every teaching subject” (#Interviewee 10)

The specific sub-theme had the purpose to reveal teachers’ views related to language teaching within the Cypriot educational curriculum in primary schools, in order to sketch out its framework, which is important to be examined in the current study. Moreover, the following sub-theme reveals teachers’ views regarding the existence of experiential learning in the language curriculum.

- Teachers’ views towards the existence of experiential learning within the Cypriot educational curriculum

In particular, the specific sub-theme is focused on the connection between experiential learning and the new language curriculum. Since, the curriculum in primary education has been recently reformed; it is remarkable to examine, if experiential learning, as a new way of learning and teaching, is integrated in the curriculum and by which ways, in order to fill this gap.

To begin with, the following statements are mentioned under the question related in which level the language curriculum is helpful on promoted practical activities based on experiential learning. Four teachers showed that they are familiar with the language curriculum. Additionally, they agree that the overall impression is that experiential learning within the curriculum is mainly based on a theoretical than a practical level. An illustrative example is the following:

“Experiential learning is included in the curriculum, but as a main goal. I didn’t see anywhere any recommendation from the Ministry of Education related to experiential learning in practical way; to inform the teachers about activities the students can do. It is very general and abstract. They mention that the lesson has to be based on students’ experiences, but what do they recommend? Do they recommend something? No!” (#Interviewee 1)

It is obvious that lack of informing through the curriculum is very important for the teachers, in order to apply experiential activities. Teachers’ perceptions concerning the lack of informing and
support from the curriculum are going to be discussed further, as it triggers the discussion regarding its effectiveness, even if it is recently reformed.

In general all the participants expressed their views regarding the existence of experiential learning through the curriculum. However, three participants mentioned that they are not familiar with the curriculum. An indicative example is given below:

“The truth is that I did not read the curriculum to the point which is necessary, but regarding the new language curriculum, I am not totally sure if it refers to experiential activities, but I think it does not” (#Interviewee 3)

Contradictory, according to the following quotation, although #Interviewee 7 showed a partial knowledge on the curriculum, there is the conviction that some promoted activities based on experiential learning do exist:

Well, I didn’t read the curriculum, but it is what we learn very randomly and by the guidance we have from another person. I imagine that promoted activities do exist in the curriculum, especially with the new curriculum, which enforces experiential learning” (#Interviewee 7)

Particularly, the previous statements capture interesting attitudes of some educators about the lack of knowledge concerning the content of the curriculum. Therefore, it is obvious that there is a need for a deeper examination of the curriculum and its aspects, since it is constituted as a fundamental tool of teaching all the subjects, by guiding the lessons’ structure. Thus, it is going to be discussed to the following chapter.

**Theme 2: The status of experiential learning in outdoor language teaching**

The second theme is related to the teachers’ perceptions regarding the status of experiential learning in outdoor language teaching. Specifically, the teachers expressed their personal opinion regarding the value of experiential learning, its practical techniques and methods, by giving different definitions of this educational aspect of teaching. In general, the specific theme aims to highlight the importance of experiential learning in language teaching and parallel its contribution to the language curriculum in the form of outdoor practical activities.

- **Different interpretations of experiential learning**

At the beginning of each interview the participants expressed their thoughts regarding the definition of experiential learning. Overall, all the teachers referred to experiential learning as a
teaching approach, which keeps students active participants, since the learning outcomes are based on their own experiences. In particular, four teachers referred to experiential learning as an educational approach, where “the students gain knowledge from their own experiences” (#Interviewee 4). Based on that, the following example indicates the importance of gaining knowledge, beyond the school books, as part of experiential learning:

“Experiential learning comes from the word experience, which means that the children need to experience something in order to learn it; to experience it themselves. It is when the students experience the process, beyond of just reading their books, but to make the knowledge part of their experience” (#Interviewee 1)

Following, #Interviewee 10 mentioned the meaning of experiential learning in all the teaching subjects, while there is a noteworthy reference regarding students’ vocabulary, as a highly important aspect within a language lesson and the language curriculum:

“Students take the opportunity to greatly experience themselves about the learning subject and they come in direct contact with it or some of its aspects; they experience themselves practically and not on a theoretical base only. For example, at first language lesson deals with the vocabulary. The children can develop their writing and speaking related to a specific topic, since they come in a direct contact with it” (#Interviewee 10)

Additionally, beyond the active participation of the students, the following statement introduces an interesting perception about the difference between experiential and passive learning, by bringing up the dissimilar way of learning before and nowadays:

“Firstly, experiential learning, as we came through the university studies and from my personal working experience until today, is the one that students experience and live something within a situation; maybe it is taken from their daily life and the teacher brings that situation inside or outside the classroom and the students learn from that. It is not the type of knowledge we know, where the teacher doing a lecture in the classroom and the students are just listening, writing and raising their hands” (#Interviewee 7)

Moreover, an additional notable perception emerged from #Interviewee 5, as experiential learning is referred to an educational approach that can be practiced in the outdoor environment, where the students experience themselves by doing a field study and examining social problems:

“I perceive the term of experiential learning, wherever it is possible to adjust and to gain a better understanding from the students, to be practiced outside of the classroom in a place, where the students can do a field study. For example, if the lessons’ subject is related to
the nature, then to adapt the lesson out in the nature, as a simple example; experiential learning refers to the implementation of a lesson to a place outdoors beyond its theoretical context” (#Interviewee 5)

At this point, it is important to mention the implicitly stated connection between indoor lessons and traditional way of teaching and the explicitly stated connection between outdoor lessons and experiential learning. This connection will be discussed further to the next chapter.

- **The value of experiential learning**

Along with the different definitions of experiential learning, all the teachers referred to the value of experiential learning based on their personal perceptions. All the teachers responded positively regarding the learning outcomes through experiential learning, even though the current curriculum is based on traditional ways of teaching. Specifically, the teachers reflected upon the cognitive outcomes from students’ side and the emotional responses of both teachers and students: “in that way you activate your students and the lesson is much more interesting” (#Interviewee 9) and “it increases the percentage of the indicators of success, as it is for granted that when the students experience something they will understand it better” (#Interviewee 10).

Furthermore, half of the teachers mention the value of experiential learning on students’ long-term memory and how they easily grasp the knowledge, when they come in direct contact with it. An indicative example is the following:

“Generally, experiential learning, because it has the learners’ experiences as its base, it helps them to memorize easily, to learn better and the results are much more numerous and more permanent” (#Interviewee 3)

Additionally, even if the quantity of incoming information in students’ mind is the same either passively or actively, the learning outcomes change based on the way the students receive the incoming information. A characteristic answer from #Interviewee 1 refers to the value of experiential learning compared with the reading of books or by having a kind of lecture based on a teacher-centered lesson:

“The students have to gain much more and I think that when you experience something, you will not forget it and this is for everything, even if you study fifteen books, there is a big difference, when you experience it. Namely, some things, because they are part of their own experiences, are easier to be perceived in their long-term memory, instead of mentioning them 100 times” (#Interviewee 1)
Furthermore, Interviewee 6 referred to the positive effects of experiential learning on students’ comprehension and the importance of having the opportunity to express their feelings. The specific teacher referred to experiential learning as a different way of teaching:

“Experiential learning is an alternative way of teaching in schools, which I think is very important, because you activate the observation skills of the students, in a way that express their feelings and the lesson is more interesting” (Interviewee 6)

To conclude with this sub-theme, analyzing the teachers’ perceptions on the value of experiential learning both to different teaching subjects and language lessons, it is obvious that they all agree on its importance regarding the learning outcomes.

- Practical techniques and methods of experiential learning

According the discussion related with the practical techniques and methods based on experiential learning, it is noteworthy to see teachers’ views on different practical methods. In particular, Interviewee 8 referred to experiential learning as the connection with other educational practices and theories and especially theatre education:

“For me experiential learning means to practice theatre education in your lessons, which I think it is a very important aspect of experiential learning” (Interviewee 8)

Furthermore, Interviewee 3 connected experiential learning with the importance of students’ involvement in different activities, in order to keep them active through the learning process:

“Generally, experiential learning is the process where the students involve themselves in a practical way of learning; they are not passive receivers of the knowledge, but they contribute in every way. For example the theatrical performances, from where the students have stimuli to move, talk, express themselves in any way they want, focusing on the target of the lesson” (Interviewee 3)

Additionally, although two of the teachers connected explicitly theatrical performances and theatrical education to experiential learning, all the teachers in their practical experiences referred to relevant examples of activities based on these practical teaching methods.

To sum up, till this point an overview about teachers’ views regarding language teaching in Cyprus and the meaning of experiential learning is presented. Although all the teachers have positive attitudes on the latter, it is apparent that there is a gap between both topics as most of the teachers referred to the contemporary traditional way of language teaching, which comes on the
opposite side of the experiential way of teaching. Hence, the next step is to examine the possible explanations given for the existence of this gap nowadays according to interviewees’ answers.

**Theme 3: Teachers’ practical experiences in outdoor language activities based on experiential learning**

Regarding the specific theme, based on teachers’ teaching experiences concerning outdoor language teaching, half of them inevitably referred to practical examples. The answers of all the participants regarding the possible place of doing outdoor activities mainly referred to visits in museums and environmental centers. The following examples reveal additional possible places of applying outdoor activities, such as the schoolyard, the place around the school, the neighborhood and public buildings, such as the post-office and the church.

To begin with, the first two quotations show the use of the neighborhood to teach and/or practice adjectives. The first example of outdoor language activity is connected with the visit in a local building, which is a supplementary aim of the educational curriculum; students’ direct contact with the community. The second example is related to a walk in the surrounded area of the school. Although the teachers have different grades (6th and 2nd respectively) and the teaching process was prepared differently, the main aim was focused on the development of students’ oral and writing skills regarding the description of the place:

“For example, our subject was related to a description of a building and we went outside of the school to the church of our parish to see that building and describe it; to see it how is it inside, outside, when is dated and more details” (#Interviewee 2)

“We did the adjectives. We went outdoors to describe different things e.g. trees, the schoolyard, the school, the slated. For example, they could say for the tree that it is big, green, tall e.t.c, different adjectives. Additionally, they were holding cards, in order to express different time adverbs: at the beginning, while, after, later e.t.c, to use these words and not all the time the same words: after, after and then” (#Interviewee 1)

The latter example describes in more details the learning process and the main goal of the activity: “The aim was to see that the way we chose to go was a sequence of words and not only the words that already know” (#Interviewee 1). Additionally, it is important to mention the use of cards, which they had different adverbs written on them and thus it was easier for the students to stay concentrated, by using different linking words. This example shows the use of non-
authentic material from the environment, in order to enhance learning. The following paradigm differs, as it is related with the use of natural materials, in order to enliven a specific theatrical speech and enhance learning:

“The students were requested to enliven the myth; to undertake their roles as they were seeing it from the images and the text through their book, to create imaginary dialogs, to express them verbally and start a role-playing. Regarding the olive tree, the children came out of the classroom, they observed the trees, they brought in some olive branches and they examined what they look like and instead of doing the lesson, from their book, we did the lesson using real natural materials (#Interviewee 3)

It is notable here that the children used the environment to take authentic materials, which would be helpful for them and their performance, even though according to #Interviewee 3 “the students were most of the times outdoor to make rehearsals, the children showed high interest of participating and involving themselves in this process”. The teacher referred to the importance of being outdoors, as a way of supporting concentration and focus on the performance.

Furthermore, the majority of the teachers referred that outdoor education can take place to additional local places and cultural visits. Specifically, they referred to museums as possible places of applying outdoor activities and specifically language activities. However, not all of them referred to relevant practical examples of visits to museums. An indicative example is the following:

“For example, now we have the section “the museum” in the language lesson. Since, most of the children haven’t been to a museum, they need to experience what is a caption and to see the statues. Thus, we went with the students to a museum to see the statues, the different objects in the museum, what are the captions, what they have written on them, why they have a caption. Thus, we started first from the experiential part and then we went to the theoretical part, so the time we started with the text, they knew what is the caption, what is the object and what there is in a museum” (#Interviewee 1)

The reference to the museums as an important place to apply outdoor activities is an interesting outcome, which mirrors the idea of outdoor language teaching taken from the perceptions of the ten Cypriot primary school teachers. Therefore it will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Moreover, half teachers referred to alternative possible place of practicing outdoor activities, which is the post-office, where the students can write their own letters and get a better
understanding of the whole process of writing and sending letters. An indicative example is given below:

“For example, recently we have visited a post-office, where the students wrote their own letter, in order to post it to the other school, so they did (they sent it) and they (the students from the other school) responded. The students visited the post-office, they put on the stamps, they were guided from the responsible person there in the post-office and they wrote the letter” (#Interviewee 10)

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that one of the teachers referred to excursions and visits based on educational programs, as a way to apply outdoor language activities. Specifically, the teacher organized an educational program within a language lesson:

“I have already applied it (outdoor education) in cases is possible and whenever I can. When I had 6th grade we had a section in language lesson entitled “two days up to the mountains”, near the nature etc. Thus, I designed a three-days program in an environmental centre, as the lesson differs when you talk with them about the mountains and when they experience this situation in the mountains” (#Interviewee 5)

Additionally, it is surprisingly to examine the opinion of five teachers, who under the question of how they perceive and understand outdoor education, they reported that supplementary possible places of practicing outdoor education are other classrooms in the school or their own classroom, if they would arrange it differently. Specifically, #Interviewee 10 mentioned that: “We moved to the classroom of Home Economics. We didn’t do that in our classroom”. Additionally, according to the following perception, teacher’s teaching in another classroom is connected with the lack of appropriate chapters in the books of applying outdoor activities:

“In other chapters or topics, where outdoor education is not suitable or easy to practice, for example in cooking, that time we went outdoors, out of our classroom, to the Home of Economics classroom, but outside of the school was not necessary to go. Hence, it depends on the teaching subject and if the topic offers outdoor opportunities” (#Interviewee 2)

Furthermore, #Interviewee 1 mentioned that: “Outdoor education can be practiced in another classroom of the school, where they have an interactive blackboard which we don’t have”. The specific quotation shows a strong connection of learning and technology, since it absorbs a big part of our lives within a modern society. Along with that and as a consequence, based on three teachers’ answers classroom’s reform is an alternative way of approaching experiential learning. An indicative example is given below:
“My opinion is that our own classroom has benefits and lots of possibilities, if you (the teacher) arrange it in an effective way. For example the students need to have their own pillow, where all of us will sit down on the floor and share different stories of fairytales, to discuss a specific topic...I mean that the classroom by its own can be source of experiential learning, we don’t need to go far away” (#Interviewee 1)

Beyond the fact that the above examples are considered as personal perceptions of each teacher, it additionally mirrors some barriers and difficulties of implementing outdoor activities, which are going to be discussed to the last theme. Beyond the referred barriers, outdoor language teaching is strongly connected with some important benefits, which are presented through the following theme.

**Theme 4: The perceived benefits of outdoor language teaching**

The specific theme of the study investigates the benefits of outdoor experiential language learning through the perceptions of the ten participants. The perceptions of the teachers are overall related both to the development of cognitive and learning skills of the students and oral and linguistic skills. The relevant theme is separated in sub-themes, in order to follow in a better way of the related benefits.

- **Existence of authentic texts**

In particular, seven out of ten teachers highlighted the importance of the direct contact with different texts and situations. Teachers stressed out the significance of the authentic texts within the outdoor environment, in order to develop oral skills and use language authentically. In general, the teachers who applied outdoor language activities mentioned that the learning outcomes are more transparent and those students have the opportunity to develop their oral skills and critical thinking. An indicative paradigm is the following:

“Surely, experiential learning in combination with outdoor education and critical thinking is an inter-connected grid. Since children are coming in direct contact with the teaching subject, it helps them to see within a critical sight and if we take the example with the post-office then the students can examine who is the sender, the different sides of the whole topic, the reason of sending the letter, who is going to read it, why he/she sends it etc. I think that it helps. For sure it helps” (#Interviewee 10)
Furthermore, #Interviewee 7 mentioned the same example about the visit to the post-office. Additionally, she supported the connection between critical literacy and the different multimodal texts from another point of view:

“The critical literacy is revealed from the students’ ‘thinking that “I wrote a letter, I took it at home and I opened it, but I realize that it was not well-written” or when their mum reads it, she didn’t understand what it was written. Thus, the child would think that needs to have a more careful handwriting the next time” (#Interviewee 7)

The aforementioned examples reveal the connection between experiential learning and the local community, by practicing an outdoor language activity. Additionally, the students come in contact with different multimodal texts, which enhance their critical thinking. The following example reveals the connection between experiential learning and critical literacy:

“Basically, when a lesson is being practiced outdoors, then the senses are more involved. Thus, it is a way to make them more active and activate their personal interest and consequently it is more possible to accomplish learning and hence critical thinking as well. I might not criticize something well, if I don’t experience it” (#Interviewee 8)

To sum up, critical literacy is enhanced through the existence of authentic multimodal texts within authentic environments. Additionally, the importance of experiential learning is highlighted as it is important for the students to experience something, in order to be able to criticize it.

Increase of interest

All the teachers unanimously stated that outdoor language teaching has a significant impact on students’ willingness to learn. Additionally, it motivates and increases their interest, since “when they interchanged with different activities in different environment, the lesson is more interesting” (#Interviewee 7). Additionally, by switching the place of learning is important for the students to “stay calm and concentrated” (#Interviewee 3). Additionally, one illustrative example which portrays the general opinion of all the teachers is the following:

“They are enthusiastic most of the times with what they see. They want to define it, to express it and share it with the others. I think that this helps them a lot. And the fact that the students are outdoors helps them. They like it. They like to recount something that they have experienced” (#Interviewee 1)
Furthermore as #Interviewee 6 agreed: “The lesson is more active and the students like it. They feel more activate. It is interesting for them. Additionally, #Interviewee 6 mentioned the importance of connecting theory to practice, especially for low-skilled students, in order to enhance their understanding on a specific topic:

“I think that if they were indoors, they would understand it, but the related outcome would not be the same as outdoors, due to the fact that some students and especially the low-skilled students need the practical stage of learning. The practical stage of learning is important for them” (#Interviewee 6)

A similar explanation was given related to the visual learners. In particular, #Interviewee 5 mentioned the importance of giving them the chance to expand their field, in order to make them feel that it is more interesting for them: “For example there are students that are visual learners. Therefore, if you take out this student to experience and see something outside of the classroom, then you provide them with more stimuli to criticize and understand better the related topic”.

Theme 5: The perceived barriers and limitations of outdoor language teaching

A general view of the teachers’ answers is referred to their willingness and the positive attitudes about outdoor language teaching and the curiosity that emerged about that from some others. However, it is obvious, that some of them didn’t refer to the connection of language lesson and outdoor activities. Either way, all the interviewees strongly mentioned some limitations or difficulties related to outdoor language teaching. Beyond that, they unintentionally separated their answers to some common barriers that are referred to the general educational system.

➤ Educational system and social barriers

All the teachers brought up several and different barriers that hold back the adaption of outdoor activities both to language lesson and other teaching subjects. Time and place restrictions, the overweight curriculum, lack of support, the existence of economical issues and generally the established cultural philosophy of schools’ administration, the teachers and the students are stressed out as important impediments of applying outdoor activities.

○ Time pressure and place restrictions

Without exception, all the teachers have the same opinion regarding the time limitations and place restrictions regarding the implementation of outdoor activities within all the teaching
subjects. Specifically, they refer to the time and place as two important factors, which prohibit the actual application or even teachers’ thoughts of applying outdoor activities, as they are constituted as time-consuming activities.

Furthermore, the lack of time is connected with the huge amount of curriculum that teachers need to address punctually. Hence, the pressure of teaching many things in short time persuades teachers’ thinking of implementation outdoor activities:

“...when you must “run” to cover all the subjects in short time, then makes the teachers thinking two or three times, what he/she is going to do. Although the expected outcomes are better, the time you will need is much more than those” (#Interviewee 6)

Additionally, place restrictions were generally mentioned by the majority of the teachers as an impediment that most of the times the teachers need to confront. Specifically, they referred to the inadequate infrastructure of the school building, as impediment of applying outdoor activities. According to #Interviewee 7 who works in an urban school:

“Another barrier is sometimes the school building, which might not be conducive to adapt outdoor activities. For example, in our school we have an inner courtyard, which is brownstone ground and around there are the classrooms. If I want to do an activity there, due to that time I cannot go to schoolyard, when they have the same time gymnastic lessons there, then I cannot practice an outdoor activity on the slated, because it is disturbing for the others. Hence, a practical issue is emerged” (#Interviewee 7)

Last but not least, all the interviewees mentioned that safety issues and risks are necessary to be taken into account, when the teachers move outdoors. Therefore, there are a lot of undertaken responsibilities within an outdoor environment. According to #Interviewee 5:

“(…) safety issues related to the children are not similar indoors and outdoors. At once, if you are outdoors, you take big risks that nobody will support you the next day, if something happens, for example if a student get injured. If that happens in the classroom, then you are supported from the classrooms’ design, which is responsibility of Ministry of Education, but when you are outdoors, who is going to support you?” (#Interviewee 5)

Hence, teachers are very thoughtful on taking these decisions. To sum up, it is important to see here how many factors are strongly inter-connected, since there is a sequence among them; over-weighted curriculum, limited time, inappropriate places, safety issues. Following, the teachers referred to cost limitations and lack of support, in front of the possibility of moving outdoors.
- **Cost and lack of support**

Without exception all the teachers mention that another important impediment is related to the economical issues and the cost of going outdoors. Specifically, #Interviewee 6 mentioned the general character of the economy, as it is in the focal point of everything:

“OK, currently the situation is difficult. When we talk about experiential learning and outdoor education and out of the school, it is very tough to come up against the economical problems. Where are the financial resources then? The economy is the one, which controls everything (#Interviewee 6)

Additionally, all the teachers except three referred to the educational administration as an additional barrier of practicing outdoor activities. Beyond that, the necessity of supporting outdoor education through the curriculum is important, as it influences headmasters’ attitudes:

“(…) the headmasters wouldn’t be so negative, since it would be in the formal planning of the government and within the educational realm. It differs when I have to say to the headmaster “I want to do this specific thing and I want to go there”, instead of saying “In our books is written that we have to visit those place and I want to do it”. In that way, they accept it more warmly, than to be considered as the teacher’s initiative (#Interviewee 3)

It is obvious that the educational administration has an important impact on implementation of outdoor activities, while teachers’ freedom is limited. Nevertheless, #Interviewee 2, #7 and #9 mentioned that their school’s headmaster is very receptive to alternative activities, especially when they move outdoors. An illustrative example is the following:

“Cyprus is suitable for outdoor activities and the weather offers this possibility. This is what our headmaster says: “Move out of the classroom. Open your doors and your mind”. The headmaster says this all the time and he enforces us to do that” (#Interviewee 9)

Last but not least, it is important to mention the existence of paperwork and educational bureaucracy, which is mentioned explicitly from one participant. However, the overall idea of all the interviews reveals that it is a limitation, which affects all the teachers either way:

“(…) they could be done this kind of arrangements. Whereas now, the educator by his/her has to take numerous permits, to do a lot of discussions with the headmaster, something that is very difficult to do within the limited time we have” (#Interviewee 3)

Following, the need of effective communication between the teachers and specialists teachers on outdoor education or consultants is important, while the planning of training seminars including
the concept of outdoor education is significant as well. The lack of informing is revealed to the following example: “At first the educators need to be trained. We don’t know what is this kind of education and how can we use it” (#Interviewee 6)

To sum up, all the above examples reveal that time limitations along with an overweight curriculum and cost issues prevent teachers of applying outdoor activities. Following, another important impediment is the current established cultural philosophy of teachers and students.

- **The established cultural philosophy of teachers and students**

In general, all the teachers referred to other teachers’ attitudes and students’ behavior as important difficulties that impede outdoor activities, due to the fact that the idea of outdoor education is not well-known. The following example is given within the framework of language teaching and it indicates an explanation of the current character of education in Cyprus:

“We have this culture from a long time ago. In the University of Cyprus, where most of the teachers finish their studies, we haven’t been taught how to teach experientially and out of the classroom. But, all the courses were related of teaching courses indoors, by using technology, doing this and that. For example, Bruner’s philosophy about experiential, cooperative and learning by building up on the prior knowledge, you should search for it on your own, in order to understand it” (#Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, students’ culture and behavior is another important barrier of applying outdoor activities, since according to #Interviewee’s 1 answer the students are not easily receptive and adjustable in changes. Therefore teachers’ work is even harder, as they need to be well prepared:

“The students are not used to these changes. They don’t keep their line. Until you turn from the other side, they are gone. They are not obedient. They don’t have self-discipline. You put them in a place and they run right and left and you lose them. They need to understand that they have to be close to the teacher, that our subject is this one and to be focused. And this needs a lot of preparation” (#Interviewee 1)

Beyond students' behavior, another important and attention-grabbing barrier that has been explicitly mentioned from #Interviewee 9 is the personal feeling of insecurity, when the teacher is outdoors:

“When you are outdoors, students can ask much more things, as the range is wider. (....) Hence, I have to be prepared for more things. But, in the classroom they are limited. (....) We are. Because most of the times we might ask ourselves rhetorically “But, aren’t you too
lazy now to go outdoors?” OK, whenever I can practice it, I try, because I also like it. But, due to the lack of time, I typically prepare something indoors” (#Interviewee 9)

Although, the specific attitude is presented only from #Interviewee 9, it is a significant aspect that needs to be emphasized. Furthermore, #Interviewee 1 highlights this aspect from the general position of other teachers that in the classroom they feel more secure themselves. Hence, the personal uncertainty enforces indoor lessons:

“Something else is the feeling that: “When the door closes, I am in my classroom and nobody can see what I am doing”. Thus, the teachers feel safe in the classroom. But, when you move outdoors, other teachers will see you and wonder: what are they doing outside? They are doing silly things. They are doing good things; I will implement them as well” (#Interviewee 1)

It is very obvious from the teachers’ answers that the established cultural background of the teachers and students keep one step backward anything that could develop the current situation. Specifically, #Interviewee 7 mentioned that:

“That’s the truth. Can a specialized teacher on the specific topic promote it to the schools? Can it be like that? Or does all the educational system and the general thinking and culture of the teachers need to change? It is hard to change something” (#Interviewee 7)

To sum up, the reported answers sketched the traditional educational culture of Cyprus’ school system, as one of the major impediments of the implementation of outdoor activities. Thus, this is going to be discussed to the next chapter.

➢ Language teaching barriers

Beyond the general barriers that teachers have to face in outdoor teaching, the teachers referred to some limitations they deal with, when are willing to apply outdoor language activities. More specifically, the theoretical nature of language as a teaching subject, the insufficiency of outdoor language teaching, as an approach to develop the appropriate language skills to the students and the inappropriate language books of applying outdoor activities, are the three main impediments that were mentioned.

o The theoretical nature of language

The majority of the teachers referred to the theoretical nature of the subject of language as a factor that abridges the implementation of outdoor practical activities. However, three of the
teachers didn’t have a complete idea about teaching language in an outdoor environment. The teachers were asked to express their opinions regarding the specific topic, but they didn’t give any apparent idea about that. Specifically, they referred to grammatical issues and phenomena, as difficult teaching subject to apply it outdoors:

“It is very hard for me to think about the combination of outdoor learning and language teaching. For grammatical issues for example, I cannot think something that it can be practiced experientially in that way. I don’t know, but I think it is much harder to be applied and practiced in language teaching” (#Interviewee 4)

“If I take for example one text, which has a grammatical phenomenon and you don’t want to go out; because you are wondering, why do I have to go outdoors? It is waste of time. I don’t know something else specific” (#Interviewee 6)

The above statements show the situation of the current educational system, which is focused on grammatical rules and on the knowledge of language’s structure. Also, they reveal teachers’ insecurity of moving outdoors, in order to apply an outdoor language activity regarding a grammatical phenomenon. Additionally, #Interviewee 8 mentioned that:

“It is difficult for me to find the way and might also the aim of practicing an outdoor language lesson and why it has to be done outdoors You need to have an aim when you take the students to practice an outdoor activity, to understand the reason you are doing it, to have an additional value” (#Interviewee 8)

The above statement highlights the importance of selection not just an outdoor place, but the appropriate place, where you have an aim and the learning process will guide the students to the necessary for them knowledge. Higgins and Nicol (2002) support that going outdoors does not constitute a choice of not being indoors, but it is a learning method with specific educational aims and links with the different teaching subjects.

- **Insufficient methods on practicing writing skills**

Most of the teachers argue on the inadequate method of outdoor language teaching to include writing activities. The necessity of practicing writing skills is as important as the verbal skills, so the teachers mentioned that within outdoor language activities it is difficult to overcome the limitations of applying writing exercises. Seven out of ten teachers mentioned the difficulty to develop writing skills outdoors: “It is difficult. The students need to write somewhere, to take some notes” (#Interviewee 6). Additionally, an indicative example is the following:
“When you are outdoors, the teacher has to prepare and organize everything from before with accuracy, the materials that are necessary for the lesson, because it is not easy as if you are indoors, where you have all the things you need. And I refer to the learning tools and materials” (#Interviewee 5)

Additionally, #Interviewee 5 mentioned that sometimes the books are not necessary to have them outdoors, while some other times are important. Furthermore, it is notable to see that the learning tools and materials are important to some students, thus they need to transfer them outdoors:

“There are students that when they experience something is enough. But, there are also students who need to write down the same time the things that they saw, examined and experienced. Thus, the learning tool is more important for them, regardless grade and age of the student. Most of the lessons are being practiced by using these learning materials, thus it is easier for them to learn” (#Interviewee 5)

To conclude, it is interesting the fact that the majority of the teachers referred to the writing skills as an important aspect of learning language. However, they have mentioned the insufficiency of outdoor activities to develop this kind of skills. Additionally, the teachers expressed their concerns for the way that the educational system is currently working, while they explained the impediments that inhibit their efforts of applying new and alternative techniques.

- **Inappropriate language books**

In general, all the teachers referred to the limited amount of information that is provided from the curriculum and continuously from the Ministry of Education, regarding the implementation of outdoor activities out of the school classroom. Specifically, half of the teachers referred to the inappropriate chapters in the school books for language lesson. As it was mentioned to the third theme related to the teachers’ practical activities in language teaching, the indicative example from #Interviewee 1 showed that the lack of support from the books does not lead the teachers to apply activities in the classroom. That is, because the language books are not supportive on outdoor activities. Following, it is presented another example:

“For example, now we have a topic about “My birthday”. In which places do I have to go that are relevant with this topic? They are not helpful of enforcing you (the teacher) to say that “I will take them outdoors for that specific subject” (#Interviewee 1)

Furthermore, the specific barrier is revealed more from the teachers’ suggestions and recommendations regarding the school books. Indicative answers mention that:
“It would be very good if in every section of the books or in every teaching lesson was a list of thematic activities that could be done; like a bank of materials at the end of each section, which would mention beyond the main goals, some ways or games that could achieve the goals. Additionally, it would be nice to have a list of suggestions to places that we could visit, so it would be easier for the teacher” (#Interviewee 3)

“...the way that the language books are structured, are not helpful to teach outdoors. That is, from all the books I taught the last one is the worst” (#Interviewee 1)

In this part the examination of the teachers’ perceptions is mainly focused on the explicitly stated answers. Following to the next chapter, both the explicit and the implicit meanings of their answers regarding all the themes will be examined in a deeper level. The specific investigations are necessary, in order to conclude in remarkable outcomes of the study.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Summary

In this chapter the most notable results are going to be discussed. Furthermore, the relevant literature and findings are going to be connected and analyzed in a further discussion based on the research aims of the current study. The aim of this chapter is both the presentation of the possible connections between the findings and the relevant literature and a deeper analysis and comprehension of the teachers’ perceptions according to outdoor language teaching, based on experiential learning. The extracted information focuses on the answers of the guiding questions and fulfills the basic aim of the research.

Teachers’ views about outdoor language teaching in Cypriot primary schools

Teachers’ views on the specific topic were based on the individual discussions, which began from their general idea about the nature of language teaching in Cyprus and went to the specific idea of outdoor language teaching within a Cypriot primary classroom.

To begin with the general idea of the nature of language teaching, all the teachers reported a significant characteristic of the current educational system in Cyprus, which affects language teaching; the traditional form of education. They described the educational system as conventional and bonded to old ideas and methods of teaching. Accordingly, it puts pressure on them, as it is the main difficulty that they have to come up against. By giving a deeper look, the character of education and its aspects are enforced from people with competence on educational changes. Therefore, applying changes does not constitute as a simple situation, but a complex action, where many different things need to be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, the majority of these teachers are used to the traditional way of teaching and they are very skeptical of different teaching practices and methods. Additionally, most of the teachers referred to the students’ upbringing as a barrier of applying new ideas. But, none of them referred explicitly to parents’ attitudes towards reformed ways of teaching and learning language. Specifically, eight teachers reported that the educational and cultural background of the students make the implementation of other teaching methods harder or the decision to implement alternative methods more difficult. This refers to the cultural philosophy of teachers and students. At this point, they implicitly stated that the parental education needs to be
transformed, when they face new educational methods and ideas. Accordingly, this affects students’ adjustment in new situations, for example when they have to be entailed in outdoor activities. The students are over-active and the level of their obedience is low. Thus, when they move outdoors, they make much noise, which is something that consequently generates complaints from other teachers and affects teachers’ patience. Hence, teachers’ decision of moving the children outdoors is not easily taken. However, students’ behavior is receptive to changes, when the educators approach different methods and ideas in an interesting way for the students. Therefore, it additionally lies on the educators how close they are with their students and how they can persuade them on concentrating and focusing through the outdoor learning process. To sum up, a good relationship between teacher and student is very important impact on students’ behavior and cooperation, in order to achieve more effective lessons.

Additionally, it is obvious from all the interviews that the teachers put the weight on the books, as the main learning tool. Indeed, the book is an important learning material. However, what is important is not completely outdoor education, but a combination between outdoor and indoor education (Jordet, 2007; NCU, 2004). Through all the interviews the teachers reported the importance of going through the curriculum and all the chapters promptly. Additionally, they have specific guideline of what to teach and when. Therefore, before they “go out” of the book and they change the learning environment need to examine these factors. As a result of this, parents’ and headmasters’ insecurity is increasing. This is an implicitly explanation from all the interviewees, that leads them to the implementation of “within the four walls” lessons. The explicitly statements of the teachers referred to the over-weight and mandated curriculum, as a characteristic of language teaching.

As it mentioned before, an important factor that encourages indoor lessons is the pressure that teachers need to go through the curriculum and all the chapters of the books promptly. This pressure is created from the way that the curriculum is structured and the specific instructions given to the teachers. Therefore, this situation mirrors the teachers’ answers regarding the basic philosophical background of the competent authority for the recent educational system, which is the Ministry of Education and Culture. This is also notable from all the teachers’ answers at the end of each interview, related to their suggestions and recommendations about the things that the Cypriot educational system needs to change and in which ways the relevant books for language teaching can be reformed.

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2 “Within the four walls”: It is an exact translation from Greek language to English, which refers to the implementation of indoor lessons.
Another important barrier to the application of outdoor activities, according to the teachers’ answers, is related to the school’s headmaster, since most of them have a conservative way of thinking. The general picture of the results showed that the teachers have low self-confidence, when it comes to moving outdoors, due to the school’s headmaster attitudes towards alternative teaching practices; they are not so open-mined and the freedom, which is given to the teachers, is limited (National foundation for educational research in England and Wales, 2005). Nevertheless, it is surprising to conclude that for some teachers (#Interviewee 2, #3 and #9), although they have the freedom to move outdoors, their low level of confidence constitutes as a notable barrier. At this point, taking into consideration the age of each participant, it is obvious that the younger teachers do not feel secure of applying outdoor activities, comparing to the older teachers. This implicates that the experienced teachers, since they have experienced teaching in longer time, they feel more confident to change the current situation. Following, #Interviewee 1 mentioned that, even if there is not so much freedom from the school’s headmaster, the personal motivation and confidence of moving out does exist. Despite that fact, #Interviewee 1 reported that the headmaster has to be informed before hand, even if the outdoor activities would just take place in the schoolyard.

Consequently, the teachers are less motivated to move outdoors, when they have to give explanations for the outdoor activities in advance. Otherwise, they will be reprimanded by other teachers or the school’s headmaster. Thus, in order to avoid this kind of situations, the teachers prefer to apply indoor lessons more often than outdoors (Tan & Pendretti, 2010). Taking into account this impediment, it is important to mention that not all the headmasters are conservative and narrow-minded. Therefore, is their way of thinking based on their personal experiences and/or the guidelines and instructions that they need to follow as the head of the school? As it mentioned before, #Interviewee 2, #7 and #9 argued that the headmaster of the school enforces them to move outdoors, due to the fact that he had practiced outdoor learning before (Chapter IV, p. 44). The rest of the teachers reported a negative or insecure position of the headmasters in front of outdoor activities. Therefore, it needs to be taken into account where this derives from, in order to apply more effective changes.

To conclude this discussion, all the above factors, that influence outdoor learning and are related to the educational system, show that there needs to be a greater receptivity towards to alternative ideas. Indeed, it will take time until a new way of thinking will be adapted within the Cypriot society and in peoples’ minds and ideas.

Following with the general idea of outdoor education, all the teachers except two reported a basic knowledge of outdoor education. The majority of the participants referred to outdoor
education as a way of teaching out of the classroom and an educational approach, which is connected to different teaching subjects of the curriculum. Most of the teachers tried to define outdoor education as an educational approach by simply moving the lesson out-of-the-door. Nevertheless, in most of the teachers’ answers there is not a clear and complete idea of outdoor education, related to their practical experiences and their perceptions of the possible places for implementing outdoor activities. Additionally, most of the teachers defined outdoor education very briefly, something that reveals low-confident or at least low-informed educators on the specific topic. An important factor that leads to this superficial knowledge is the lack of information by the educational system, which was mentioned by all the educators as a barrier for applying outdoor activities (Rickinson et al., 2004). Hence, outdoor education within the Cypriot educational system is a less known educational approach.

Although most of the teachers referred to different teaching subjects, the practical examples they mentioned are more related to environmental education, geography lessons and mathematics with the exception for two teachers, who referred both to language and other teaching subjects. Thus, most of the teachers said that outdoor education has more to deal with environmental issues. Additionally, #Interviewee 6 added that outdoor education deals more with environmental issues and sustainable development, while also he pointed out what outdoor education is not, by saying that: “regarding the physical education, it is a lesson that we do outdoors. But, I don’t think is what we call outdoor education. I think we don’t mean this”. Although, this statement seems to distinguish teaching subjects, which their natural place of teaching is outdoors, the general idea of all teachers’ answer showed that they are not familiar with the related topic, thus they were not so confident to their answers.

Out of the possible places that an outdoor activity can be implemented in, most of the teachers referred to local places such as olive oil presses, environmental centers and culture places, such as museums and art galleries. Additionally, all the teachers except one reported practical implementations of using the school ground and the school periphery as possible places for outdoor education (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998). The practical experiences of the teachers mirror the profile of each of them. The profile of each interviewee gives information about four topics related to their year of service, the different grades that they have to teach, the different teaching subjects and the location of their school. Even if this amount of information is limited to these four points, straightforward explanations can be given by combining them with the answers of the participants. An example on that is given by #Interviewee 1, who highlighted the importance for all the students being outdoors, but especially for the small ones, since they are more active than older children. Nevertheless, the teacher mentioned that it is more difficult with
the younger ages, because they cannot be as easily controlled as the older children. Moreover, #Interviewees 7, #9 and #10, who have students in young ages as well, expressed the same opinion. Additionally, #Interviewee 1 mentioned that working outdoors with young children entails the feeling to be more protective, than when working with older children. In contrast, #Interviewee 5, who is working with older children said that protectiveness as a feeling exists equally for all the ages.

Regarding the location of the school, two teachers reported that it might be a problem, since it does not offer possibilities of outdoor activities. #Interviewee 4 expressed a doubt of applying outdoor activities and did not mention any practical experiences outdoors. Additionally, #Interviewee 3 referred to the poor school environment, which limits the outdoor possibilities. Here, it is important to mention that the teachers are working in an urban and rural school respectively. Although the schools are located in different areas, the teachers referred to the same barrier for applying outdoor activities within the schoolyard. Nevertheless, #Interviewee 3 gave a clear example of an outdoor activity by using olive leaves, in order to perform drama activities. This reveals that outdoor activities are not being applied on a frequent base, but rarely. It is important to mention here that although rural areas are generally considered to be easier places for adapting outdoor activities, since the surrounding natural environment is richer, the teacher’s perception regarding the possibilities did not show that.

These examples show that the environment surrounding of a rural school can be easily adaptable to outdoor activities. This is connected with what Dahlgren and Szczepanski (1998) mentioned that urban settings are places that outdoor activities can be practiced as well. Furthermore, it is also connected with the importance of taking primary experiences through direct experiences with the environment (Reed, 1994).

**Outdoor language learning and the connection with the new curriculum through critical literacy and links with experiential learning**

It is obvious from all the teachers’ answers that there is a strong connection between outdoor education and critical literacy. According to the teachers’ answers the existence of different and multimodal texts in the outdoor environment, the authentic use of language, the direct contact with current environmental problems and the possibility of connecting with the local community by visiting local and cultural places enhance the development of critical literacy. Thus, the children learn within an authentic environment by using all the important stimuli and develop all
the necessary skills that are needed, in order to be critical thinkers. Certainly, authentic learning is a basic characteristic of outdoor education, which is also supported in the relevant literature (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998; Hammerman, Hammerman & Hammerman, 2001). Beyond that, the children learn to respect the local community and surrounding buildings, such as the church and a castle. Although this seems as taken for granted, it is not so obvious to all the teachers or the students, until they become involved in this. Thus, many of the teachers were impressed by what the students can develop, beyond the learning goals they set up. Furthermore, according to the teachers’ answers, the students learn important skills, when they are outdoors, for their social and personal development. Thus, they are reflecting critically about social problems that they face by trying to find possible solutions. Consequently, they are developing personally and contribute individually to the social community (Higgins, Loynes & Crowther, 1997).

But, in which points is the critical literacy, outdoor education and experiential learning connected? Initially, regarding the above interrelations, it is obvious that outdoor activities cannot exist without experiential learning and that experiential learning cannot exist without critical thinking. That is because, when the students come outdoors, then they directly are experiencing something new and when they experience something new, then their ability of thinking critically is improved. Priest (1986) emphasizes the importance of activities that are based on experiential learning and human senses. #Interviewee 3 agreed that experiential learning is very important, as the students can only criticize something, when they know it well and since experiential learning achieves that, then it is apparent that the students need to experience something first and then be able to criticize it.

Consequently, not all the outdoor activities can have a critical perspective, if they do not lead to direct experiences with the authentic environment. This comes contradictory to the teachers’ idea that all the outdoor activities are connected with critical literacy. Taking the example of #Interviewee 2, who mentioned that sitting in the school garden with the students and talking or doing their homework can be seen as an outdoor activity, then the status of critical literacy, as a natural part of outdoor activities, is undoubtedly uncertain. However, taking the aforementioned example, the students experience themselves by discussing new situations and new topics and by reflecting on them based on their personal opinions. But, in order to also reflect critically on them, they need first to get familiar with the topics. Thus, the experiential part proceeded of critical literacy.

Additionally, the status of experiential learning differs from indoor to outdoor lessons and consequently critical literacy has different character, since in an outdoor environment the stimuli
that students take, give them the opportunity to reflect critically in another way. In indoor lessons, children reflect critically through the use mainly of technological gadgets and in the outdoor environment the students reflect critically using their own senses, while in both learning environments their communication skills are developed (Comber & Kerkham, 2007).

Outdoor language learning and the connection with the new curriculum and experiential learning

As was already mentioned, through the whole curriculum the existence of experiential learning has a theoretical base and it is mainly based on indoor lessons. For the language curriculum, there are some promoted activities that are based on experiential learning, but for the teachers this is not enough, in order to implement as experiential activities. Moving a step forward, outdoor education and outdoor language activities are not prominent in the curriculum. Thus, the language lessons are missing important information about alternative educational practices that could be done, in order to include more experiential-based activities in their lessons.

However, the current situation in the primary classrooms, according to the teachers’ answers, is that most of the activities are based on the use of technology and influences all the lessons and specifically the language lessons (Jewitt, 2006). Within a technologically developed society, it is obvious that education must include that. This is noticeable from the teachers’ indoor practical experiences on technological tools such as computers. It is also apparent, when it comes to what the teachers learn from the training seminars that “all the sample lessons are taught how to be practiced indoors and not outdoor” (#Interviewee 4). Consequently, the teachers are instructed about practical ideas that are mostly related to technology. Besides, the teachers’ inspectors are focused on the use of technology in a lesson.

It is generally accepted that through the technology and the internet the students are exposed to different kinds of information and different kinds of texts, which is what matters a language lesson (Jewitt, 2006; Sharpe, Beetham, & Freitas, 2010). Thus, with these methods the students are expected to learn how to think critically, but with no experiential learning methods, this will be difficult. The current situation of the educational system needs to be changed, in order to be receptive to other teaching methods. Therefore, both the status of experiential learning and outdoor education needs to find the correct place in the curriculum.
Teachers’ attitudes about the barriers and benefits of outdoor language teaching

Apart from behavioral issues and attitudes (Chapter VI, p. 50-52), all the teachers referred to safety limitations that exist in front of the possibility of moving outdoors. The safety limitations are related both to students’ and teachers’ safety. At this point it is important to mention that the nature of the safety issues reflect differently on the students and the teachers. This is being explained following: All the teachers reported that the whole responsibility for the students’ safety rests on them, when they want to go outdoors. The teachers said that whether they are in the schoolyard or visiting a local place, they are heavily responsible for the students’ physical safety (Goldenberg, 2001; Backman, 2011). All the teachers reported risks as a major barrier for implementing outdoor activities. Hence, regardless their willingness to apply outdoor activities, the teachers think more than once about moving outdoors, as they want to stay away from trouble. The implications of the general way of thinking in the community highlight the necessity of being more open-minded, when facing significant changes.

Beyond students’ safety, but connected to that, #Interviewee 1 and #9 referred to teachers’ safety and personal issues in connection with the possibility of moving outdoors. At this point, the term “safety” does not refer to the physical health or physical safety of the teachers, but to the feeling of being secure. Half of the teachers concurred that, since the educational school background limits the practical applications of alternative methods, they prefer to stay mainly indoors, as they feel more secure both for their students’ safety and for their teaching process and learning outcomes. Additionally, one of the participants referred explicitly that educators themselves constitute as a barrier of moving outdoors. The others participants referred mainly to the time needed for preparation and follow-up work as impediments of applying outdoor activities. However, in general from their interviews, the participants’ insecurity of moving outdoors was obvious. Therefore, they implicitly referred to their insecurity by mentioning the aforementioned barriers. Besides, the necessity of informing teachers about new teaching approaches and reformed pedagogies theoretically and practically is very important. All in all, the current outcome shows that there is lack of informing and training of the teachers and therefore the feeling of security is decreased.

Although, experiential learning is a very important parameter in all teaching subjects, its status in the new formal curriculum is mainly theoretical than practical. The teachers’ argue on this point, as they all recommended, that they need more practical suggestions for activities either indoor or outdoor based on experiential learning. According to the literature, experiential
learning is an important aspect, which leads the students to more active participation during the learning process and increases their efficiency.

During the interviews, the teachers reported a range of potential benefits of outdoor language teaching, regardless if they apply practical language activities outdoors or not. Additionally, they mentioned several barriers and difficulties that prevent their willingness to apply those activities. The barriers and benefits that the teachers reported regarding outdoor teaching are related both to language teaching and to other teaching subjects. Although the specific study is focused on outdoor language teaching, the teachers’ reflections on others subjects help to identify supplementary factors that help or hinder outdoor language teaching. The related literature provides an overview of the barriers and benefits of outdoor learning, thus it functions as comparative analysis of teachers’ personal reflections and opinions on outdoor language learning.

Reflecting on the teachers’ answers the participants reported that the benefits of outdoor learning and teaching include: personal and social development, hands-on experiences, long-term memory and increased enthusiasm. Specifically for outdoor language teaching the teachers’ reflections on the benefits include: authentic use of language linked with increased expressiveness and developed vocabulary, communication and verbal skills connected both with their personal and social development. All the teachers reported that being outdoors in an authentic environment encourages the children to express themselves and improve their ability to use language in an appropriate way and in different situations. Examples taken from the teachers’ practical experiences are related to the students’ visits to local places and buildings outside of the school such as the neighborhood and the church respectively. The teachers expressed their personal feelings on the effective influence of the students’ vocabulary and their ability to use language appropriately in different situations. Additionally, all the teachers agreed that outdoor teaching based on experiential learning has an effective impact on students’ memorization of the new information. The students keep the new information in their minds for more time, thus it is more effective for them, as they can easily recall back to their own experiences.

Furthermore, the majority of the teachers reported that being outdoors enforces students’ learning, which comes naturally and effortlessly. They pointed out the importance of joy and the feeling of relaxation during the learning process, which assist to an effective and enjoyable learning. Therefore, the teachers’ reported that an enjoyable lesson keeps students’ attention to the main focus of the teaching subject and thus the quality of learning increases (White, 2008).
Another important parameter of the discussion refers to the barriers to the implementation of outdoor activities both to language lessons and to other teaching subjects. The teachers reported some notable barriers of the current educational school system, which influence outdoor learning in all the teaching subjects as well as some barriers that have an impact on outdoor language learning. Place restrictions, economical issues, lack of support and information, safety limitations, traditional beliefs and thoughts are the most important barriers related to all the teaching subjects and they need to be put into discussion, in order to examine the impediments. The specific impediments reflect on the current educational system and the cultural background of Cyprus, which are the major force of changes.

Beyond these barriers, there are additionally barriers that reflect the personal thinking and decision of the teacher such as lack of materials and long-time preparation. These inhibiting factors concern the nature of an outdoor lesson, which limits the presence of books, since the focal point of the learning process is the use of the environment, thus it is necessary to be well organized and prepared to choose the appropriate place of teaching and not just to move an indoor lesson to the outdoor environment.

The majority of the teachers mentioned different practical experiences as well as different ideas of possible practical implementations of outdoor activities. Both are related with outdoor activities, when the students use the environment and things in the surroundings to enforce their learning of something and/or to learn something new. The related paradigms refer to the use of the artificial geometrical shapes on the school ground as a tool to enhance their mathematical knowledge on circle’s characteristics, the description of the neighboring buildings to enhance their verbal skills, the visit to an oil press to come in direct contact with the production process of the olives, the visit to a post-office to gain a better understanding of the different stages of sending and receiving letters etc. Two teachers mentioned that outdoor activities could include a discussion or doing of homework, while they are sitting in the garden of the school. Although the schoolyard is a place of learning, outdoor learning does not refer to the transformation of an indoor lesson to the outdoor environment in this way, but in a more effective way, which involves the natural resources to focus on the teaching subject. Nevertheless, in this way outdoor environment offers a relaxing atmosphere, which enforces teacher-student and student-student relationships and development of their in-between communication. Another important aspect is focused on the importance of students’ reflection in an outdoor environment, which is referred to as a significant place for students’ learning.
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The final chapter of the current research summarizes the most important findings. Moreover it sets out some recommendations regarding the methodological implications of the current study by presenting an individual feedback. Also, some research suggestions for further studies are pointed out.

Summary of the results

The current study investigated ten primary teachers’ perceptions of outdoor language teaching in Cyprus, with the focal point on experiential learning and its status through the language curriculum. The most important results are summarized and briefly presented below: The research revealed and developed understanding of the status of experiential learning and outdoor learning in language classes in Cyprus. It indicates that teachers, who participated, considered the importance of experiential learning within a language lesson and highlighted the importance of including outdoor language activities. However, they reported different interpretations of outdoor education. Furthermore, they underlined the traditional character of the current educational system as a difficulty and impediment to adapt outdoor activities.

Practical implementations such as drama activities and outdoor games were reported as the major form of experiential learning. The majority of the teachers have practical experiences of outdoor language learning, however there is nothing included in the curriculum that supports that. Thus, the teachers referred to the importance of including outdoor activities in the curriculum.

Furthermore, the status of experiential learning seems to be understandable in teachers’ opinions and perceptions. However, it remains a theoretical basis to the curriculum. Thus, the teachers reported lack of support and information in the curriculum. Accordingly, their motivation of going outdoors decreases. Hence, they suggest and recommend relevant changes. The teachers reported some important benefits of applying outdoor language activities, such as the development of oral skills, personal and social development and critical thinking. Additionally, they all mentioned that the increase in interest among the children when they are outdoors is the major factor that enhances learning.

Furthermore, teachers reported along some significant barriers and difficulties, which remain within the realm of the educational system. In addition, they reported some personal difficulties related to safety issues and time of preparation as well as some important barriers that
are mainly related to the language lesson such as the inadequate methods of practicing writing skills. Place restrictions, lack of appropriate resources and lack of time because of the demanding curriculum are some of the barriers that they were mentioned.

Future steps towards outdoor language learning are promising, since teachers in the study revealed a willingness to be involved in activities concerning the outdoor environment and experiential learning, as most of them did not have the chance yet to experience outdoor education. Moreover, they showed an enthusiasm towards the use of unfamiliar educational approaches, despite the difficulties they face because of the insufficient official support. Generally, they seem to be open-minded and they recognize the significance of the inclusion of new educational methods in language lessons.

**Suggestions for further research**

Based on the methodological limitations of the current study and the personal opinions about possible research areas related to the specific study, I formulated the following questions, which supports the necessity of further research:

- What are the students’ perceptions about the learning process based on experiential learning, being indoors or outdoors? What are the differences? How do the students perceive outdoor language teaching?

- Taking a big sample of primary language teachers: What are the teachers’ attitudes towards outdoor language learning? In which ways do their opinions affect the implementation of outdoor education? How can this change? What are the practical and possible paths that have to be followed?

- Facing a modern technological society but a traditional educational system: What are the reasons that support this contradictory combination? Why does the traditional educational system still exist? In which ways can this be overcome?

- What are the inspectors’ perceptions about the learning process based on experiential learning in outdoor teaching? What are their perceptions especially in outdoor language teaching?


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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

- The researcher clarifies to the participants the research area and aim of the study. Also, she gives a brief presentation of herself, her educational background, the previous studies in education and the choice of the master of “Outdoor Environmental Education and Outdoor Life”.

- The researcher reminds to the participants that if they don’t have any hesitation on that, a voice recorder will be used for the data collection. She explains that its use is only due to practical reasons (more easy transcription of the data). Also, she reminds and confirms them about their anonymity and privacy of their personal details. Additionally, she reminds them the right not to answer to any questions, if they wish to.

Main part of the interviews:

- At the beginning the researcher starts with some demographic questions concerning their:
  - Sex
  - Age
  - Year of service in the primary schools
  - Grade of the children that they are teaching
  - Grade of the children that they are teaching other subjects
  - Subjects that they teach
  - Location of the school (urban or rural)

- Main questions:
  1) At first, can you tell me your personal thoughts about the connection between experiential learning and language teaching?
     Sub-questions: How do you practice experiential learning in your language lessons? In your opinion is there any value of using experiential learning in language teaching?
       o If yes, can you give me an example which reveals that value?
       o If not, how do you organise your lesson plan? Can you think of an example? If there is an inclusion of experiential learning is that because the new curriculum presents some basic principles, which have to be followed?
  2) What are the main guidelines / steps / thoughts that you follow when you organise a language lesson?
     o If you thought about including outdoor activities, why did you do that? Do you find that teaching in an outdoor setting would achieve the goals of your lesson based on experiential learning?
     o If you haven’t thought of including outdoor activities, what are the thoughts behind that decision?
3) How do you interpret “outdoor education”? What do you think is included / excluded from outdoor education? In your opinion, what are the main principles/aspects of outdoor education?
   o Sub-questions: Do you have any personal experience of outdoor teaching? Can you recall on the feelings on that day?
   o If you haven’t experienced outdoor teaching, can you inform me about the feelings of being indoors?

4) According the new curriculum and its principles that is based on; can you tell me about the connection between experiential learning and/or through outdoor teaching?

5) Do you think that critical literacy, which is the basic aim of the new curriculum, can be enhanced through outdoor teaching and experiential learning?
   o If yes, can you give me some examples? How strong is the connection between experiential learning and outdoor education?
   o If no, can you explain why? Why the connection between critical literacy and experiential learning is weak?

6) How do you find the idea of teaching outdoors? Are there any barriers / openings of practicing outdoor education?
   o If yes, can you explain any of the barriers / difficulties / openings that outdoor education has? Do you have any suggestions regarding possible changes to the school culture, in order to assist more experiential learning?
   o If no, how would you reflected upon the teaching from a general view?

- **Closing of interview:**
  - The researcher ask the participants if they have something to ask her before the interview ends
  - The interviewer thanks the participants for their contribution to the study and she reminds them that the result of the study if they wish too, they can be notified to them, when the study completed.

**Important notes:**

- The questions can be reformed according to the respondents’ answers
- Some questions or sub questions may be left back, according to how the discussion goes between the interviewer and the interviewee.
**Interview Invitation**

**Research Topic:** The perceptions of teachers regarding experiential learning through outdoor language teaching in Cypriot primary schools

Linköping University – Department of Culture and Communication

National Centre for Outdoor Education

**MSc Outdoor Environmental Education and Outdoor Life**

Name: Maria Chrysostomou  
Contact details: march762@student.liu.se

**Supervisor:** Emilia Fägerstam

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**Dr Mr/Mrs,**

My name is Maria Chrysostomou and I am a master student in Linköping University to the program Outdoor Environmental Education and Outdoor Life. The aim of my thesis is to look into the views of primary teachers regarding experiential learning through outdoor language teaching. Specifically, through the related topics I want to investigate their in-between connection, as well as the benefits and barriers that might have. Thus, I chose to collect qualitative data through interviews and you are kindly requested to participate to the specific study.

The interviews will take place till the end of March. They are optional and you have the right not to answer to any question included. Also, you have the right to refuse the invitation, if you don’t want to participate. The interviews will be lasted between 30-40 minutes. Furthermore, since I am in Sweden, the interviews will be done through telephone or Skype conversation and you can decide on that. Also, at this point, I would like to ask your permission to use an audio recorder, as it will be easier for the transcription of the data. Otherwise, I inform you that I can take notes during the interview process. At this point, I want to confirm you about the complete anonymity of any personal details, as these will be notified only to me, who I do the research.

Additionally, I want to ensure you that the interviews will be destroyed after the completion of the thesis. Also, after the data analysis, the results and findings of the study can be notified to you.

If you need any more clarification on something, don’t hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

Maria Chrysostomou