

The Teaching of Greek Language Through Opera

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Abstract

The script leverages the musical theatrical genre of opera for the teaching of the Greek language. The process emphasizes the exposure to a non-familiar language environment and the approaching of the Greek language from the same starting point. The educational procedure was held at the fourth-grade level with the methodology of remote learning. It focuses on the measurement of the learning outcomes and includes graded activities based on Greek grammar and context comprehension. It, also, brings students in contact with the arts of performance and helps them express their feelings through art. The process enhanced the confidence of the children and helped native students realize the daily difficulties of foreigners.

Keywords: foreign language environment, opera, Greek language, teaching.

1. Introduction

It is widely known that one of the most common characteristics of school classes in the 21st century is the cross-cultural element. Simultaneously, the teachers are in favour of applying high-quality pedagogical techniques to elaborate the teaching material. The dominant issue that arises is summarized in the query: "How could the educator teach the Greek language according to the syllabus at different learning levels?". The concrete scenario brings the art of opera to the forefront in response to this problematic situation. Furthermore, the script brings to light both: the major role of opera in human studies and the psychological-emotional benefits of this art. The educational process not only upgrades the role of the art of opera in the curriculum but also improves the linguistic competencies of students.

The scenario extends the first part of the 11th module of the Greek language manual for 4th-grade students. The concrete lesson refers to opera and especially to comic opera which is widespread as *buffa*. This learning area was selected because there is a superficial treatment of this musical genre based on the manual and because this art exposes students to a non-familiar language environment. The educational process is implemented according to the principles of the constructive model. Moreover, it is conducted in conjunction with synchronous and asynchronous remote learning. The structure of the scenario includes parts such as the orientation to the theme of the lesson, the detection of students' ideas, the reconstruction of the students' ideas, the implementation of the newly acquired knowledge and the metacognition processes.

2. Brief description of the research study

The script is based on the 11th module of the linguistic subject for 4th- grade students. It is oriented to measure the basic grammar knowledge that a student needs to assimilate for that level. In particular, it assesses not only students' ability to recognize and classify the basic grammatical parts of speech, but, also, how the art of opera helps students to ameliorate their performance.

One crucial parameter is that the study takes into account the affective domain. Students' psycho-emotional mood is vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic. The script

measures the willingness of students to gain knowledge and express their feelings. The scenario is applied on the method of remote learning and that increases the requirements of the research (Marzano, 2017).

3. The necessity of the research study and a short bibliographic review of previous research

Nowadays, working in classrooms where the cross-cultural element is particularly high raises the question of what educational approaches, educators could apply to ensure the cognitive coexistence of all students (Schein, 2001). This research is intended to contribute to scientific knowledge, as it aims to focus on how the art of opera can help in teaching the Greek language in cross-cultural classrooms.

Experts point out that during the music teaching process, communication and interactions exists between students and teachers. This process undergoes both continuous and multidimensional adaptations in an ever-changing environment (Hubermann, 1983). Taking the above aspect into consideration, it is obvious that the dynamics a music lesson develops are similar to the conditions of adult life. Other experts mention that opera, as an art of performance, enables us to simulate the real world and teach children from different countries not only the appropriate demeanor, but cognitive issues as well (Hellen, 2014). Along similar lines, Johansen highlights that we could examine the relationship between music and the global environment. Opera by definition means work in music. So, if we convey the aforementioned view to the school environment, we are able to investigate the relationship between opera and school subjects (Johansen, 2013).

From a linguistic point of view, scholars maintain that there is a huge number of definitions, which either approach or interpret the linguistic phenomenon. In some of them, language is a code of communication that is characterized by musicality. Opera brings transformative change, because it works at the level of mindset change. It has the capacity to get people to see what they did not realize before. This appeals to play a major role in engendering language ability (Barnbrook, 1996).

4. Methodology

The crucial queries of the research are:

- What educational approaches could educators apply to ensure the cognitive coexistence of all students?
- How could the educator teach the Greek language, according to the syllabus at different learning levels?

The paramount purpose of the survey is to emerge the benefits that arise from the use of opera in the teaching process. On the other hand, the survey aims to measure the cognitive and sentimental competencies that are cultivated.

Hypothetically, students are expected to be able to:

- define the meaning of the opera.
- recognize verbs, nouns as well as adjectives.
- interpret the linguistic environment of *The Barber of Seville*.
- respond to questions about opera.
- categorize verbs, nouns, and adjectives.
- develop and express their views.
- support themselves during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The research was held in Piraeus. The region of the school class is located in Agios Dimitrios. It is a district with a lot of immigrants and low-income residents. The sample of the

study consists of sixteen fourth-grade students. The population includes 6 students (5 Greeks and 1 Albanian) that receive high scores, 3 students (2 Greeks and 1 Albanian Roma) indifferent to the learning process, 3 (1 Greek and 2 immigrants) with learning difficulties, 1 student that does not speak Greek and 3 gifted children with underperformance. Most of the students underperform in tests for a long period of time.

The presentation, the analysis and the interpretation of the data are based on the triangulation method, which is used to increase the credibility and validity of research findings. The study applies a mixed type of survey, which combines observation via pre/post-questionnaire tests and students' comments. The observation is used to provide credibility, whereas the pre/post-test confirms the observation (Denzin, 2009).

5. Presentation - Analysis - Discussion of results

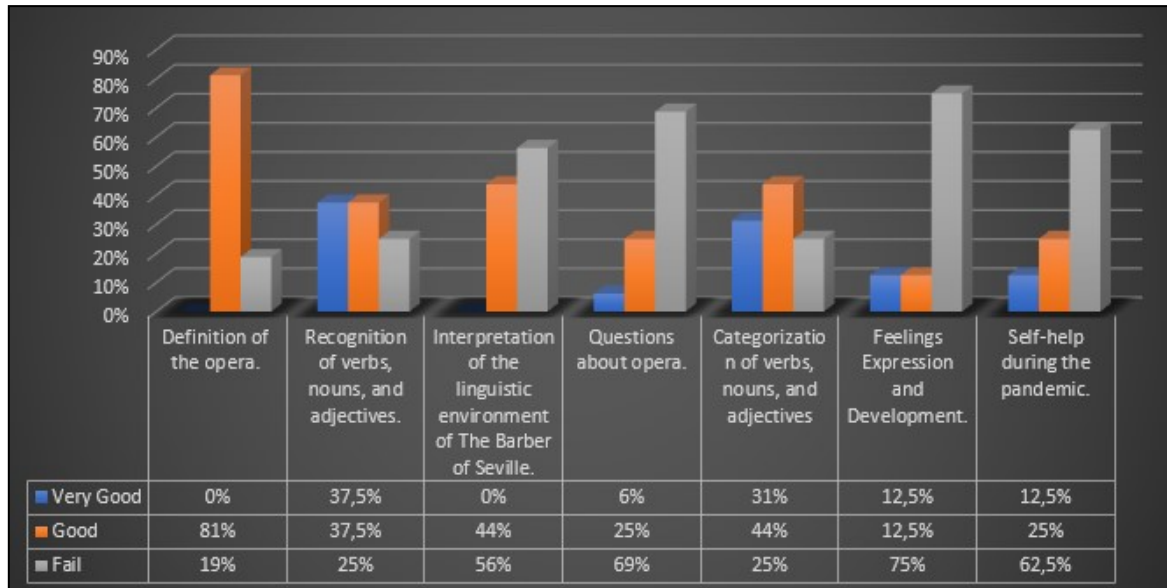
Before the implementation of the script, a well-designed questionnaire was completed by the students (see appendix). The same questionnaire was used at the stage of the final and repeated evaluation to collect the data. The questionnaire includes both: multiple-choice questions which require multiple answers and short-answer questions. The following rubric determines the degree of achievement in the above objectives based on the questionnaire. (Marzano & Kendall, 2008).

Table 1. Degree of achievements of the script's goals

	Very Good	Good	Fail
Definition of the meaning of the opera	All the correct answers	Some of the correct answers	None of the correct answers
Recognition of the verbs, nouns, and adjectives	All the correct answers	Some of the correct answers	None of the correct answers
Interpretation of the linguistic environment of the barber of Seville	All the correct answers	Some of the correct answers	None of the correct answers
Questions about opera	All the correct answers	Some of the correct answers	None of the correct answers
Categorization of verbs, nouns, and adjectives	All the correct answers	Some of the correct answers	None of the correct answers
Feelings expression and development	Complete answers	Partially complete answers	Fully incomplete answers
Self- help during the pandemic	Complete answers	Partially complete answers	Fully incomplete answers

Graph 1. Outcomes t1

During the diagnostic evaluation, the teacher collected the data and identified the



students' educational needs. The graph below indicates the outcomes of the initial measurement (Robson, 2002).

From the above graph, it is obvious that the whole class has little knowledge about the art of opera. Also, it is important to point out that the majority of the students have not a clear perception of the basic grammar parts of speech. Finally, it is observed that a lack of development is applied to the affective domain. Students neither express their feelings nor help themselves during the pandemic. Relying the results, the script takes into account not only the knowledge provision but the cultivation of lifelong competencies as well.

According to researchers in a traditional classroom, students do not have any control of the teaching process. This script is designed to shift control from the teacher to the students. The scenario is based on the flex model. It, also, combines elements from the self and flipped classroom model. It includes both: asynchronous and synchronous activities. The asynchronous part was organized via the blog of class, the wall of e-me, and parents' e-mails messages, whereas the synchronous part was held on Webex (Ματσαγγούρας, 2003).

In the asynchronous part, students attended videos and studied presentations to receive information about the opera. They focused on the opera: "The Barber of Seville". The google translate software helped students study the properly shaped material uploaded on the blog or sent to them via e-mail. Students constructed their own works, using paint tools and played games from the site of the national lyrical scene. In the synchronous part, students worked on collaborative activities. They discussed, answered questions, kept notes, used dictionaries, taxonomized and played educational games. To accomplish the above, tools such as notebooks and dictionaries are utilized. The role of teacher is only advisory and assistive (Σκαλτσά, 1990).

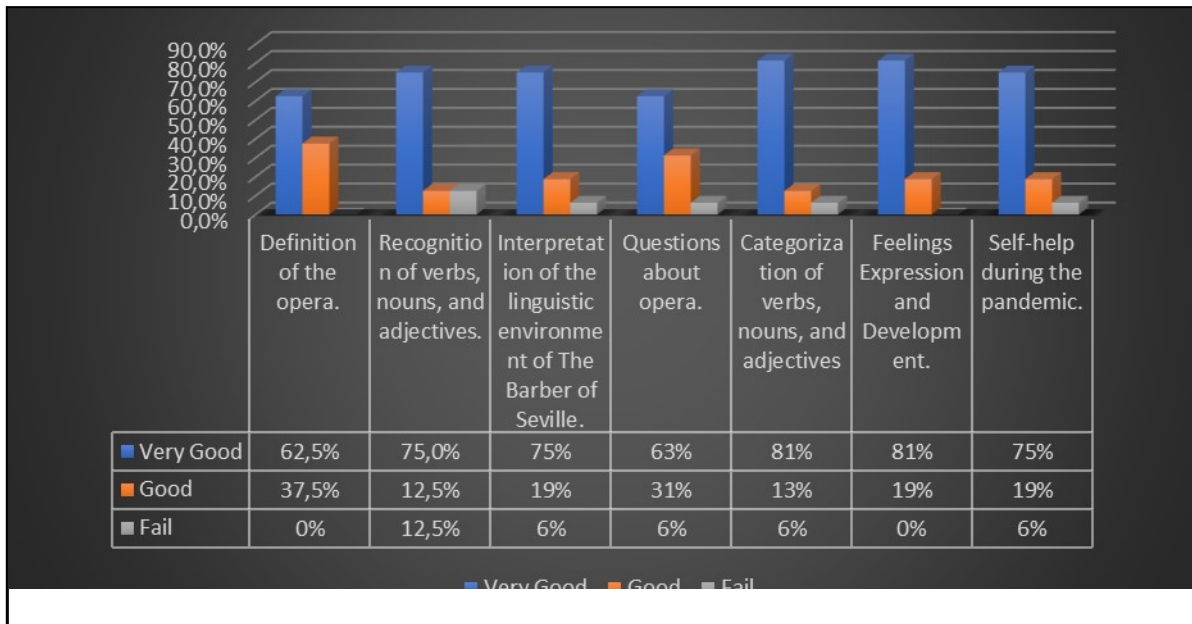
In the first day of the programme, students had to investigate the definition of the opera on their own. They used online or other sources such as Greek National Opera and encyclopaedia Britannica to compare and contrast their findings. The activity took place without the teacher's presence and was asynchronous. The average time needed for the completion was 60 minutes (Stein & Graham, 2020).

In the second day, students shaped an idea for the definition of the opera. At the first stage, they posted their views on the wall of the e-me and discussed them with their classmates to detect the alternative aspects. The activity took place during the teacher's presence and was synchronous. The average time needed for completion of the activity was 20 minutes. At the next stage, students used the wall of e-me to attend the first presentation video cited on the link: (<https://blogs.e-me.edu.gr/hive-ekpaideusi/11%ce%b7-%ce%b5%ce%bd%cf%8c%cf%84%ce%b7%cf%84%ce%b1/>). They concluded which of their ideas were confirmed and which were not. The activity took place during the teacher's presence and was synchronous. The average time needed for completion of the activity was 10 minutes (Clandfield & Hadfield, 2017).

For the third day of the program, students assembled on Webex. At the first stage of orientation, students attended the second presentation video cited on the link: (<https://blogs.e-me.edu.gr/hive-ekpaideusi/11%ce%b7-%ce%b5%ce%bd%cf%8c%cf%84%ce%b7%cf%84%ce%b1/>) to gather information about the Barber of Seville. The activity took place during the teacher's presence and was synchronous. The average time needed for completion of the activity was 5 minutes. In the second stage of elaboration, students were separated into groups. They collaborated and wrote in their notebook words related to opera. They used dictionaries to find out the grammatical type of the words and to classify them. The teacher had an advisory and assistive role to the teams. The activity took place during the teacher's presence and was synchronous. The average time needed for completion of the activity was 25 minutes. In the final stage of practice, students spectated the third (gamification) video, cited on the link: (<https://blogs.e-me.edu.gr/hive-ekpaideusi/11%ce%b7-%ce%b5%ce%bd%cf%8c%cf%84%ce%b7%cf%84%ce%b1/>) to answer not only cognitive but sentimental questions as well. The activity took place during the teacher's presence and was synchronous. The average time needed for completion of the activity was 15 minutes (Holt et al., 2012).

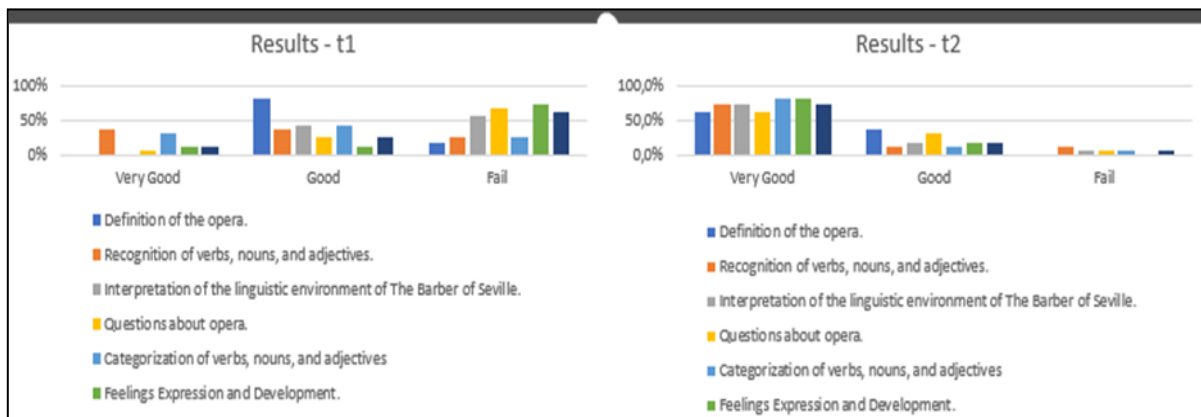
In the final day of the program, students worked both online and offline. They focused on the activities, cited on the blog of class at the link (<https://blogs.e-me.edu.gr/hive-ekpaideusi/11%ce%b7-%ce%b5%ce%bd%cf%8c%cf%84%ce%b7%cf%84%ce%b1/>). Students sent their completed tasks to the teacher via e-mail. The activities took place without the teacher's presence and were asynchronous. The average time needed for completion of the activity was 1 hour and 45 minutes (Storey, 2010).

After the implementation of the script, the initial questionnaire was completed by the students for a second time. The same process was repeated in two subsequent months. The teacher collected the data. The graph below indicates the outcomes of the final measurement t₂ (Coolican, 2004).



Graph 2. Outcomes t2

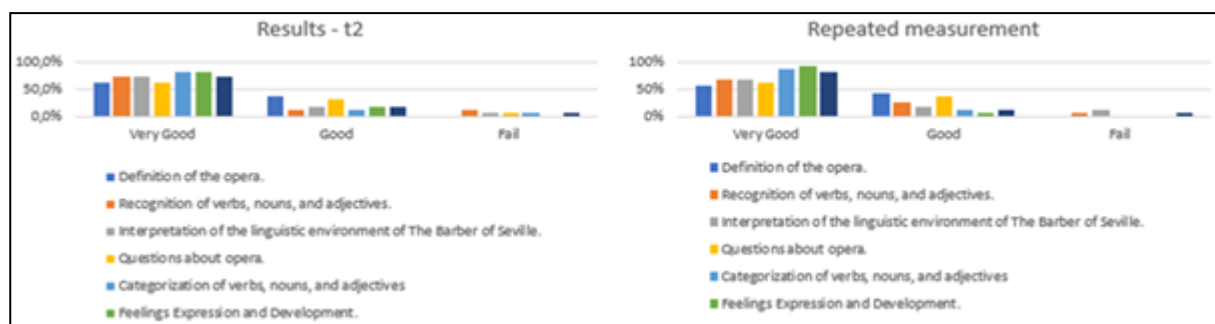
In addition, the next graph compares the initial and the final measurement.



Graph 3. Initial & final measurement

Taking into consideration the aforementioned results, it is concluded that there is a shift in the data. In the initial measurement (t1), students seem to know little about opera. Furthermore, they are reluctant to express their feelings and appear grammatically confused. For this reason, the quantities of the data in the first column are lower than the other two columns. In the final measurement, the results are reflected. The first column which represents the exceptional performance is higher than the other two columns. Also, it is important to point out that the column assigned to failure is the lowest. In other words, the learning and sentimental pace of students are boosted. So, the view that the culture-oriented educational processes have a positive impact is confirmed (ΠΔ79/2017, άρθρο 16, παρ.1).

The last graph compares the final and the repeated measurement.



Graph 4. Final & repeated measurement

Another important aspect of the results is the slight difference between the final and the repeated measurement. Graph 4 brings out the stability of the educational outcomes. After two subsequent months, students remember the cognitive information and are eager to express their inner thoughts or feelings. It is also significant to mention that the cognitive part is enhanced in the repeated measurement. This is because students performed their own searches and were active during the learning process.

6. Conclusions – Suggestions

Based on the teacher's observation (focus group) and students' comments, the organizational process is considered satisfactory. The teamwork mitigated students' anxiety, improved the practices and brought forward alternative ideas and practices in completing goals. Furthermore, the Greek students realized the learning difficulties of their foreign classmates, as they had to manage the Italian opera of the barber of Seville. Students increased empathy and comprehended the cross-cultural issues.

The results affirm that students are more efficient when exposed to three-dimensional and virtual environments than two-dimensional ones. In addition, opera is multisensory, and for that reason helps students to comprehend better the newly learned knowledge. It is known scientifically that laughter enables the human brain to store and remember information more effectively. Opera buffa helps the human brain retain information due to its comical nature (Δερμιτζάκη, 2017).

Several researchers highlight the benefits that arise from the implementation of cultural activities in the school environment. They refer that the cultural activities reflect the personal desires of the students (Longinou, 2020). Based on the above the enrichment of the school schedule with cultural processes is proposed. Also, the development of remote learning activities is recommended. These interventions are able to literate children in competencies such as cognitive, technical and sentimental skills.

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Appendix

Ερωματολόγιο

- 1. Κύκλωσε τις φράσεις που πιστεύεις ότι περιγράφουν καλύτερα την έννοια της **όπερας**.**
 - A) Είναι μια μουσική παράσταση.
 - B) Είναι ένα είδος σκηνικής τέχνης, όπου ένα θεατρικό κείμενο αποδίδεται από τους καλλιτέχνες, τραγουδιστά, με τη συνοδεία ορχήστρας.
 - Γ) Είναι το κτίριο στο οποίο διαδραματίζεται η μουσική παράσταση.
 - Δ) Σημαίνει έργο.
- 2. Κύκλωσε τις φράσεις που θεωρείς σωστές.**
 - A) Η χώρα προέλευσης της όπερας είναι η Αγγλία.
 - B) Η σοβαρή όπερα λέγεται Μπούφα, ενώ η κωμική Σέρια.
 - Γ) Ο Ροσίνι είναι ένας συνθέτης που έχει γράψει πολλές όπερες.

Δ) Οι βασικές φωνές της όπερας είναι: η σοπράνο, η μέτζο σοπράνο και η άλτο για τις γυναίκες, ο τενόρος, ο βαρύτονος και ο μπάσος για τους άντρες.

3. Κύκλωσε τα σωστά. Στην όπερα: *Ο Κουρέας της Σεβίλλης...*

- A) Ο Φίγκαρο είναι ο πρωταγωνιστής του έργου και είναι κουρέας.
- B) Ο Φίγκαρο προσπαθεί να χωρίσει τους δύο νέους.
- Γ) Η Ροζίνα, στο τέλος, δεν παντρεύεται αυτόν που αγαπά.
- Δ) Ο Φίγκαρο είναι τετραπέρατος, έχει πλάκα και καλή καρδιά.

4. Δες το παρακάτω απόσπασμα από τον *Κουρέα της Σεβίλλης*.



Πώς νιώθεις βλέποντας το βίντεο; Γράψε τρεις λέξεις που σου έρχονται στο μυαλό:

Όταν κάτι σε στενοχωρεί, τι κάνεις για να ξεπεράσεις τη λύπη σου;

5. Κύκλωσε ποια ή ποιες από τις παρακάτω λέξεις πιστεύεις ότι είναι **ρήματα:**

- A) Τραγουδάω
- B) Κουρεύω
- Γ) Κουρέας
- Δ) Τραγούδι

6. Κύκλωσε ποια ή ποιες από τις παρακάτω λέξεις πιστεύεις ότι είναι **ουσιαστικά:**

- A) Τραγουδάω
- B) Κουρεύω
- Γ) Κουρέας
- Δ) Τραγούδι

7. Κύκλωσε ποια ή ποιες από τις παρακάτω λέξεις πιστεύεις ότι είναι **επίθετα**:

- A) Τραγουδάω
- B) Ψηλός
- Γ) Διασκεδαστικός
- Δ) Τραγούδι

8. Γράψε τις λέξεις που βρίσκονται στο σύννεφο στη σωστή στήλη.

τραγουδώ, κουρέας, διασκεδαστικός,

Επίθετα

Ουσιαστικά

Ρήματα

9. Ζωγράφισέ μου ένα emoticon (φατσούλα), για να μου δείξεις πώς αισθάνεσαι αυτή τη στιγμή.