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## School Libraries in Greece: A State-of-the-Art Report

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*The creation of school libraries in Greece starts early in the history of the Greek independent state, which was established in 1827. At first, much importance was attributed to the role of the library, but this did not continue due to lack of funds, a strict bureaucracy, the prevalence of the single textbook as a teaching tool, and the general ideology of the educational system. The 1985 legislation concerning school libraries brought again to the surface the discussion about the need for and the role of the school library, but these changes have not been implemented yet. Currently, a large national project, undertaken with funding from the European Union, aims to create 500 school libraries.*

### Introduction

School libraries in Greece do not have an official status in the school unit and, if and when available, their function is not integrated in the curriculum. Even after the relevant recent legislation of 1985, they have neither dedicated space in the school building, nor have they trained personnel or allocated funds. Most schools maintain a small collection of books, usually encyclopedias and literature books not always visible or available to students. In some schools, the parents' association, with its own funds and in cooperation with an open-minded school director, forms and supports a small library collection, mostly fiction, maintained by an interested teacher. Only a few private schools have well-organized school libraries, adequately funded and operated by trained librarians. To explain the current situation, one should start perhaps at the beginning, when schools were first established in the Greek independent state.

### History of School Library Development

Discussion about the establishment of school libraries in Greece starts early in the history of the Greek independent state. Greek scholars living abroad, on their return to Greece, wanted to see established in the young state the public library system they had experienced in other European countries, or the successful models of the libraries of the prosperous Greek communities outside Greece. Their dream modern state has a network of public, special, and school libraries, necessary tools for the support of the educational system of the nation, with the main public library, the national library, playing a central role in this network. "The library and the printing are the two

channels for the dissemination of education" is a belief shared by many enlightened Greeks (Sklaventis, 1995, p. 24).

At the beginning, action followed the dream. In 1829, the two-year-old state established on the island of Egina, temporary seat of the first government, the Book Repository that would receive donations of books and feed the libraries to be created. A large number of books was accumulated there, donations from Greek scholars eager to help. In 1832, the National Library was founded, and in 1842, for lack of funds, it was "provisionally" housed at the University to play the role of both central/national and university library. This was fatal to the future growth of both. A dual school-public role was also reserved for the school libraries.

In 1834, George Gennadios, a distinguished scholar and the librarian of the central library, recommended the establishment of school libraries in 10 regional capitals. These school libraries, again for lack of funds, would also act as public libraries for the region. The first high school of the young nation, the school of Nafplion in the Peloponese, can serve as a case study for the problems that education and the school libraries faced right from the beginning. Schools were constantly plagued by lack of space, personnel, textbooks, and educational resources. In the decade that followed, many school requests focused on the need for an adequate number of up-to-date books.<sup>1</sup>

In 1835, acting as consultant to the Secretariat of Education, Gennadios compiled a list of 73 titles representing 148 volumes that could be sent from the central/national library to the Greek schools. He acknowledged that these titles were not all relevant to the needs of the teachers who, in his opinion, needed to be exposed to a variety of different titles and subject areas. He saw this contribution as a first core collection for the school libraries, which, he urged, needed to be established immediately. Further development would be the responsibility of the local community. What he could not foresee is that the state bureaucracy would always hinder book distribution from the Repository to the schools, the teachers, and the students. Gennadios's ideas were officially expressed in the Royal Decree No. 8 of November 20, 1835, the first legislation for the establishment of a public library in every public high school for the use of teachers and students. These libraries would be temporarily the responsibility of the school directors, and their support the responsibility of the local authorities (Sklavenitis, 1995). The fact that the legislation refers to "a public library" rather than a school library, and that the responsibility for it is only temporarily given to the school directors, indicates that these school libraries were meant to become the public libraries for the area, a plan that never materialized.

In 1836, the royal decree governing the operation of the Greek schools and high schools was published. In none of its 126 articles, which described in detail school operation and curriculum, was there any mention of the school library. The teaching community's lack of reaction to this omission is evidence of agreement with the government line about the use of a single

textbook for each subject. The single textbook philosophy, although criticized by the progressive and open-minded people of the country, would prevail because it guaranteed a uniform level of learning and security to the teachers. The library became less and less a necessity for the students. Had it been available with collections relevant to the curriculum, it would have been useful to the teachers for the preparation of their lessons,<sup>2</sup> but enrichment of the library by the local authorities was never possible. They could not even support the basic needs of the school such as heating and repair. In December 1838, students and teachers of the Nafplio high school almost froze for lack of heating in the school building.

Distribution of books from the Repository became inefficient and heavily bureaucratic. In addition, the Ministry of Education's circular of November 23, 1853 requested that the local authorities provide for each existing school a book cabinet to house the book collections available. The school director would be accountable for any losses of books from that time on. This circular, 18 years after the first decree for the establishment of school libraries, abandoned the original idea of their development into public libraries. Although it gives lengthy details about the catalogues and lists of books the Ministry of Education would require from each school, it offered no context for the function of the school library in a designated space, with regular hours and dedicated personnel (Sklavenitis, 1995). From then on, the locked bookcases representing the "school library" would be the model that would prevail. The state preferred to inspire fear in the school directors responsible for the number of library books rather than invest in the development of a learning methodology that would use the advantages of the library. For fear of loss, multiple copies of books, sometimes even 30, would remain locked in cabinets. The library books became an alibi for the educational system, which was totally centralized, uniform, and based on the same, single textbook for each grade and subject area.

Despite further legislation, together with detailed regulations, on school libraries in 1901, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1949 (Kokkinis, 1970), and finally in 1985, school libraries (meaning small collections of some reference and literature books) remained isolated from the teaching process. The library books, or rather, as the category was characteristically called, the *non-textbook* books, remained the responsibility of the students and their parents rather than the teachers. Few teachers even now incorporate in their homework the reading of a non-textbook, usually a literature book.

"The school library," writes a contemporary scholar, "the locked pieces of furniture of my childhood and youth." And he continues,

The centralized school system, with the lack of correspondence between the objectives it projects and the means it possesses ... this basic characteristic that mainly accounts for its deformities and distortions ... did not content itself in cancelling the library, eliminating thus a possible source of challenge to its philo-

sophy. It went even further: it appropriated its ideology as an alibi for its dead ends. (Sklavenitis, 1995, p. 13)

## General Education

The most recent major educational reform of 1976 brought many changes in the educational system of Greece:

1. The spoken language (the demotic) became the official language for teaching and the language in which textbooks would be written.
2. Mandatory schooling was extended from six to nine years.
3. General education was divided into primary (6 years, as before) and secondary. The secondary includes the *Gymnasium* (middle school, 3 years) and *Lyceum* (high school, 3 years). The Lyceum is divided into general, technical, and vocational.

Since then, many new schools have been built, allowing for the class size to be reduced from 40 to a maximum of 30 students, with an average of 20 students per class. Several schools can now function in the morning rather than in morning and afternoon shifts. However, despite the beneficial changes, the system remains heavily centralized, with the Ministry of Education and Religion playing the key role. Figure 1 shows the levels of education in Greece (Department of Studies and Programs, 1988).

Education is tuition-free for all those who attend public schools. Uniform teaching is guaranteed throughout the country through the use of the same single textbook for each grade and subject. Textbooks are written by subject specialists, usually university professors, selected and appointed to the task by the Ministry of Education. They are distributed gratis to all primary and secondary public schools of the country. The director of the school is an administrator-bureaucrat rather than a manager-leader (Saitis, Tsiamasi, & Hatzi, 1997).

With a fixed curriculum, free textbooks, and a prescribed learning model, there is little room for any type of initiative. Despite recent research about the positive effect of teamwork, all teaching takes place with the teacher facing the student (Dervisis, 1996). All knowledge derives from the teacher and the textbook and is memorized. The curriculum is academically demanding with a strong emphasis on the humanities. Teaching of computer skills is mandatory for the middle school and the first grade of the high school, but few schools are adequately equipped with computers. Only a handful have Internet access. The learning model remains teacher-centered, and the focus of learning is the acquisition of knowledge rather than the acquisition of skills and the development of critical thinking. Few teaching resources other than the textbook or some audiovisual material and equipment assist in the learning process. In a study about the use of audiovisual equipment and material in Greece (Kanakis, 1996), we notice with interest that the student library is mentioned as a learning media resource on the same level with the slide projector, television, and the overhead projector. Although 69% of the teach-

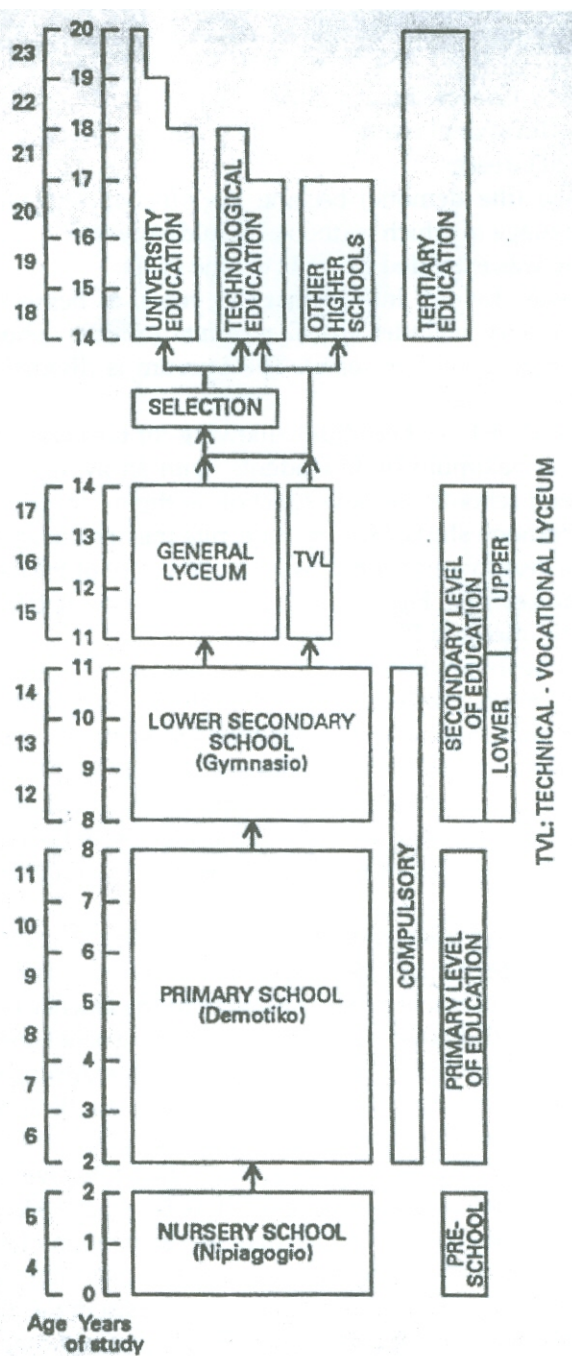


Figure 1. Levels of education in Greece.

ers participating in the study claimed to have a student library at their disposal, 99% used encyclopedias from the student library collection, which means that, again, emphasis is on collecting basic information on a specific topic. Its use is not creative in any way.

To summarize, the Greek educational system has all the attributes of the traditional system. It is teacher-centered rather than student-centered; knowledge is transferred rather than built; and the teacher is the source of all knowledge rather than the coordinator of the learning activities. The student does not build his or her knowledge through learning based on research and on acquisition of skills. He or she rather passively receives knowledge, and knowledge acquisition is an end in itself. In the middle and high school, 13 to 14 academic subjects is the normal school load. Students are expected to put in long hours to do their homework. In addition to school, they normally attend extra preparatory courses or foreign language courses. In this learning model, which is repeated to a great extent at the university, there is little room for a school library, for the use of its resources to support independent learning and for the philosophy it represents: development of critical thinking and acquisition of information skills. The ideology of the Greek school is almost incompatible with the idea of the independent research, of student initiative, and originality. In 1994, the project/paper was introduced as a new learning mechanism for grade 3 of the middle school.<sup>3</sup> Its failure to last for more than two school years is, unfortunately, supporting evidence to the above statement (Mattheou, 1997).

However, despite its lack of flexibility, the system is so demanding and strict that, until now, Greek students did extremely well when they went to study abroad either for undergraduate or graduate studies. The information society, with its requirements for more independent learning, for the acquisition of information and computer skills, and for lifelong learning may change that if the system does not adapt to the new demands.

## The Current State of School Libraries

### *School Library Legislation*

Law 1566 of 1985 includes the most recent legislation concerning school libraries. Article 43 defines that "in every primary and secondary school a school library will function, to be used by students, faculty and the inhabitants of the area to which the school belongs. The existing school libraries function as school libraries."

Once more, 150 years after the first state legislation on school libraries (1835), the idea of the dual role of the school library is back. It is the school/public library idea that has caused so much confusion in the past and was partly responsible for the failure of the school library in the Greek educational system. It is true that in 1985 the state of the public libraries in Greece was rather poor.<sup>4</sup> However, given the general social conditions in

Greece, the lack of personnel in the schools, and their limited means and short opening hours, it is clear that the school library could not play the role of the public library. Besides, the school library has the special function of supporting the curriculum and a certain age group. It does not address the general public.

The new legislation has many flaws. Like all its predecessors, its approach to the issue of the school library is mechanical rather than holistic. It is really surprising that the educational and curriculum context in which the school library will operate is not discussed at all. It is assumed that it remains the same. Why, then, is the library introduced into the system if the teaching philosophy and learning methodologies remain the same? What role will it play? The legislation deals with issues concerning personnel, funding, acquisition of new books, and the teachers' library, but omits any explanation of the reasons for the existence of the library and its connection to the curriculum. In the first draft of the article, a teacher, appointed by the faculty council, is designated as the person responsible for the operation of the library. In the secondary school, this teacher is assisted by students elected by the students' council. It was only after substantial efforts of the Greek Library Association that an addendum to this article offered librarians the chance to be appointed as school librarian with the function of organizing and running the school library.

The personnel issue of the school library is another weakness of the law. The legislation does not take into consideration that positions outside the class are usually given to problematic teachers and that the teachers in Greece receive no training in integrating the library's resources in the curriculum, let alone in organizing and running a school library. Unfortunately, it is also true that librarians are not quite prepared to play the role of the school librarian, having had no exposure to the special role of the school library in their schooling or their professional training.

### *Research on School Libraries*

There is little research and literature on school libraries in Greece. An informal search undertaken by the members of the School Library Section of the Greek Library Association in 1994 indicates that most of the schools that claim to have a school library have, in reality, a small collection of books in an area of an average of 30 sq m that serves more like a storage space. In rare exceptions, the space available was about 100 sq m, and in one instance 200 sq m. In the area of Ioannina in 1989, there were 22 primary schools with 6,000 students; only one had a library with more than 300 books; most had between 31 and 100 books, and 4% of the existing libraries were located in the corridors (Kapsalis, 1989). In another study, Skepastianu (1990) visited 12 Lycea in the Thessaloniki area, where it was revealed that what were called libraries were locked bookcases in a corridor or the staffroom, opened by the responsible teacher twice a week or for some hours each day. In the only

school that had a real space, furnished and with some books, the room was locked and inaccessible to the students.

Because of lack of space, the library does not seem to be the natural place for new multimedia resources. When such resources are available, which is not often, they are usually housed in a computer room, used under the supervision of a computer teacher, and rarely by a subject area teacher. Because the school library has been bypassed in the educational system, many prominent computer advocates promote the idea of the electronic library, which does not need space, only equipment, a difficult idea to contradict when the earlier stage of the well-organized library has never existed or functioned properly.

### *Conference on the Role of the Library*

In 1994, the Greek Library Association organized a conference on the topic of the role of the library in the creation of readers ("Incentives and approaches," 1994). Two round table discussions were organized, the first on the role of the public libraries, the second on the need for school libraries. Representatives from the teachers', parents', librarians', and publishers' associations, together with teachers from the primary and secondary education and academics, had a chance to speak. After the librarians, the group that felt most strongly about the operation of school libraries in the schools were the parents, not the teachers.

The parents' association representative was knowledgeable about the 1985 legislation, which was still not implemented. Yet the association had the benefit of the experience of members who had tried to organize small libraries in many schools, and their suggestions were many and useful.

1. Distribution of leaflets with the new library additions to students, parents and the cultural organizations of the area.
2. Representation of a parent from the parents' association on the school library committee that operates the library. The representative will assist the teacher in charge.
3. Integration of a library /book hour in the curriculum.
4. Creation of librarians' positions for the school library.
5. Constant enrichment of the school library with new acquisitions.

One of the teachers, the general secretary of the Teachers' Association (OLME), felt that books and reading were not entirely the responsibility of the school. The school is a centralized system unable to accept and integrate new ideas, and the curriculum is rigid. To illustrate the situation, he gave as an example the case of environmental studies, introduced into the school program 11 years ago as an extracurricular activity. As an activity, it was meant to bring the teacher and the student closer together and change the teacher-centered attitude. Unfortunately, this activity and the teaching philosophy it was supposed to represent never became part of the regular program. Most of the initiative and the enthusiasm came from the students

rather than the teachers. He considers that in the school day there is no room for extras, for example, books other than the textbook: "One goes to school to give a lesson and then leaves." He does see changes though, for the better. In his school, in an underprivileged area of Athens, the bookcases are now in the corridor rather than in a locked space, and money is raised by the students every year to purchase new books.

The general conclusions drawn from the speakers' presentations and the open discussion may be indicative of what the various parties, librarians, parents, authors, academics, and publishers think about the issue of the school libraries. They are not representative views, however, of the teaching community, which does not see the library as the vehicle of a different teaching approach, but rather as a collection of books that can help the student, not necessarily related to the teaching activity. The following is a short selection of the major conclusions of the conference.

1. The school library should be a cultural centre that offers incentives.
2. The school library helps the student to become a responsible person, because the task of selecting and evaluating sources exposes him or her to the decision making process. Through the use of the school library, the student learns how to learn.
3. The student learns better when participating in the learning process rather than when being a passive observer.
4. Teaching should move from the teacher-centered model to the student-centered model.
5. There is a need for a plan that would integrate the teaching and the curriculum with the library philosophy. This presupposes the close cooperation of teachers and librarians and available time in the school day for the use of the library.
6. The library's resources should be able to assist teaching and the curriculum. Material for pleasure reading and for the extracurricular interests of the students should also be available. The material should be print and non print.
7. It is necessary to adapt the way students are being evaluated to include the use of the library.
8. The library has to operate with specialized staff (librarians). It should be open and available to students even after the end of the school day for extended access to its resources.

One hopes that these recommendations will become a reality in the schools of the near future.

### *The New Educational Reform*

In the last few years, the Ministry of Education has been planning a new reform. This new reform, named Education 2000, will be implemented for the first time during the school year of 1998-1999. The new educational system aspires to represent the many social changes and technological ad-

vances that characterize the beginnings of the new era. The new reform calls for some structural changes, as well as a new teaching approach and renewed curriculum content. Beginning with the next school year, there will be only one type of Lyceum rather than three, a "unified" Lyceum. Graduation from the Lyceum will guarantee most of the students entrance to the university and polytechnic schools.

The new curriculum will have a European dimension and will expose the student to the variety of the social, political, and cultural types, stressing at the same time the special characteristics of Greece. It will include additional courses on computers, environmental studies, health, and European issues.

Its approach will focus on solid knowledge, but will also encourage the development of critical thinking. Elective courses will be introduced. The new system calls for new teaching methods, not clearly defined, but de-emphasizing memorization and learning by heart. Teaching will promote lifelong learning techniques. Teacher training and new methods of evaluation will also be major items on the agenda of the new system.

Because school libraries are not a reality in Greek schools and the public libraries are not in a position to play their role, there is no direct mention of the school library in the framework of the new educational reform, and school libraries are not a prerequisite for its implementation. However, research is encouraged. One might fear that the lifelong learning and critical thinking approaches, without the support of the school library, will suffer the same fate as the introduction of the project/paper in earlier years. It remains to be seen how much pressure the teaching community will exert under the influence of the new system for the creation of school libraries in the secondary schools.

### *National Project for the Creation of 500 School Libraries*

In 1994, the Ministry of Education and Religion decided to invest about 3 million dollars of the structural funds allotted to Greece by the European Union for the creation of 500 school libraries. A consulting company was engaged to prepare a study that was delivered in 1995. At first, a major contractor was to be selected for the implementation phase. For bureaucratic reasons, however, the project is now to be realized by the universities of the various regions of the country. The implementation has a pilot phase for 50 libraries, and the rest will be developed on the basis of the results and conclusions of the pilot. The project starts with the assumption that a school library needs its own separate space in the school building, a minimum of 100 sq m; specialized personnel, that is, a librarian or a trained teacher; and a collection that will be continually renewed. The suggested model gives enough freedom of action to the library committee of the individual school for collection development and for a library regulation adapted to the individual school needs. The standards of IFLA, as well as those of the major library associations (ALA, LA, etc.), have been taken into consideration in the

planning phase. It is anticipated that during the next school year of 1998-1999, the 50 libraries of the pilot phase will operate with the help of teachers who will be specially trained for this purpose. A core collection of basic titles has already been developed, and a core curriculum is in the process of being organized for the training of both librarians and teachers. The project was expected to be completed by the year 2000, but, due to various delays, it will probably have to be extended. The next two years will be critical, however. If the function of the new libraries combines well with the new school curriculum introduced under the reform, the result may prove a great success. It remains to be seen whether, this time, the school library will not be bypassed and forgotten, but will become an integral part of the educational system. Only this integration and the belief that the library is the information center of the school for students and teachers will guarantee its survival and further development.

### Conclusion

The Greek educational system, a successful system until recently, needs to adapt to the new demands of the information age and technological challenges. Teaching can no longer be limited to the single textbook. A new student-centered and less centralized approach to learning is needed. The new curriculum reform, combined with the project to create 500 school libraries, will give new breath and purpose to the Greek school. This may result in establishing a strong role for the school library. A strong and well-organized school library, equipped with printed and electronic resources and with strong ties to the educational program will assist teachers and students in keeping up with the new social, cultural, and scientific developments.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Teachers particularly request books for the sciences, geography, and history.

<sup>2</sup>Teachers do recognize the need for a library with books relevant to the curriculum and a lending mechanism to students and teachers. This, however, was never possible.

<sup>3</sup>Grade 9 in the United States system.

<sup>4</sup>In the next decade there will be much more activity around the 40 public libraries (dimossies) directly overseen by the Ministry of Education and the many smaller public libraries (dimotikes) that function in the context of the local authorities.

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