

## Teaching Practice in Language Teachers' Training in Greece: Present State and Future Perspectives

**Dimitris Chatzidimou, Konstantinos Chatzidimou**

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece)

[kchatzidimou@hotmail.com](mailto:kchatzidimou@hotmail.com)

### Abstract

*Teaching practice is considered an essential part in any teacher education programme, the other three being training in the subject fields, pedagogical, didactical and psychological training, and courses providing general knowledge. Having in mind the widely acknowledged importance of practical teacher teaching in teacher education, which includes methods such as microteaching and teaching practice in actual classrooms, we investigated its employment in language teachers' initial training within the framework of the Greek tertiary education. To this aim, we examined the programmes of study of university departments that train future Greek language teachers of the secondary education, future teachers of primary education and future foreign language teachers both of primary and of secondary education. Through content analysis of the programmes of study of the Greek university departments under investigation, their view on teaching practice is estimated. Useful conclusions are drawn and suggestions are made for the improvement of language teachers' training in Greece towards preparing "beginning teachers to cope in the complex natural-classroom environment".*

### 1. Introduction

The present paper discusses language teachers' training in the Greek higher education with a focus on the part of teaching practice (student teaching). A brief presentation of the respective university departments that train future Greek language teachers of the secondary education, future teachers of primary education and future foreign language teachers both of primary and of secondary education is followed by critical remarks regarding the role of student teaching in language teachers' initial training. Conclusively, some recommendations are made about its future perspectives based on relevant literature.

### 2. Language teacher education in Greece

Language is taught within the framework of the Greek educational system by the following categories of teachers:

- a) Primary school teachers (Greek language is one of the many subjects they have to teach during pupils' six-year-attendance at primary school), who are being trained at university level since the late 1980s;
- b) Greek language teachers at schools of secondary education: they are trained at various departments – Philology, Philosophy and Education, History and Archaeology etc. – all of which produce "Greek philologists"; regardless of his or her specialization during his or her initial training, a Greek language teacher may teach Modern Greek language, Ancient Greek, Modern Greek literature, translated Ancient Greek literature, History, Psychology, Philosophy and Latin.
- c) Foreign language teachers, who are trained at the respective departments.

Overall, among 22 Greek universities there exist: a) nine departments of Primary Education, b) six departments of Greek Philology, two departments of Philosophy, Education and Psychology, one department of Philosophy and Education, one department of Philosophy and Social Studies, one department of Philosophy, five departments of History and Archaeology, one department of History and one department of History and Ethnology, c) two departments of English Language and Literature, which also goes for the French and the German language, one department of Italian Language and Literature and one department of Italian and Spanish Language and Literature.

The duration of studies for all of the said departments is four years (eight semesters) and the number of courses in which a student has to succeed in is approximately fifty. This high number of courses has led to criticism because it gives the impression that university studies merely pursue the logic of Greek high school.



### 3. Teaching practice in language teacher education curricula in Greece

The picture emerging from the study of the language teacher education departments' curricula indicates that the departments of Primary Education seem to cultivate a culture of teaching practice, since there is a phase that includes students' attending and teaching actual school pupils within the framework of their programmes of studies. Teaching practice usually lasts one semester, during which students are expected to attend in-service teachers' lessons and then perform their own teaching, generally for one week, even though the form of this field experience varies by university and department. This concern about students' teaching practice could be attributed to the tradition passed down to university departments of Primary Education by the former Pedagogical Academies, which were responsible for training future teachers of primary schools until the late 1980s, when the initial training of primary school teachers became a responsibility of the universities. In spite of the fact that the studies at the former Pedagogical Academies were of only two years, the value of student teaching and its benefits for the students had been acknowledged. A possible reason for that is the fact that professors at the former Pedagogical Academies were mainly people who had studied abroad (mainly in Germany) and had tried to transfer their experiences to the Greek educational system [1: 53]. Additionally, it could be argued that this inclusion of teaching practice as a part of the curricula of university departments of Primary Education is connected with the presence of various pedagogists among their academic staff, of scientists, that is, who take to the cultivation of education science.

The departments training future foreign language teachers also seem to include some sort of teaching practice in their curricula, even though the number of pedagogists among their staff is not that high. However, they seem to be aware of the fact that the majority of their students will later be employed as teachers at public or private schools or tuition centers and, therefore, it is expected from them to undertake teaching practice to a certain extent. Again, this varies by department, since there are departments which include student teaching as an obligatory, one-semester in length course, whereas in other departments it constitutes an optional two- or three-week course.

On the other hand, the situation is totally different when it comes to the university departments that train future Greek language teachers of the secondary education, where student teaching is highly disregarded [2: 35-39]. Within these departments one can distinguish two different trends: one followed mainly by the departments of Philosophy, Education and Psychology and another one followed by the departments of Philology and the departments of History and Archaeology. In the latter case, great emphasis in the programmes of studies is laid on the subject field. That means that departments of Greek Philology aspire to produce graduates who will be able to master Modern Greek literature, ancient Greek and Latin or linguistics – which of the three depends on the specialization each student chooses to pursue. Respectively, departments of History and Archaeology train their students to a great extent on issues about the science of History or Archaeology and much less on Modern Greek literature, ancient Greek and Latin or linguistics. In contrast to these departments, the ones of Philosophy and Education and of Philosophy, Education and Psychology seem to value pedagogical and didactical training much more. Indeed, they offer a great number of courses related to pedagogical and didactical matters and apply some sort of teaching practice. On the other hand, these departments only include a restricted number of courses related to Modern Greek language and literature, Ancient Greek, Latin or History. It appears that departments of this category aim for *teachers* but neglect the training in the subject field, whereas the opposite category of departments aims for *scientists*, paying little or no attention at all to pedagogy and the training of teaching attitudes and skills [3: 82]. The philosophy that seems to underlie the logic of their curricula's construction is that teaching matter subject knowledge is more than adequate for its effective teaching; therefore, almost no courses of pedagogy and didactics are offered, since knowing one's subject is regarded as the one and only prerequisite for teaching well.

In general, field experiences of prospective language teachers in Greek universities are still rather rare. Student teaching is almost completely absent in the majority of the departments responsible for the preparation of future Greek language teachers. Concepts like the "back to schools" movement in England in the 1980s [4: 1091] or the second phase of teacher preparation in Germany, where teaching practice may last a full year, seem quite distant. Subject didactics is a field which is also absent, even though at a lower rate; for example, one can find courses concerning the methodology of language teaching, but in most cases they are not mandatory for all students. Only few departments apply teacher training methods such as microteaching [5], [6], [7], [8], which connect theory to praxis and give students the opportunity to develop teaching skills, operate as teachers and see how teaching works in practice. However, even in those cases little connection is made to practice teaching experiences in schools. Overall, this disregard of field experience by the Greek language teacher

preparation departments could be attributed to the fact that their staff members do not care for pedagogical and teaching efficiency – education science is being rather looked down upon. In addition to that, the Greek state does not seem to have specified what kind of teachers it aims for. And even when an effort was made to establish the “pedagogical and didactical efficiency” concerning teachers of secondary education [9: 84], most of the language teacher preparation departments responded negatively.

#### 4. Conclusions and suggestions

The above observations point out the urgent need for Greek teacher education departments to focus more on field experience, such as student teaching, like in other countries – see for example [10: 1091-1093], [11: 57] –, in order to link the university with the school and familiarize prospective teachers with the actual teaching procedure and school reality. This way, students would be given a chance to acquire hands-on experience with their possible future profession and the difficulties and problems accompanying it, to implement their theoretical knowledge, to enhance their instructional abilities concerning the planning, performing and evaluation of teaching strategies and pedagogic techniques, and eventually to find out to what extent this profession meets their expectations. This is why it would be useful to introduce teaching practice as early as in the third semester of studies. Practical pedagogical training needs to be emphasized and the fallacious dogma that one has only to master his or her subject in order to be a good and effective teacher should be overcome. The support of the institution of the “mentor” [12], which has not materialized until today despite its announcement, could also prove useful. The establishment of two different programmes of studies within the framework of the departments in question, one for the students who wish to become teachers and one for those who plan to follow another profession, providing students the possibility to switch directions could also be introduced [13: 88], [14: 136-137]. Furthermore, introducing a limit of two subject fields to the teaching subjects a Greek language teacher can teach, like in Germany, could be another step in this direction. This would facilitate the formation of teachers who will be adequate both in subject field knowledge and in pedagogical and didactical knowledge, competence and skills; because it is practically impossible for one person to be equally well qualified to teach the many subjects a Greek language teacher may have to teach in a secondary education school.

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