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AN OVERVIEW OF THE GREEK EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM: DRAWBACKS AND CHALLENGES FACING THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract:

This paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the Greek educational system, highlighting its structure, guiding pedagogical principles, teacher training processes, evaluation methods, and key characteristics such as inclusivity, interdisciplinarity, and digital innovation. The Greek education system is detailed from early childhood education to post-secondary education, emphasizing the influence of historical and cultural heritage on its pedagogical approaches. The process of becoming a teacher in Greece, including academic qualifications, professional training, and the societal role of teachers, is discussed. Evaluation methods at various educational stages and criteria used to assess students' skills and achievements are outlined. Additionally, the paper identifies strengths such as cultural heritage and inclusivity, as well as challenges like resource allocation and educational equity. The analysis underscores the need for continuous adaptation and innovation to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Keywords: evaluation, Greek educational system, Pedagogical Principles, Inclusive Education.

Overview of the Greek Educational System

In Greece, the structure of the education system is overseen by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. The Greek education system is comprehensive and provides pathways from primary school to secondary education and beyond (Xochellis & Kesidou, 2015). An overview of the Greek educational structure is as follows:

Early Childhood Education (Ages 3-6):

- Optional Preschool: While not compulsory, many children in Greece attend preschool from the age of 3 to 6. Preschool education focuses on early childhood development, including socialization, basic numeracy, literacy, and motor skills.

Primary Education (Ages 6-12):

Primary education in Greece is compulsory for children aged 6 to 15.

- Primary School (Grades 1-6): Primary education spans six years, from grades 1 to 6. The curriculum includes subjects such as Greek language and literature, mathematics, history, geography, science, physical education, and art. The basic characteristics of primary school in Greece include an emphasis on Greek language and culture. Primary education places a strong emphasis on Greek language and culture, with students also learning a foreign language, often English. Also, the assessment in Greek primary school is primarily based on continuous evaluation by teachers, with periodic exams and standardized tests to measure student progress.

Lower Secondary Education (Ages 12-15):

At the age of 12, students transition to lower secondary education is occurred.

Lower Secondary School (Gymnasium) (Grades 7-9): Lower secondary education lasts for three years, from grades 7 to 9. The curriculum becomes more specialized, with a focus on core subjects as well as electives in areas such as technology, music, and physical education. Also, lower secondary education prepares students for upper secondary education and offers career guidance and counseling to help students make informed choices about their future paths. The assessment includes ongoing evaluation by teachers, periodic exams, and standardized tests.

Upper Secondary Education (Ages 15-18):

- Upper Secondary School (Lyceum) (Grades 10-12): Upper secondary education lasts for three years, from grades 10 to 12. Students can choose between different types of lyceum based on their interests and career aspirations, including general, technical, and vocational lyceums. The curriculum in upper secondary school becomes more specialized, with students focusing on subjects related to their chosen lyceum stream. General lyceums prepare students for university entrance exams, while technical and vocational lyceums offer specialized vocational training. Students in general lyceums prepare

for university entrance exams (Panhellenic exams) at the end of grade 12. These exams are crucial for admission to higher education institutions in Greece. The assessment includes ongoing evaluation by teachers, as well as national exams administered by the Ministry of Education (Xochellis & Kesidou, 2015).

Post-Secondary Education

After completing upper secondary education, students have the option to pursue higher education at universities and technical institutions in Greece or abroad. Higher education in Greece typically includes bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs in various fields of study. Admission to higher education institutions is based on performance in the Panhellenic exams and other criteria set by individual institutions.

Overall, the Greek education system provides a structured pathway from early childhood through secondary education, with opportunities for further study and specialization at the post-secondary level.

The main pedagogical principles

The Greek education system is guided by several pedagogical principles that reflect the country's cultural heritage, educational philosophy, and historical context (Zacharis, 2017). These principles have evolved over time and continue to shape the modern education system. Let's explore some of the main pedagogical principles and their historical background:

The first principle is the Humanism and Classical Education. Greece has a rich history of classical education dating back to ancient times. The ancient Greeks valued education as a means of personal and societal development, emphasizing the pursuit of knowledge, critical thinking, and the study of classical literature, philosophy, and arts. Humanism and classical education remain central to the Greek education system. The curriculum places a strong emphasis on Greek language, literature, history, and culture, reflecting the country's deep-rooted intellectual heritage.

The second principle is the holistic development. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle emphasized the importance of holistic education that nurtures the mind, body, and spirit. They believed in the development of the whole person, including intellectual, moral, physical, and social dimensions (Savelides et al., 2015). The Greek education system aims to foster holistic development by providing a balanced curriculum that integrates academic learning with physical education, arts, and

extracurricular activities. Education is seen as a tool for cultivating well-rounded individuals who are capable of contributing to society in various ways.

The third principle is the strengthening of the democratic Values and citizenship education. Greece is often regarded as the birthplace of democracy, with ancient Athenian democracy serving as a model for modern democratic systems. The concept of citizenship and civic participation has deep roots in Greek history and culture. The Greek education system promotes democratic values and citizenship education, aiming to instill a sense of civic responsibility, social justice, and respect for diversity. Students learn about the principles of democracy, human rights, and active citizenship through both formal instruction and experiential learning opportunities.

The fourth principle is the continuity with innovation. Throughout its history, Greece has been a hub of intellectual and cultural exchange, absorbing influences from various civilizations while also contributing its own innovations to the world. Greek education has evolved over time, blending continuity with innovation (Ierapetritis, 2017). The Greek education system values continuity with tradition while embracing innovation and adaptation to meet the changing needs of society. It seeks to preserve the cultural heritage and educational legacy of Greece while incorporating modern pedagogical approaches, technologies, and educational practices.

The fifth and last principle is the pursuit of excellence and achievement. Ancient Greece celebrated excellence in various fields, including philosophy, literature, arts, and athletics. The pursuit of excellence was considered a noble aspiration and a source of inspiration for future generations. The Greek education system emphasizes the importance of academic rigor, critical thinking, and striving for excellence in education. It encourages students to set high standards for themselves, pursue their passions, and achieve their full potential in both academic and extracurricular endeavors.

In summary, the Greek education system is guided by pedagogical principles rooted in the country's historical legacy, cultural heritage, and educational philosophy. These principles emphasize humanism, holistic development, democratic values, continuity with innovation, and a commitment to excellence and achievement. They shape the curriculum, teaching practices, and educational goals, reflecting Greece's enduring commitment to education as a fundamental pillar of society.

The current process to become teachers in Greece

In Greece, the process to become a teacher involves a combination of academic qualifications, professional training, and practical experience. The role of teachers is highly regarded in Greek society, as they are seen as central figures in the education and socialization of young people (Maria, 2018). Let's explore the process of becoming a teacher and the training they receive, focusing on both compulsory and optional aspects, as well as the societal perception of teachers.

The main academic qualifications are as follows: Prospective teachers typically pursue a bachelor's degree in education or a specific subject area, such as mathematics, language arts, or science. This degree provides a foundation in pedagogy, curriculum development, and educational theory. Upon completing their bachelor's degree, aspiring teachers must obtain teacher certification from the Ministry of Education. This certification verifies that they have met the academic requirements to teach in Greek schools (Maria, 2018). It must be noted that some bachelor's degrees include the teacher certification. In case that it is not included the aspiring teachers should obtain it from special public institutions.

As far as professional training is concerned all teachers in Greece are required to undergo pedagogical training as part of their professional development. This training covers topics such as classroom management, teaching methodologies, assessment strategies, and student-centered learning approaches. Teachers may also receive specialized training related to their subject area or grade level (Xochellis & Kesidou, 2015). This training helps them deepen their knowledge and skills in specific academic disciplines and adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Teachers have opportunities for optional training and continuing professional development to enhance their skills and stay abreast of new educational trends and best practices. These may include workshops, seminars, conferences, and online courses offered by educational institutions and professional organizations.

Optional training may focus on relational and educational aspects of teaching, such as communication skills, conflict resolution, student engagement techniques, cultural competence, and fostering positive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues.

Role of Teachers in Society

1. Educators and Mentors. Teachers are seen as educators and mentors who play a crucial role in shaping the intellectual, social, and emotional development of students. They are respected for their knowledge, expertise, and dedication to nurturing young minds.

2. Guardians of Values. Teachers are often regarded as guardians of societal values and traditions. They instill moral and ethical principles in students, promote civic responsibility, and foster a sense of community and solidarity.

3. Agents of Change. Teachers are recognized as agents of change who have the power to inspire and empower students to reach their full potential. They challenge stereotypes, promote critical thinking, and encourage creativity and innovation.

4. Partners in Education. Teachers are valued as partners in the educational process, working collaboratively with parents, administrators, and other stakeholders to create supportive learning environments and ensure student success.

5. Role Models. Teachers serve as role models for students, embodying qualities such as integrity, compassion, resilience, and lifelong learning. They set an example for their students to emulate and aspire to (Xochellis & Kesidou, 2015).

The process to become a teacher in Greece involves academic qualifications, professional training, and ongoing professional development. Teachers receive compulsory training in pedagogy and may pursue optional training to enhance their relational and educational skills (Maria, 2018). In Greek society, teachers are highly regarded as educators, mentors, guardians of values, agents of change, partners in education, and role models, reflecting the central role they play in shaping the future of the nation.

Evaluation Process

In Greece, evaluation is indeed a crucial aspect of the educational process, serving to assess student progress, inform teaching practices, and guide educational policy. Evaluation is conducted by various stakeholders throughout the school career, including teachers, school administrators, and government agencies (Papanthymou & Darra, 2019). Let's explore how evaluation is addressed in Greece, including who conducts evaluations and the criteria used to assess students and their skills.

1. Teacher-Led Evaluation:

- **Continuous Assessment:** Teachers play a central role in evaluating student progress on an ongoing basis through continuous assessment. This involves observing student performance in class, reviewing homework assignments, quizzes, and projects, and providing feedback to students and parents.
- **Formative Assessment:** Teachers use formative assessment techniques to monitor student learning and identify areas for improvement. This may include classroom discussions, questioning techniques, peer assessment, and self-assessment activities.
- **Summative Assessment:** Teachers also administer summative assessments, such as end-of-unit tests, midterm exams, and final exams, to evaluate student achievement and determine grades.

2. School-Based Evaluation:

- **School Administrators:** School administrators oversee the evaluation process within their schools, ensuring that teachers are effectively implementing assessment practices and meeting educational objectives.
- **Internal Quality Assurance:** Schools may develop internal quality assurance mechanisms to review and evaluate teaching and learning processes, curriculum implementation, and overall school performance.

3. National Evaluation Framework:

- **Panhellenic Examinations:** At certain key stages of education, such as the end of lower secondary school (grade 9) and upper secondary school (grade 12), students take national examinations known as Panhellenic exams. These standardized exams are administered by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs and assess students' knowledge and skills in core subjects, including Greek language, mathematics, foreign languages, and other subjects depending on the lyceum stream.
- **University Entrance Exams:** The Panhellenic exams at the end of grade 12 serve as the primary criteria for admission to higher education institutions in Greece. Students' performance on these exams, along with their overall academic record, determines their eligibility for university admission and selection into specific programs of study.

*Criteria for Evaluation:***1. Academic Achievement:**

- Students are evaluated based on their academic performance in various subjects, including Greek language, mathematics, sciences, social studies, foreign languages, and elective courses.
- Assessment criteria may include knowledge and understanding of content, application of skills, critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and creativity.

2. Skills and Competencies:

- Evaluation also encompasses students' acquisition of skills and competencies essential for success in school and beyond. This may include communication skills, collaboration, information literacy, digital literacy, and socio-emotional skills.
- Teachers assess students' skills through a combination of direct observation, performance-based tasks, projects, presentations, and portfolios.

3. Learning Outcomes:

- Evaluation in Greece is aligned with learning outcomes specified in the national curriculum framework. Teachers assess students' progress in achieving these learning outcomes and provide feedback to support further learning and development.
- Assessment criteria may vary depending on the specific goals and objectives of each subject area and educational level.

Evaluation in Greece involves a combination of teacher-led assessment, school-based evaluation, and national standardized examinations (Papanthymou & Darra, 2019). Teachers assess students' academic achievement, skills, and competencies based on established criteria, while national examinations provide a standardized measure of student performance at key stages of education. Evaluation serves to support student learning, inform instructional practice, and ensure accountability within the education system.

*Characteristics of Greek Educational System***a. Inclusive Education:**

Inclusive education in Greece aims to provide equitable opportunities for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or learning needs. This approach recognizes the diverse strengths and challenges of students and seeks to create supportive learning environments that accommodate individual differences (Savelides et al., 2015). Inclusive education is grounded in principles

of social justice, respect for diversity, and the right to education for all.

In Greece, inclusive education is supported by legislation such as Law 4485/2017, which emphasizes the right of every student to access quality education in an inclusive setting. This legislation promotes the inclusion of students with disabilities, special educational needs, and diverse learning profiles in mainstream schools. Greek schools implement various support mechanisms to ensure the success of inclusive education. This includes the provision of specialized support services, such as resource rooms, assistive technologies, and individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to the needs of students with disabilities (Savelides et al., 2015). Teachers in Greece receive training and professional development on inclusive education practices, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to effectively support diverse learners in their classrooms. This training emphasizes strategies for differentiation, universal design for learning (UDL), and collaborative problem-solving.

Inclusive education in Greece involves collaboration among educators, parents, students, and community stakeholders. Schools work closely with families to understand students' needs and provide appropriate support, while also fostering a culture of acceptance and inclusion among students through awareness-raising activities and peer support programs. While progress has been made in promoting inclusive education in Greece, there are still challenges to address, including the need for more specialized support services, the importance of combating stigma and discrimination, and the necessity of ongoing professional development for teachers to effectively meet the needs of diverse learners (Zacharis, 2017).

b. Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity in the Greek school system emphasizes the integration of knowledge and skills across different subject areas, fostering connections between disciplines and promoting deeper understanding and critical thinking. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of knowledge and encourages students to make meaningful connections between different fields of study.

Greek schools incorporate interdisciplinary approaches into their curriculum design, creating opportunities for students to explore complex topics from multiple perspectives. This may involve thematic units, project-based learning, or cross-curricular projects that integrate content from various subjects (Zacharis, 2017).

Interdisciplinarity often involves collaborative teaching teams composed of educators from different subject areas.

as. These teams work together to design interdisciplinary units, align curriculum objectives, and facilitate cross-disciplinary learning experiences for students. Interdisciplinary learning promotes critical thinking skills by encouraging students to analyze information, synthesize ideas, and draw connections between different domains of knowledge. This approach helps students develop a holistic understanding of complex issues and prepares them to think critically and creatively in diverse contexts. Interdisciplinary learning in Greece emphasizes the real-world relevance of academic content, encouraging students to apply their knowledge and skills to solve authentic problems and address contemporary issues. This approach fosters engagement and motivation by connecting classroom learning to students' lives and interests.

While interdisciplinarity offers many benefits, it also presents challenges such as curriculum alignment, assessment methods, and time constraints. Greek schools are working to overcome these challenges by providing professional development opportunities for teachers, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation, and integrating interdisciplinary approaches into school-wide practices and policies.

c. Digital Innovation

Digital innovation in the Greek school system harnesses technology to enhance teaching and learning experiences, promote digital literacy, and prepare students for success in the digital age. This approach recognizes the transformative potential of technology in education and seeks to leverage digital tools and resources to support student engagement, creativity, and achievement (Nikolopoulou & Kousloglou, 2019).

Greek schools integrate digital technologies into their teaching and learning practices, providing access to computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards, and educational software. Teachers use digital tools to deliver instruction, facilitate collaborative activities, and provide personalized learning experiences for students. Digital innovation in Greece emphasizes the development of digital literacy skills, including information literacy, media literacy, and computational thinking. Students learn how to critically evaluate online information, communicate effectively in digital formats, and use technology responsibly and ethically. Greek schools implement blended learning models that combine traditional classroom instruction with online learning opportunities. Blended learning allows for greater flexibility and customization, enabling students to access educational resources, participate in virtual di-

scussions, and engage in self-paced learning activities outside of school hours. Digital innovation requires ongoing professional development for teachers to effectively integrate technology into their teaching practice. Greek schools provide training and support to teachers on digital pedagogy, educational technology tools, and best practices for online instruction, empowering educators to adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of digital learners (Nikolopoulou & Kousloglou, 2019). Digital innovation in Greece is committed to ensuring equity and access to technology for all students, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location. Schools work to bridge the digital divide by providing devices and internet connectivity to underserved communities, implementing policies to promote digital inclusion, and fostering a culture of digital citizenship among students. Inclusive education, interdisciplinarity, and digital innovation are three highly significant aspects of the Greek school system, each contributing to the holistic development of students, the enhancement of teaching and learning experiences, and the preparation of students for success in a rapidly changing world.

Modern challenges

The Greek school system possesses several strengths, but it also faces various challenges (Xochellis & Kesidou, 2015). Let's examine both:

Strengths

1. **Cultural Heritage:** Greece's rich cultural heritage provides a strong foundation for education, emphasizing classical education, humanism, and democratic values. This cultural legacy contributes to a robust curriculum and a deep appreciation for the arts, literature, and philosophy.
2. **Inclusive Education:** The commitment to inclusive education ensures that students of all backgrounds and abilities have access to quality education. Legislation and support mechanisms are in place to promote equity and inclusion within schools, fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among students.
3. **Teacher Professionalism:** Teachers in Greece are highly trained professionals who are dedicated to their craft. They undergo rigorous academic preparation and receive ongoing professional development to enhance their pedagogical skills and support student learning effectively.
4. **Emphasis on Holistic Development:** The Greek school system places a strong emphasis on the holistic de-

velopment of students, recognizing the importance of intellectual, social, emotional, and physical well-being. Schools provide opportunities for students to explore their interests, develop their talents, and cultivate essential life skills.

5. Resilience and Adaptability: Despite facing challenges such as economic instability and resource constraints, the Greek school system has demonstrated resilience and adaptability. Educators, administrators, and policy-makers work together to navigate complex issues and implement innovative solutions to improve educational outcomes.

Weaknesses

1. Resource Allocation: Limited resources, including funding, facilities, and personnel, present challenges for the Greek school system. Budget constraints can affect the quality of education, infrastructure maintenance, and access to support services for students with diverse needs.

2. Educational Equity: Disparities in educational opportunities persist, particularly between urban and rural areas and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Addressing these inequities requires targeted interventions, resource allocation, and policies to ensure that all students have access to high-quality education.

3. Standardized Testing Culture: The emphasis on standardized testing, such as the Panhellenic exams, can lead to a narrow focus on test preparation and rote memorization at the expense of critical thinking, creativity, and holistic learning experiences. There is a need to balance assessment practices to encompass diverse forms of evaluation that capture the complexity of student learning.

4. Teacher Workload and Support: Teachers in Greece face heavy workloads, administrative burdens, and limited support systems. Addressing teacher workload and providing adequate support, mentoring, and professional development opportunities are essential to enhance teacher well-being and retention (Xochellis & Kesidou, 2015).

5. Digital Divide: While digital innovation offers opportunities for enhanced learning experiences, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, particularly in underserved communities. Ensuring equitable access to technology and digital literacy skills is crucial to bridge the gap and promote digital inclusion for all students.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the Greek school system has many strengths, including its cultural heritage, commitment to inclusive education, and emphasis on holistic development, it also faces challenges related to resource allocation, educational equity, standardized testing culture, teacher support, and the digital divide. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from stakeholders at all levels to build a more equitable, inclusive, and resilient education system in Greece.

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