

Novice teachers following post-graduate studies: their needs, motives and working conditions. The case of Greece

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Submitted

Electronic Conference Proceedings ATEE, website of the Conference

The conference proceedings -published at ATEE's website.

[http://www.atee1.org/-](http://www.atee1.org/)

Abstract

Novice teachers consist a special group of in-service teachers facing enhanced difficulties in the beginning of their teaching career, expressing fears concerning their teaching efficacy, the lack of adequate support during practicing their profession. For this reason, we conducted a study exploring the needs and problems that new teachers face, the information and training they had during their undergraduate studies (Bachelor Degrees), also the information and training they have about the new curricula and school textbooks, their motives for following post-graduate studies, the support they might have. The study took place at the School of Education at the University of Western Macedonia in Florina during the winter semester of the academic year 2008-2009. The sample of the study was 30 (N) post-graduate students attending Master Courses in Education (M.Eds.), who were also newly engaged in Primary Schools, Secondary Education or Kindergartens. A semi-structured interview protocol, consisted of twelve questions, was constructed and used. The results of the study are of main importance and offer insight for suggestions in Teachers' Education and further Training.

1. Teachers' Education and Training in Greece: an overview of the current types of Education and Training

Teachers Education and Training in Greece has undergone the same stages like in many European countries. In this section we will provide a concise overview of Teacher Education and Training in Greece nowadays.

In brief, before mid 1980s Teachers Education in Greece was completed upon two years studies through the Pedagogical Academies (since 1933) both for the Primary School and Early Education (Kindergarten) Teachers. The programme of the Pedagogical Academies was characterized by inadequacies concerning the content of the modules offered, the teaching methods that were followed and it had not been updated for 50 years. Thus, the need for a shift in Teachers' Education was an imperative demand in early 1980s (see: Papagueli-Vouliouris 1999 for a detailed evaluation of Teacher Education in Greece until 2000).

As Kazamias had pointed out clearly (1985) it was not until 1982 that serious efforts were made to reform the Greek educational system. During that year, a comprehensive Law (Law 1268/1982) was enacted which, amongst other things, had a significant effect, on the organization and governance of the Greek Universities (in abbreviation, named AEIs). Moreover, according to Law 1268/1982 provisions were made for the establishment of autonomous university Departments of Education,

whose exclusive function would be the education and training of Primary School and Early Education Teachers.

As a result of this step, in 1983, the two-year Pedagogical Academies- that were until that time the official institutions for Teachers' Training- were abolished and replaced by the University Departments of Education that offer four years undergraduate studies. Also, were abolished the training centres addressed to Primary School Teachers and Secondary Education teachers, named *SELDE-SELME*, offering one year in-service training. The traditional system of job entry (named *epetirida*), induction and in general of Teachers' employment in schools finally changed. Until that time it was based on an annual record, according to priority by the date of submission of candidates - graduate teachers from the Pedagogical Academies, and this system very ineffective in practice since there was a long time lapse between the date of teachers' graduation and their engagement in schools.

In the next years, Pedagogical Academies were phased out and since the academic year 1985-1986 the Departments of Education have been functioning throughout Greece. The University Departments of Education, with new programmes and curricula, promised to provide update information and knowledge of academic standards and, at the same time, to offer an extended, pre-service training of practical level. Furthermore, the *Regional Training Centres* (in abbreviation, called PEKs) were established, addressed to Primary, Secondary and Early Education Teachers. Since 1992, PEKs have been offering short-term training at local level either to newly engaged teachers aiming at their teaching preparation and readiness or to more experienced teachers who would like to acquire new knowledge, get informed about new trends in educational issues, get trained also in new scientific areas (e.g. ICT in Education, Administration in Education, Intercultural Education).

Another important measure that was initiated in 1990s, was the establishment of the National Teachers' Competition for engagement (in abbreviation, called ASEP for Teachers). Since then, the *epetirida* has been gradually abolished, with the majority of teachers engaged within schools after national exams on annual basis. In addition, the long time lapse situation between the date of graduation and the employment of teachers according to the old system of *epetirida*- with a range of 10 years (for Primary School Teachers) until 15 years (for teachers of Secondary Education) has been improved with the ASEP system.

Seniority and action within syndicates as well as the interview are amongst the criteria that count more for the selection of the key actors of Education rather than the further degrees acquired or any additional training (Georgogiannis 2006). This situation discourages many new teachers who have the qualifications but they do not have the working experience required, which according to the latest relevant provisions should be 16 years of teaching experience, with the 10 years of experience acquired from the classroom (Law 3467/2006, 128/21.06.2006) in order to be considered eligible for entering the above competition for the selection of the key actors. For the same reason, some teachers with a postgraduate degree can be discouraged from entering the Teachers' National Competition and prefer following other professions or working in non-public schools. So far, the existing in-service Teacher Training programmes in Greece fall within two main categories of programmes for the professional development of teachers. The first are called *didaskaleia* and are associated within the Departments of Education of universities (Primary or Early Childhood). They provide two-year full time basis programmes- called *metekpedeusi*- to those teachers who have at least 5 years of teaching experience. The entrance to these programmes is through

examinations. During this in-service training, teachers are released from the class' duties and are prepared usually in order to challenge at later stage a leading position in Education. Didaskaleia offer two directions: either a general one or that of Special Needs Education. Another in-service programme is the one that is called *exomiosi* which upgrades the two year (non-university) degrees of teachers to University degrees. Since these programmes are functioning mainly during weekends, teachers at the same time continue their teaching profession (see Antoniou 2002; for a detailed overview about the Primary Teachers' profession in Greece from 1828 until 2000). From the above one can conclude that the field of the Teachers' Education and Training in Greece is characterised by almost the total autonomy of its Departments of Education as far as the structure and implementation of the curricula are concerned (Eurydice 2005).

The study following is indicative of new teachers, with limited teaching experience or without any teaching experience yet, who feel it is important for them to follow post-graduate studies in an effort to obtain more qualifications and acquire more knowledge. First, the methodology of the study and presentation of its results will be presented compared to similar studies implemented in Greece. Finally, a discussion will take place concerning suggestions on new teachers' in-service training in Greece.

3. The study: Methodology

This study explores and depicts the problems that novice teachers face in Greece. A study was conducted at the School of Education University of Western Macedonia at post-graduate students attending Education master courses, who were also new teachers in primary, secondary, kindergarten schools. By using the term novice in this study we refer to those teachers who have minimum teaching experience (in this study, from 2-6 years) or they have not worked in school yet; the latter group followed post-graduate studies immediately after graduating from AElS. In this study the terms "novice/new teachers", "post-graduate teachers", "teachers' students" are used alternatively.

The aim of the study was to explore if the educational system of the Pedagogical Departments of the Greek Universities faces needs that arise within the school classroom and supports new teachers. The samples were 30 (N) post-graduate students attending Education master courses, who were also newly engaged in Pre-Primary Schools. A semi-structured interview protocol was constructed and used, combined of twelve questions. The axes of this interview protocol are based on the international bibliography concerning novice teachers' needs and incentives for following further studies. Content analysis was followed.

As already mentioned, participants, post-graduate students were teachers, the 20 were females and the 10 were males.

18 participants were graduates of Departments of Education (from the University of Western Macedonia in Florina, from the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, from the University of Thessaly) and the 12 of them had graduated from Departments of Secondary Education (i.e. Department of Mathematics, Department of ICT, and Department of Theology). All the participants of our sample had graduated from AElS (not from the old Pedagogical Academies); this was a criterion since this study focused on novice teachers. Also, for those who had worked as teachers in schools, the minimum time was 2 years (in order to become permanent teachers) up to 6 years. This criterion was important in order to exclude other categories of teachers' students (i.e. the experienced or older teachers) who followed post-graduate programmes. In terms of working during attending the post-graduate programme, 17

participants attended the post-graduate programme and were working at the same time on full-time basis, the 6 participants were working on part-time basis, and 7 of them were supported financially from their parents in order to follow the post-graduate programme.

4. Presentation of results

In this section, we will present the results of some of the questions, i.e. answers of the post-graduate teachers' to some of the questions of the semi-structured interview protocol. This type of interview was chosen as the most appropriate for exploring possible categories of answers because of its flexibility in the line of questions and their adjustability (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). Content analysis method was followed in order to put in categories students' answers to the semi-structured interview (Babbie 2003, pp. 320-330, Kyriazi 1999, pp. 283-299; Weber 1990, p. 9). The recorded interviews were decoded in protocols for all the participants. Then, following the steps of content analysis, representative categories were defined deriving from informants'/students' answers. In the main study, cross-tabs were also used for the analysis of answers of the questionnaire. The categories of answers are presented in the following tables, with their frequencies also; in other words, the categories of answers are treated as quantitative data, something which is permissible in the content analysis. The irrelevant answers given have been omitted from the analysis.

<i>Q1. Do you believe that the content of your undergraduate studies gave you the knowledge and qualifications in order to meet the needs and demands of the teaching profession?</i>	Frequency	%
1. Yes, in practical level	9	24.32
2. Yes, in theoretical level	25	67.56
3. Yes, in both levels	3	8.10
Total frequency of answers given	37	100%

Table 1

In the above table 1, one can see that the majority of post-graduate students (67.56%) allege that they were not trained at sufficient level concerning the practical level. On the contrary, only a minority of informants, that is 8.19%, said that satisfied in both levels of their undergraduate studies (theoretical and practical).

It seems that novice teachers do not feel that their bachelor degree offered to them the adequate training in order to use different teaching approaches, to handle special categories of pupils within their classes. Those who have realized this gap between the education they had received and the difficulties arising in practice have chosen to follow a postgraduate programme (in our case an M.Ed).

As far as teachers' motives are concerned in order to follow the post-graduate studies these are mainly two: to acquire practical experience (42.5%) and to acquire a second degree which will help them later to have a better position in their teaching career. The answers given in this question are in accordance with teachers' answers in the previous question.

<i>Q2. Which were the motives that influenced you for following post-graduate studies?</i>	Frequency	%
1. To broaden my knowledge	8	20
2. To acquire practical experience	17	42.5
3. To take a degree which will help me in my professional development	15	37.5
Total frequency of answers given	40	100%

Table 2

It seems that novice teachers are divided in two main groups concerning the accusations they offer as explanations to the limited information and knowledge they had before taking the decision to follow a postgraduate programme.

Those that place the locus of control to the system and the lack of adequate training (external factors); these are these students who have worked for some years in school. The group of students that has not worked in schools or has worked only for 2 years.

<i>Q3. Do you feel you are adequately informed and trained as far as Curricula and school textbooks are concerned in order to meet the needs of your teaching profession ?</i>	Frequency	%
1. Yes, because the School Counsellor inform us frequently	6	16.63
2. Yes, because I have a personal interest in getting informed	11	26.82
3. No, there is not any special training on new school textbooks and curricula	14	34.14
Total frequency of answers given	41	100%

Table 3

Only a minority of new teachers (16.63%) said that they were satisfied from the support they received from the school counselor and the co-operation with him/her. In question 7, the majority of teachers (34.21%) believe that there is not any connection between the knowledge they acquired during their undergraduate studies with the practical needs that arise in class.

<i>Q7. Do you believe there is a connection between the knowledge you have acquired from your undergraduate studies with the practical needs that arise in the school environment?</i>	Frequency	%
1. No, because we have not attended new modules for special categories of pupils	13	34.21
2. Yes, because there are special seminars in schools and in universities	14	36.84
3. No, these are two different things: theory and practice	11	28.94
Total frequency of answers given	38	100%

Table 4

The majority of novice teachers believe that cooperation is the most important factor that contributes in a supportive way during teaching, either with the teaching staff (24.32%) or with the Head teacher and the School Counsellor (35.13%), with parents also (40.54%).

<i>Q8. Which are the factors that according to your view contribute in a supportive way in the teaching process?</i>	Frequency	%
1. The cooperation between the teaching staff	9	24.32
2. The support from the school Head teacher and the School Counsellor	13	35.13
3. The support from the parents and the cooperation with them	15	40.54
Total frequency of answers given	37	100%

Table 5

One teacher asserted:

I believe the role of the Head teacher is very important and influences also the school personnel. Also, the parental involvement and cooperation but I am sorry to say that many teachers are indifferent to children's needs... (PS18)

<i>Q10. Do you have the adequate support from the colleagues at your school?</i>	Frequency	%
1. Yes, the older teachers help us with their experience	9	23.07
2. No, the environment is very competitive	17	43.58
3. No, on the contrary, they put many obstacles to the novice teachers who have better qualifications	13	33.33
Total frequency of answers given	39	100%

Table 6

One teacher pointed out:

Ok, we all know that older teachers from the Pedagogical Academies usually do have not any special qualifications... this has created two different types of teachers... the more qualified you are, the more you work, the more you are excluded from your colleagues... (PS25)

It seems that the only factor which plays a supportive role in novice teachers during working at school is not the human factor; support for teachers is equivalent to the good infrastructure when there is an ICT laboratory and educational programmes.

<i>Q11. Does your school offer to you the adequate support to implement innovative educational programmes and activities?</i>	Frequency	%
1. No, because there is not such support: no equipment, no infrastructure, no computers	18	60
2. Yes, because it is a school with good infrastructure, ICT programmes, educational programmes.	12	40
Total frequency of answers given	30	100%

Table 7

One teacher said:

From my limited experience I think that only some public schools that are in urban cities are adequately equipped...but most have many problems in functioning...not to mention the schools in rural areas...it would be a nightmare for a young teacher to be placed there... (PS27)

5. Conclusions

This research aimed at exploring novice teachers' perceptions of their undergraduate preparation programs and their motives in order to follow postgraduate studies. It also aims at providing some suggestions both for teachers' undergraduate studies (pre-service education) and their further training.

It is clear from all aforementioned that the majority of the post-graduate teachers of this study believe that the teaching preparation they received during their undergraduate studies is not sufficient enough for facing the new challenges in modern classes. For this reason, they decided to follow further post-graduate courses in order to fill in this gap. At first place, it seems there are needs for connecting the theory of the undergraduate studies with the needs that come out in practice during the teaching process and bridging the gap between them. Also, it is important new teachers to receive support by the head-teacher, school counselor as well as the local educational authorities. Furthermore, novice teachers choose to follow post-graduate studies having as a motive not only the need to get adequately informed and better trained but also for their own personal development. In the same direction, novice teachers' follow postgraduate studies because they believe that through this process they upgrade their professional status and acquire more qualifications that empower them in their profession. All the aforementioned show that nowadays novice teachers in Greece are in great need for updated information, practical training, reinforcement and support in their profession.

According to the results of this study, it is of first priority to improve the existing teacher education programmes offered during their undergraduate studies in order to correspond to the needs that arise in everyday school practice. Since 1980s Greek academics have pointed out the needs for upgrading the teaching profession (Kazamias 1985), teachers' in-service training (Kassotakis 1988); these needs remain to a great extent even today reflecting the needs to update the curricula of the Departments of Education as well the content of the practical training they offer to their students (Firippis & Papi 2002).

For this reason, it is important the evaluation of the programmes and courses provided at the Departments of Education. Contrary to the Polytechnic Departments, the evaluation of the programmes, academic staff at the Departments of Education has only recently started only in some Departments (i.e. at the Department of Early

Childhood Education- University of Western Macedonia). According to Williams and Alawiye (2001), programme evaluation is associated with the extent to which the program meets the needs of students. Since these needs are directly related to the effectiveness of the program, it is important that the students themselves offer a direct feedback about the services they received from the program and their degree of satisfaction.

The need to raise quality in the field of Teachers' In-service Training is also evident. In Greece, during the last three years some changes were initiated in the field of Education concerning the introduction of new curricula and school text books and of new modules such as teaching a second foreign language (apart from English); teachers were unprepared for these changes and what is worse is that they didn't receive a well structure in-service training and adequate support from the MoE. Teachers have to be well educated, then trained effectively and assessed on a meritocracy basis system. The real upgrading of the Departments of Education can be implemented only with the introduction of new curricula, the improvement of their infrastructure and the use of an evaluation process both to the academic staff as well as to the programmes they offer. What is still lacking in Greece is a systematic longitudinal evaluation of the Teacher education programmes both in undergraduate education and in the in-service training. Especially, post-graduate and on-service training programmes should meet the needs both of new and older teachers, otherwise they cannot be considered as sufficient and they do not offer a real further training or expertise. Such programmes should offer opportunities to teachers for engaging them in the teaching process as researchers, for teaching them how to use new teaching models and practices, and for reinforcing their professional status.

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