

# The Teaching of Classical Literature in Greek and Italian Secondary Education: Structural and Conceptual Approaches

Sofia Skleida, Philologist, MA, Ph.D., Postdoc

University of Athens

sofiaskleida70@gmail.com

**Abstract**—The point of departure and, at the same time, the motivation for examining the present subject stemmed, on the one hand, from the author's keen interest in the didactic analysis and teaching of Ancient Greek and Latin, both in Italian secondary education and in Greek education, and, on the other hand, from the increasing demands raised by everyday pedagogical and teaching practice in many dimensions and areas of educational and school reality. Furthermore, contemporary concern regarding the future of classical studies, the interest in Comparative Pedagogy and Education, as well as the hypothesis that the comparison and juxtaposition of educational systems could prove fruitful and creative for the further development and advancement of both the systems themselves and the countries from which they originate, also provided stimulus for this research. In Greece, the teaching of Ancient Greek constitutes an essential and necessary fact, from both a historical and a traditional standpoint. In Italy, by contrast, where a Neo-Latin language is employed as the medium of communication, Ancient Greek is perceived, perhaps, more as a foreign language. The reverse holds true regarding the teaching of Latin, for the Latin of the Italians corresponds evaluatively to our own Ancient Greek. The convergence of aims and objectives in the curricula of the two countries with regard to the teaching of Ancient Greek and Latin often confirms the similarity of the two educational frameworks.

**Keywords:** *Italian educational system; Greek educational system; Classical languages; Secondary education; Structural framework component*

## 1. The Structural and Conceptual Framework of Classical Languages

As Konomis notes, the Greeks, both in antiquity and during the Roman period, never pursued the study of Latin language and literature for educational or even utilitarian purposes. In fact, they do not appear to have considered even the supposed assumption that Latin was superior, at least in administration. He further argues that in the Eastern Roman Empire, the dominance of the Greek language continued uninterrupted, despite the existence of a Latin linguistic presence in Constantinople during the Byzantine era, while

noting that very few Latin works were translated into Greek throughout the long Byzantine period (Mallinson, 1966).

This can be explained by the fact that the Greeks never believed in the inherent value of Latin culture, nor did they recognize the important service rendered by the Latin world as an intermediate link in the chain connecting Greek civilization with that of Western Europe. According to the same scholar, modern educators in Greece followed the same path (Konomis, 2011).

It is noteworthy that from the mid-1960s onward, voices demanding a concrete description of the content and function of classical language teaching multiplied internationally. Westphalen specifically argued that the determination of the purposes of classical language instruction should be oriented towards the needs of contemporary society or those anticipated for the future. Furthermore, he stressed that the teaching of classical languages may be influenced by the teacher's personality, the individual course of learning psychology for each student, curiosity and interest, emotional intensity, methodological pluralism, clarity of learning objectives, and reliable evaluation during teaching, among other factors (Nichel, 1976).

In state secondary education across Western countries, the teaching of Latin followed a parallel path with that of Ancient Greek. From the years of World War II onwards, the subject was gradually restricted to the curricula of schools with a humanistic orientation and today generally constitutes an elective course (Ginsborg, 2003).

The reforms of the 1980s sought to alter the relationship between ancient and modern culture in favor of modern elements. That is, scientific and technological subjects were increased and improved, while the duration and, more significantly, the mode of offering humanistic subjects were modified (Ancient Greek through translation, changes in syllabus and textbooks, new courses in philosophy, sociology, etc., greater opportunities for electives). As a result, new organizational models emerged (types of schools, levels, structure of subjects, university entrance examinations), along with new curricula (content changes) and new textbooks (Papakonstantinou, 1985).

The modern Italian educational system, for example, is the product of numerous reforms that took place in the 19th and 20th centuries and during the first decade of the current century. Within this framework, and in line with the provisions of new European educational programs, organizational changes in Italy's school system were accordingly planned and approved by the national parliament in 2003. This was embodied in Law 53/2003, which authorized the government to regulate the general rules of education (Eurydice, 2009/2010).

Given that the government itself is entrusted with responsibility not only for education but also for vocational training and lifelong learning within its educational policy, it was likewise charged by the aforementioned law with overseeing the most essential and specialized levels of the system. Thus, gradually and cumulatively, numerous factors influenced the shaping and evolution of the educational system (including our current one), and consequently the teaching of classical languages as well (Thut & Adams, 1064).

In recent years, the following changes have been observed in education: (1) the transition from elitist education to education for all, (2) the expansion of compulsory education, (3) the introduction of new technologies in schools, and (4) the opening of schools to the outside world as a result of social evolution and free education for all (Biddle-Good-Goodson, 2000).

Conflicts, disagreements, intellectual disputes, reforms and counter-reforms, political contradictions, private interests, and personal ideologies often prevailed and significantly influenced educational policy in Greece, frequently within a turbulent political climate. The social demand for further democratization of education, the new technological challenges pressing for improved economic efficiency of the educational system, and the demand for social justice will undoubtedly shape the future structure of our educational system (Markopoulos, 1990).

Regarding the teaching of the two classical languages in Greece itself (Katsikas & Therianos, 2004), it is important to note the dominant and historically continuous role of Ancient Greek, a role that Latin never held to the same degree. It should also be emphasized that the largely unnecessary and historical antagonism between the two ancient languages has not yet been fully overcome. Nevertheless, today it is generally accepted that the two languages complement one another (Bruni, 2005).

Finally, it should be observed that the teaching of Ancient Greek, broadly speaking, was often assigned political and ideological purposes, though perhaps not in as overt or intense a manner as occurred in Italy with the teaching of Latin (Pasquali, 1964).

In any case, the perception and treatment of classical languages in the two countries may be considered somewhat modified. In Greece, the teaching of Ancient Greek constitutes an essential and necessary fact, from both a historical and traditional perspective. In Italy, by contrast, where a Neo-Latin language is the primary medium of communication, Ancient Greek is considered, perhaps, more of a foreign language. Conversely, with respect to Latin, the opposite holds true, since Latin for Italians is equivalent in value to Ancient Greek for Greeks (Semeraro, 1996. Calia, 2002)).

At the same time, in Italian secondary education, Classical Literature seems to be treated more holistically. Ancient Greek and Latin are referred to as "classical" or "ancient languages." In many cases, they are considered jointly from a didactic and consensual perspective, sharing identical aims, objectives, and methodological approaches. Nevertheless, the convergence of curricula goals in both countries regarding the teaching of Ancient Greek and Latin confirms the similarity of the two systems (Thut & Adams, 1064).

## 2. Conclusions

It is a fact that the two countries under study share, to a considerable degree, a common historical past as well as direct intellectual and cultural exchanges, observed in the past and continuing today (Crouzet, 1971). Inevitably, these have influenced the overall intellectual and cultural foundations of both educational systems.

Classical Literature in both countries is linked to historical, political, and cultural factors, which mandate its compulsory teaching in general secondary education, particularly in classical-oriented programs of study. On this matter, various opinions have been expressed concerning the didactic approach to the two subjects, often articulated in opposing and conflicting terms.

However, the central issues of this subject concern the traditional form of the two courses, their aims and objectives, the methodological approach adopted, the years devoted to their teaching, and their overall place within the curriculum.

For this reason, international cooperation, cross-party dialogue on education, political consensus, and above all, the strengthening of educational research in Greece are required. Through systematic research, analysis, evaluation, and creative intervention for potential modifications, Greece may actively participate in the international development and prospects of Education.

On the basis of such feedback processes, it will be possible to improve and strengthen outdated or poorly designed principles that undermine the functioning of the educational system as a whole and, consequently, erode the foundations of tomorrow's society.

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