

The Acquisition of Greek as a Second/Foreign Language by the Imprisoned Adult Refugees and Migrants in Corfu: A Comprehensive Study on the Teaching Material Used During Their Formal Education

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The purpose of this article was to investigate the way that imprisoned adult refugees and migrants can acquire Greek as a second/foreign language. In particular, the study focused on the teaching material used by the educators during the teaching and learning process. Light was also shed on the benefits that formal education that can be offered to the inmates regarding their unhindered integration in the Greek society. The research was carried out in the Second Chance School operating in the Prison of Corfu. The Second Chance School in a Correctional Institution such as a prison was first established in Larisa in 2004. Today, there are already eleven in Greece. One of them is in the penal institution of Corfu, established in 2017. According to the Greek Ministry of Justice the 52.7% of the prisoners are foreigners and most of them hardly speak Greek. This study mainly dealt with formal education as a systematic and organized education model that requires students' constant attendance. Usually the learning objectives, the teaching frame, and learning procedures of the formal education are fixed and students need to acquire specific knowledge within specific time, which might make it even more difficult for imprisoned immigrants. On the contrary, non-formal education is considered to be more flexible and with non-fixed curricula. This article briefly presents the overall structure and the context of adult education that is nowadays in use in Greece—especially the one that refers to the education of inmates in Greece. Moreover, it focuses on the research that has been carried out in the Second Chance School in Corfu, it presents the data collected and concentrates on the obstacles and the limitations that the educators encounter in the Correctional Institutes of Greece, in general. Finally, there are some enlightening conclusions accompanied by some useful proposals aiming at the enhancement of the quality of the educational material used in the Second Chance Prison of Corfu.

Keywords: adult education, inmates of the prison of Corfu, needs analysis, Special Designed Educational Program for Inmates, proposals, limitations

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Introduction

This paper focuses mainly on the educational material used by instructors when teaching the inmates of the Second Chance School in Corfu—along with their assessment about the suitability of the specific teaching material. In addition, the paper sheds light on the unhindered ways that the inmates could likely employ for the effective acquisition of Greek as a second/foreign language. Finally, the paper proceeds to improvement suggestions regarding the current teaching material.

Observation, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires constituted the main tools for the data collection and their processing. More specifically, there was a selection of eight educators teaching at the Correctional Institute of Corfu who functioned as the interviewees. To such an aim semi-structured interviews were prepared, so that the educators could freely express both the experiences they acquired and the difficulties they faced while educating imprisoned students—most of them being refugees and migrants. Every interview lasted about 40 minutes. Moreover, a comprehensive questionnaire that was used consisted of close-ended questions. The questionnaire was also delivered to other correctional institutions of the country, so that safer results could be extracted.

The results showed that the foreign inmates present differences from the indigenous students due to their heritage language and their culture influences. Most of the foreign students are illiterate due to the fact that they had never received any kind of education before! Despite their eagerness for learning they have severe problems in expressing themselves in the target language (Greek)! Usually their classes are mixed ones, which means different levels of students concerning their age, education, gender, previous experience, and duration of their stay in Greece—factors which complicate things and impede their smooth learning progress. The necessity for the conduct of a Needs Analysis at the beginning of the year was more than evident and imperative. The necessity for further funding of the Second Chance Schools across the country was urgent too!

Literature Review

Formal education, as it is distinguished and juxtaposed to informal and non-formal education, constitutes the official education and training system of a country. It might be structured and supported by both public and private educational institutions. It includes the school based classroom learning and it is consisted of the primary, junior, and upper secondary education and the tertiary education. Students participating in formal learning activities are given instructional goals and objectives. The learning process is guided by established criteria consistent with the goals and objectives set by official curricula and syllabi. The distinguishing feature, however, from other forms of education is that students have the incentive to receive a degree or certificate at the end of their studies, officially recognized by the (Greek) state. The formal education system of Greece is under the central responsibility, guidance, and supervision of the Ministry of Education.

Adult education, on the other hand, first appeared in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. The aim was to improve the educational situation of the various vulnerable social groups. Gradually, adult education kept on developing—mainly at the beginning of the 80s—with the decisive financial support of the European Union. Actually, it was globalization, immigration, social exclusion, and technology that urged the development of adult education as an international phenomenon. By being educated adults had now the opportunity of getting improved, they could acquire new knowledge and could be integrated into the local society successfully.

In Greece, adult education is organized by the General Secretary of Lifelong Learning of the Ministry of

Education. Nowadays the official adult educational programs existing in Greece are the Schools of Second Chance, the Centers for Lifelong Learning, and the Greek language courses for migrants and refugees organized by Universities. Generally speaking, adult education consists of the general education, the vocational training, and the formal, non-formal, and informal learning. An adult student is legitimate to attend all educational levels—from primary to tertiary education. Within the frame of adult education, populations with special needs and aims are currently provided with specially designed educational curricula along with the enhancement of their working life, their employment, and the improvement of their productivity. Self-motivated education, personnel training, and labor market training are also offered to adult students in a variety of courses and programs delivered at all levels of formal education.

The Second Chance School was introduced in Greece as a new educational institution during the late of the 90s by the Law 2525/97. The Program consisted part of the Operational Program “Education and Lifelong Learning” of the Ministry of Education and was co-funded—apart from the National funds—by the European Union (European Social Funding). The aim was to offer adult students the opportunity to enter the education and training system again, to be positive towards the learning procedure, to be able to acquire knowledge and skills, to develop further their personality, and to have access to the labor market. Students need to be 18 years old and above, who haven’t completed the compulsory secondary education. After the successful completion of the Second Chance School, a Certificate of Attendance equivalent to secondary school diploma is granted. Generally speaking, the overall Curriculum is flexible and carefully adjusted to the adult education regulations. According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) during the years 2015-2020 there has been a 15.5% increase of students (among them a lot of foreigners, too) who attended Second Chance Schools.

The main subjects taught at Second Chance Schools are Modern Greek, Mathematics, Technology along with English, courses related closely to society, science, the environment, and culture. Moreover, students are free to express themselves through Arts and Sports for a more constructive management of their leisure time. All Modules are open and flexible and are based on the actual needs of the learners. The weekly program is scheduled by the Principal and the educators of the school, after the completion of a comprehensive Needs Analysis during the first week of the school year.

Each class of the Second Chance School is usually consisted of twelve (12) to twenty (20) adult students. The principal, the educators, the career advisor and the consultant psychologist constitute the educational personnel of the school. The role of the educators (Law 4186/2013, A 193, Article 27, paragraphs: 11, 12, and 13) is that of the “facilitator” and the “coordinator” of the teaching process. The educator undertakes the obligation to apprehend the educational needs of the learners, to participate in the design of the educational program, to come up with solutions to the various daily problems that may arise, and to adjust the “educational material to the actual needs of the students”. Moreover, teachers need to “update their qualifications” on an annual basis, to “use new and innovative teaching methods and techniques”, and finally to handle any supportive “technological material” for efficient instruction.

The new *Correctional Code* in Greece (Law 2776/1999) addresses prisons as correctional institutions belonging to the Ministry of Justice. It initially focused mainly on punishment; gradually, however, there was a shift to the new trends and ideas of the New Social Defense and to the UN resolutions, having as a result a radical reform concerning the treatment of the imprisoned. The aim now was to improve the personality of the imprisoned and elevate them ethically. Work and education were also included, so that the social re-integration of the inmates

could be achieved. The respect of the human rights is now the main concern along with the encouragement of the inmates' self-esteem, their dignity, and the development of a sense of responsibility.

Second Chance School in a Correctional Institution

As already mentioned, the Second Chance Schools that operate in correctional institutions follow exactly the same syllabi with those of the Second Chance Schools in Greece. The aim is the whole development of the inmates, the completion of their basic education and the acquisition of skills, knowledge and behavior that will help them in their social and economic integration and development.

Unfortunately, no educational material is given to the educator in the Correctional Institutes. After a Needs Analysis is carried out at the beginning of the school year the educator organizes the structure of each lesson in order to correspond to his/her students' needs. A useful instructional tool is the so-called "Folder of Educational Material", which is enriched by the educator throughout the school year. This tool helps the teacher organize his/her thoughts, program a schedule for the units to be taught, fill in a self-assessment and collect feedback for future improvements. The Educational Folder also includes the educational material organized in units (texts with information, notes, worksheets, activities, self-assessment forms), articles from newspapers, magazines or the internet and maps and photographs that can be used as educational material. The attendance of the lessons has been proved to be beneficial to the students due to the fact that one day in school equates to two days of their conviction sentence.

At any rate, education in a correctional institution needs to be effectively organized mainly based on the inmates' characteristics on one hand and the general environment and the prevailing conditions of the prison on the other. It is crucial that the inmates would be able to have good access to any educational source such as the prison's library and the internet. In addition, the lessons' objectives have to be clearly stated and be closely related to the inmates' needs and interests. To effectively accomplish such a goal a so-called "educational contract" has to be agreed with from the very first meetings, so that all the members of the educational community would comply with the rules and the learning procedure to be followed.

The Research Method

The selection of an appropriate research method for the thorough investigation of a topic constitutes a fundamental decision for any scholar, since it requires various scientific aspects to be considered. For the objectives of this particular study a mixed method was selected, that is to say, both a quantitative and a qualitative approach was engaged in order to ensure a more comprehensive and profound understanding.

The main research questions referred to the degree of "appropriateness" of the "teaching material" that educators use during the teaching procedure along with the "suitability of their teaching methods" while teaching inmates, especially refugees/migrants.

In total, eight educators were employed as interviewees. Semi-structured interviews were accordingly prepared so that the educators could freely express themselves and discuss their experiences and the difficulties they encountered while training imprisoned refugees/migrants. Every interview lasted about 40 minutes. Moreover, a questionnaire that was used consisted of close-ended questions. It was delivered to other correctional institutions of Greece too, such as the institution of Komotini, Trikala, and Nigrita, so that safer results could be extracted. The total number of the respondents of the questionnaire reached the forty-three (43) teachers.

The interviews were not recorded, because the educators did not provide their consent. The observation

method during the session also proved to be quite helpful regarding the overall data collection. Extensive notes were held by the researcher throughout the procedure. The data were analyzed inductively and were categorized by the use of respective codes. The acquired results were measured by the Likert scale.

Results of the Questionnaire and the Interviews

The Participant's Academic Background

Among the 43 respondents of the questionnaire and the eight interviewees, 51.16% were men and 48.84% women. Most of them ranged from 40 to 56 years old and the most common ages were 44, 45, 47, and 50 years old.

The majority of teachers were teaching Greek literature and Mathematics. 62.79% have already worked in a Second Chance School before, but only 30.23% have been employed in a Second Chance School in a correctional institution.

Moreover, 39.53% had a university degree, while 5% possessed a master's degree and have attended a/any seminar(s) in adult education.

Almost 64.21% of the educators spoke English and 12% French, but only 2% could converse in Arabic and Albanian. Consequently, 84% of the educators did not speak the mother tongue of the imprisoned, whereas only 16% could handle it at an elementary level.

Six out of the eight educators of the 2nd Second Chance School in the correctional institution of Corfu were women and four men. Regarding their academic qualifications, they were all very well qualified. Only one of them was not a holder of a Master's degree! On the contrary, four of them had already acquired a Ph.D. Although all of them were experienced in adult education, it was the first time that they taught in a school that operates in a correctional institution.

The Participant's Teaching Methods

The teaching methods and the learning strategies that the educators employed were mainly focused on vocabulary, grammar, and activities related to daily communication—along with the learner's daily training of how to fill in and handle Greek official documents. Teachers used whiteboards, photographs, Power Point, various communication activities with escalating difficulty such as dialogues, exercises on the computer, activities aiming at raising their environmental awareness, and original multimodal texts. In addition, educators concentrated on “experiential learning” quite extensively, they used dramatization methods and role playing, they tried to cultivate the oral and written speech, and they presented videos according to the inmates' level and their actual needs.

As far as the “learning strategies” are concerned, educators exploited widely the metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategies of O'Malley and Chamot's Typology (Papanis, 2016). More specifically, the more advanced trainees were asked to apply strategies such as self-evaluation, key words detection, self-monitoring, skipping and scanning for information acquisition. Students of a lower level in Greek focused on cognitive strategies such as repetition, grouping, word-meaning prediction, images and photos, Greek songs, and quizzes. Finally, the youngest learners made effective use of the so-called social-affective strategies such as cooperation and working in teams and asking for clarification. Brain storming and role playing proved to be very popular to this particular group of learners.

The Teaching Material

In order to fully design a lesson 84% of the educators did not resort to specific teaching books for imprisoned refugees, while 16% of them used books from the free market and the internet, material that was relatively coherent with teaching to refugees and migrants. The 88% of the respondents disapproved the fact that no educational material was provided to the educators by any organization or the official state, except from some general guidelines that were distributed to each educator at the beginning of the academic year. Taking their own initiatives and in order to organize their educational material more effectively some of the educators relied on other sources for feedback, such as the book under the title “KLIK in the Greek language (Levels A1 & A2) edited by the Center of the Greek Language Certification, the Book *Odysseus—the gate of the Greek language*, and some school notes. Additionally, 56% of the teachers resorted to the use of technology and tried to avoid code switching from Greek to English and vice versa in order to communicate with the inmates. Regarding the internet access, however, 84% pointed out that they were unable to use it during their lessons due to technical problems. It was also quite disappointing for the researchers to realize that 53% of the educators did not take into consideration the specific elements and traits of their students’ culture in order to help them learn the Greek language. Concerning the evaluation of the educational material the majority of the educators (67%) mentioned that it was barely satisfactory. However, due to the fact that there were difficulties in teaching foreign adult inmates, “they would prefer to have a fixed teaching material properly adjusted to a correctional institution’s environment.”

The educators of the 2nd Second Chance School in the correctional institution of Corfu, in particular, appeared to be rather dissatisfied with the educational material since it was—according to them—vague, too general and it did not integrate effectively the special needs of the inmates. Educators were obliged to design extra notes by themselves, holding always in mind the special traits and the learning level of their students. They all appeared to be warm supporters of the implementation of a Needs Analysis at the beginning of each academic year, so that they could extract safe and exact conclusions concerning the actual educational needs of the learners. This seemed to be even more imperative considering the learning differences among the inmates, the variations at the level of their literalism (from the very illiterate ones even in their homeland to the educated), the differences of age, their social and economic status at home, the duration of their stay in Greece, etc. Finally, almost all teachers highlighted the need for extra financial support and grants by the Greek Ministry of Education, so that the Second Chance Schools of the Correctional Institutions could successfully comply with their mission.

Discussion of the Results

As far as the first objective of the research is concerned, that is the degree of “appropriateness” of the “teaching material” that educators use during the teaching procedure, the results revealed the urgent need for improvements and amendments of the current teaching material, so that it fits better with the teachers’ aspirations for their students’ improvement. Such a task seems to be even more problematic due to the fact, as already mentioned, that no fixed educational material has been provided to the educators by the official state so far. The design of the lesson plan, the methodology to be followed, the educational strategies and techniques, the learning aims, the respective teaching tools and means, the educational material to be selected (texts and activities, articles from newspapers, worksheets, magazines)—all is dependent on the teacher’s final decision of how to proceed to his/her teaching procedure.

Teaching materials for the correctional institutions of Greece should include anything which can facilitate the learning of the Greek language. They can be linguistic, visual, auditory, or kinesthetic, and they can be

presented in print, through live performance or display, or on cassette, CD-ROM, DVD, or the internet. They can be instructional in that they inform inmates about the language, they can be experiential in that they provide exposure to the language in use, they can be elicitive in that they stimulate language use, or they can be exploratory in that they seek discoveries about language use. Unfortunately the teaching material of the correctional institutions in Greece seems to integrate few traits of the above.

The results referring to the second objective which has to do with the suitability of the educators' teaching methods showed that the majority of the educators were not familiar with the *European Toolkit*, an innovative website initiated by the Council of Europe so that the member states of the European Union, organizations, and volunteers can be supported in providing language help to adult refugees. The toolkit is consisted of 57 tools and has been produced as part of the project "Linguistic Integration of Adult Migrants". The tools are free to public, available in PDF and Word format and they can be downloaded and adapted to different contexts in order to meet the needs of the refugees. The ultimate goal is the host country's language acquisition, in this case Greek. Tongues such as English, German, Greek, Italian, French, Dutch, and Turkish are the target languages of the website. Tools 1 to 13 provide information to the educators about the cultures of the refugees, whereas Tools 14 to 33 shed light to the various ways for a lesson design and planning. Valuable knowledge is diffused based on the refugees' urgent needs. Finally, tools 34 to 57 focus on language teaching and especially on situations that interest the refugees and the asylum seekers (infomigrants), such as filling in application forms, asking for clarifications, talking on the phone, making arrangements, etc.

Another interesting finding of the research is that almost all educators in the correctional institutions presented an astonishing low degree in the use of the "learning strategies" when teaching Greek as a foreign language. Actually, a lot of typologies have been proposed in order to classify learning strategies (Dörnyei, 2005; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1985; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1983). According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) they are divided into three major categories: (1) Cognitive strategies that operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning; (2) Metacognitive strategies which are higher order executive skills that may entail planning for monitoring, or evaluating the success of learning activity; and finally (3) Social/affective strategies which represent a broad grouping that involves either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect (Papanis, 2016). Various researchers have studied parameters related to choice of language learning strategies such as language being learned, language proficiency, degree of metacognitive awareness, often related to knowledge of more than one foreign language, gender, career orientation, motivation, personality traits, language teaching methods, etc. Oxford (1985) has identified strategies reported by students or observed in language learning situations that seem to contribute to learning. More recent studies (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Wenden, 1998) emphasized on the importance of metacognition in learning strategy use while some others (Oxford & Nyikos, 1989) focused on the relation between the strategy use and the gender, stating that the final strategy selection by males and females is closely related to their "cultural background and to the prevailing social conditions of the local community they live in". Moreover, some researchers (Halbach, 2000; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989) found that learners with a higher proficiency in a foreign language tend to use a higher number of strategies (especially metacognitive) every time they face linguistic difficulties in L2, compared to those with a lower proficiency in the foreign language, whose strategy use is relatively low. According to the authors of the paper, the fact that the educators did not resort to the learning strategies to some extent could be the reason for the many obstacles they encountered during their teaching procedure.

Another valuable aspect concerning the teaching methods that every single educator should embody in the educational process is the encouragement of the students to use “technology and the Internet” as a kind of a virtual library where—through coordinated visits in “authentic sources of information” such as newspapers, magazines, and brochures—the participant students could critically explore the Internet, evaluate the results of their search, assess and categorize them. In essence, this constitutes a new form of “electronic literacy”, which the new generation is undoubtedly more familiar with. The results of the study showed a very limited use of technology too—a rebuke that certainly should not be attributed only to the educators.

Finally, the employment of “new and innovative teaching techniques” when dealing with imprisoned refugee inmates is essential. Task based language teaching is a learner-centered approach that is focused on activities that require the use of authentic target language by the students in order to complete meaningful tasks. These tasks may be similar to situations of “real life”, such as making a phone call in Greek, visiting the doctor, buying clothes. Also, task-based teaching is not focused on grammar or vocabulary which the teacher may have already introduced to the students earlier, but the emphasis is given on the creative language use, spoken or written. So, the inmates realize that the language is a tool and it is used to solve real-world problems. This approach teaches important skills to the students. They learn how to ask questions, how to interact with others, and how to work within groups. Team work and cooperation can help the student to realize that there are different approaches to problem solving and that each one leads to thinking and making decisions in different ways. Moreover, the learners can acquire the appropriate skill and the linguistic component in order to accomplish the tasks of their real-world in the right socio-cultural context. It was evident after the completion of the interviews with the educators that this certain teaching approach was not particularly popular among them.

Conclusion

The 2nd Second Chance School of the Correctional Institution of Corfu operates during the last three years. Undoubtedly, both the educational personnel of the institution and the local society of Corfu support the Second Chance School. Based on the school Principal’s words “this kind of school is a chance for the society to show its humanity.” The majority of the imprisoned students are foreigners, they come from Arabic countries and Albania and they do not speak Greek. Undeniably, attending the second chance school in the correctional institution has many advantages such as the acquisition of the Greek language and the development of those skills that will enable them to be better reintegrated into the society.

Eight educators teaching at the 2nd Second Chance School in the Correctional Institution of Corfu participated in the research by being interviewed and 43 educators from other Second Chance School in Correctional Institutions in Greece by answering a questionnaire. The collected data highlighted important issues related to the educational material, the strategies that are used, the challenges that the educators face, and their needs in further education so that they could be more effective.

Regarding the educational material the educators did not possess a specific material to use in teaching the foreign inmates and they were not trained to teach the Greek language as a second/foreign language. The fact that the foreign inmates did not speak nor did they understand Greek constituted a remarkable burden which had to be overcome. Unfortunately, the foreign learners were treated as being native speakers of Greek, which made their learning quite cumbersome.

All in all, the educators mentioned that a Needs Analysis was important to them along with a “specially designed program adjusted to their students’ needs”. Finally, insufficient funding proved to be also a major

inhibiting factor towards success.

According to the authors, the combination of “experiential learning”, the use of multi-dimensional authentic material, the interaction among the students, and the detachment from a stereotypical source of information to a much wider range of innovative sources could greatly contribute to the design of an integrated and well- designed teaching syllabus, fully coherent with the actual learning needs of the inmates at the correctional institutions of Greece.

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