

THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN CYPRUS

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Abstract. This article has as a purpose to inform researchers as well as teachers for the educational system of Cyprus. More specifically, this paper aims to give a brief description of Cyprus' history and to inform about the structure of the Cyprus education system, emphasizing in primary education, the main characteristics of Cyprus education system, the Cypriot National Curriculum today and the teacher qualification in Cyprus. The current socio-political context in Cyprus is now quite different from that which prevailed in the 1980s and in the 1990s. Cyprus has become a member of the European Union, so many changes have occurred at the educational system of Cyprus. The Cyprus Education system is currently under reformation in every aspect of education making difficult to find and collect all the relevant information.

Keywords: educational system, curriculum, qualification of teacher

Background information on Cyprus

In order to clarify the educational system of Cyprus it's important to note a brief description of Cyprus' history which has significantly influenced the development of the leadership and management of the educational system. Cyprus is an island state (9,251 square kilometers) in the Eastern Mediterranean and has a population of approximately 804,435. In the last five centuries Cyprus was conquered by the Ottomans (1571-1870) and then passed to the British Empire. It achieved its independence from Britain in 1960, becoming the Republic of Cyprus. The country was divided in 1974 after the Turkish invasion of the northern part of the island and a settlement is still being sought. It is therefore undeniable that every part of life in Cyprus (economy, education system and the society) has been inevitably influenced by Cyprus' own history (Republic of Cyprus, 2010) and, as it is claimed, Cyprus educational system has been created by the impact of foreign societies and became the one we know nowadays (Papadakis, 2008; Trimikliniotis, 2004).

Purposes and goals of the Cyprus

A worldwide-*recognised* Government governs the non-occupied part of Cyprus; the Minister of Educational and Culture has the responsibility for the Education of Cypriots. The purposes and goals of the Cyprus Education system are included in

the Annual Reports and in the Analytical program the Ministry of Education and Culture is publishing.

Basic purpose of Cyprus education system is to create citizens who are complete, responsible and democratic, and who will have the potentials and the abilities to respond at the needs and demands of a modern and constantly changing world. At the same time they should be ready and capable to contribute with their motion and action in the political, financial and social progress of the Country and also of the wider European family, of which we are a vital member (Constantinou, 2005).

Within the more specific goals are to identify the right of people, who faces circumstances of poverty and social exclusion to live with dignity and fully participate in society, to increase the public participation in the political and social life, making noticeable the impact and the responsibility of all in fighting poverty and marginalization, increase social cohesion in order to be no doubt that society as a whole is not benefited by poverty.

As it is mentioned in the Report of the Committee for the Educational transformation one of the basic goal of it, is to create a democratic school which facilitates the social inclusion of all children against lacks from the system and social marginalization.

Meaning that the creation of a school, within which all the children can be educated, regardless of any particularity they might have, to be prepared for a common future, in which no child is excluded from gaining all the supplies necessary that will make it a educated citizen.

As it is underlined in the introduction of the new analytical programs “ensuring of equal participation of all children in education is a basic principle of the analytical program” because “every child” based on the United Nations agreement for the rights of children, “has the right to gain all those necessities that characterize an educated person of the 21st century” (Ministry of Education and culture, 2008, p.4.).

Therefore, the new analytical program is organized and applied focusing on the providence of effective prevention and elimination of negative consequences that commonly follow children with disabilities, challenging domestic environment, financial difficulties and different cultural backgrounds.

The above-mentioned purposes are coming to be full field by the development in Cyprus of a democratic and humanitarian school, within which no child is excluded, marginalized, stigmatized, despised and is unhappy due to a particularity. A school within which, a environment of mutual respect of the human dignity is dominating, and within which students have the right and the possibility not to live their childhood as a period of exhausting preparing for the adult life but to experience the most creative and happy periods of a human life.

One, equally important goal that was set for this school year is the development of a peaceful culture of peaceful cohabitant, mutual respect and collaboration of

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots with goal the elimination of the occupation and the reunion of Cyprus. Closing this reference of the goals of the Cyprus Education system, the ministry of Education and Culture (M.O.E.C), aims to be continued also next year the promotion of creativity and innovation. Thus, the Ministry of Education and Culture aims to enhance and promote creativity of teachers and students and introduce innovation in all levels of education. At the same time it aims to the growth of critical thinking and transforming students to individuals that will handle information effectively, to pursuers of knowledge and not passive and inactive receivers (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008).

Cyprus Educational System

The educational system of Cyprus is highly centralized. Centralization was adopted by Spyridakis from the very beginning (1960) because he believed that education could not be left entirely to local school committees whose viewpoint was “essentially narrow” and in order to “bring the hitherto disorganized education into definite shape”(Eleftheria, 1923). According to Trisokka (2008), “Ministry of Education and Culture is the policy making and administrative body of the Government for education” (p.38). To be more specific, the Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the administration of education, the enforcement of education Laws and in the preparation of education bills. It prescribes syllabuses, curricula and textbooks.

The construction, maintenance and provision of equipment of school buildings are the responsibility of School Boards under the supervision of the Technical Services of the Ministry of Education. The school Boards related to education have no say in purely educational matters and their members receive no remuneration. Each year they submit their budget for the next school year to the Ministry of Education and Culture for approval.

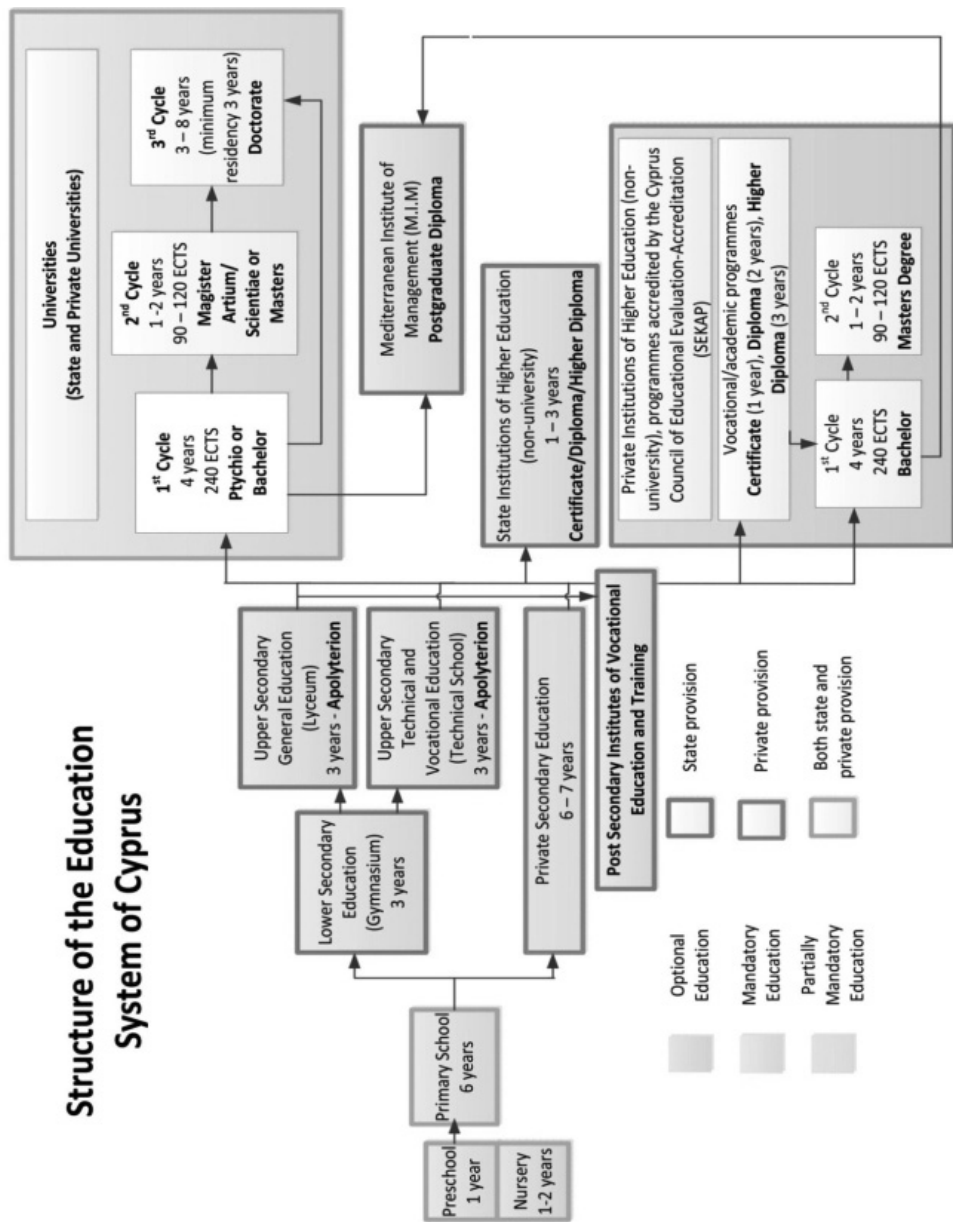
The Education Service Commission is a part of Ministry of Education and Culture, chosen by the President of the Republic and it is mainly responsible for the transfers, appointments and the promotions of all teachers among Cyprus (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2008).

According to Solsten (1991) the Cypriot education system is divided into the pre-primary and primary schools, secondary general and secondary technical/vocational schools, and special schools for the blind, deaf and other teachable handic

Pre-Primary Education

It is offered in Kindergartens for children age 3 – 5 8/12 under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The compulsory pre-primary years is considered part of basic education. There are also day nurseries under the Ministry of labour and Social Insurance mainly proving care and protection to children aged less than 3 years.

Structure of the Education System of Cyprus



Primary Education

Primary education in public schools is compulsory and caters for children who reach the age of 5 and 8 months, over a six-year period. There are no formal completion examinations, so readiness to proceed to secondary school is assessed by on-going evaluations throughout the learning period. A pupil cannot enter secondary school, however, without a leaving certificate which confirms completion of primary education.

The primary school year is divided into three trimesters, beginning in September and ending in June with two-week breaks at Christmas and Easter. The school day begins at 7.45 a.m. and ends at 1.05 p.m. on a five-day week timetable. Primary school subjects are compulsory. Teachers are provided with textbooks and advice on how to implement the national curriculum.

Secondary Education

It is pursued mainly at public schools, but there are also a few private schools. Secondary Education encompasses two stages. Stage one is offered in Gymnasiums, and stage two in the Lyceum and Technical/Vocational Schools. Attendance is open to all schools without any examinations, and since 1985/86 attendance at the first stage has been compulsory.

Stage one-Secondary General (Gymnasiums): Schools in this category are the Gymnasiums, which comprise the first three grades, and the emphasis is on general subjects and humanities.

Stage two: It encompasses two sub-categories:

1. The Lyceums: Schools in this category comprise the last three grades, and the emphasis is on specific subjects, specialisation begins in the first grade. In the previous years pupils had to choose one of the five main fields of specialisation e. g. Economics, Science. As from the school year 2000/01, the Unified Lyceum was introduced and pupils have to choose subjects instead of fields.

2. The Technical/Vocational schools: In these schools pupils choose subjects and not fields of study. Schools in this category aim at providing local industry with technicians and craftsmen. These schools accept pupils at the last three grades, beginning in the first grade. Each school has two departments, the technical and the vocational. The technical lays emphasis on theory and practice in science and technical knowledge and skills, while the vocational department provides training for craftsmen and various service trades.

Higher Education

Access to higher education is subject to the results of the entrance examination. Higher education institutions include public universities and tertiary-level

institutions offering professionally-oriented programmes, and a number of private tertiary education institutions. Professionally-oriented programmes lasting one to three years lead to the award of a certificate (one-year programme), a diploma (two-years programme) or a higher diploma (three-year programme). Universities offer undergraduate programmes in a variety of fields. The duration of programmes leading to the award of a bachelor's degree is normally four years, equivalent to 240 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System). Full-time master's degree programmes normally take one and a half to two years to complete (equivalent to 90-120 ECTS). The University of Cyprus also offers postgraduate programmes leading to a doctoral degree after three to eight years of study (usually four years), including research.

The school year is divided into two semesters (into three terms until 2009) and consists approximately 180 teaching days at the primary level and 161 teaching days at the lower secondary level; classes are held five days a week (Monday to Friday) from any day during the first ten days of September until 20 June in the case of primary education, any during the first ten days of June for lower secondary, and during the last ten days of May for upper secondary. The exact dates are defined every year by the Ministry of Education. (Eurydice, 2011). The academic year consists of thirty weeks, divided into two semesters (September-January and January-May).

More information about Primary Education

As mentioned, primary education covers grades 1 to 6 and the entry age is 5 years and 8 months. Primary education is compulsory and provided free of charge in public schools. Most of the larger schools in urban areas are divided into two cycles, namely Cycle A (grades 1 to 3) and Cycle B (grades 4 to 6). Generally, the same classroom teacher organizes the teaching and learning process in all subjects, although in large schools there are also subject teachers for physical education, art, music or other specialized subjects. There are no final examinations at the end of primary education. Upon successful completion of grade 6, pupils receive the primary school-leaving certificate.

As stated in the introduction to the national curriculum of 1996, the general objectives of primary education are to:

- Develop children's knowledge using modern technology to the greatest extent possible;

- Ensure children's emotional and psycho-motor development;

- Help children to successfully face problem of adaptation and other challenges in their school environment and in society;

- Promote the gradual socialization of children, their sense of national identity and culture and respect for other countries and cultures;

- Provide children with a positive attitude towards knowledge and human values;

- Develop appreciation for beauty, creativity and love for life;

- Develop a sense of respect and protection towards nature. (Eurydice, 2009).

The typical weekly lesson timetable in 2001 in schools with six or more teachers is shown below:

Primary education: weekly lesson timetable (2001)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Greek language	13	13	14	13	10	10
Mathematics	5	5	6	6	6	6
Social studies	5	5	6	6	6	6
Science	—	—	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Art education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Music	2	2	2	2	2	2
Foreign language (English)	—	—	—	2	2	2
Home economics/Design and technology	2	2	—	—	2	2
Free activities	—	—	—	—	1	1
Total weekly periods	31	31	34	35	35	35

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, 2001. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes. Social studies in Grades I-II include science, geography, history and religious education; in Grades III-VI, social studies include history, geography and religious education, all taught separately.

The weekly lesson timetable implemented since 2004 is presented in the tables below (schools with or more teachers, and schools with three to five teachers):

Cyprus Primary education: weekly lesson timetable

Schools operate in every town or village where there are more than 15 children. Area schools serve neighbouring communities with less than 15 pupils. In urban areas and in large rural schools there are single-grade classes, while in small communities multigrade classes are common. In 2005 the maximum size of a class was 30 pupils in all grades. By 2010/11, the maximum number of pupils per class is to be 25 in all grades, and 20 in multigrade classes.

All-day schools have been introduced to help improve the quality of education. In September 1999, the implementation of this new programme began in eight pilot schools on a voluntary basis; one year later it was implemented in 25 schools, and in 2008/09 it covered 116 schools. From October to May all-day schools offer to grade 4-6 pupils four additional period in the afternoon (up to 16:00 p.m.) four times a week. The morning session is devoted to the compulsory curriculum following the prescribed timetable. The afternoon programme includes four periods during which pupils can complete assigned homework, four periods for reinforcing learning and receiving individual help if necessary, and eight periods

Primary education: weekly lesson timetable (2004)

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Modern Greek language	14	14	14	13	10	10
Mathematics	7	7	7	6	6	6
Religious education	2	2	2	2	2	2
History	–	–	2	2	2	2
Geography	–	–	2	2	2	2
'Environmental studies'	3	3	–	–	–	–
Science	1	1	2	2	2	2
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Art education	2	2	2	2	2	2
Music	2	2	2	2	2	2
Foreign language (English)	–	–	–	2	2	2
Home economics/Design and technology	2	2	–	–	2	2
Free activities	–	–	–	–	1	1
Total weekly periods	35	35	35	35	35	35

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, 2004. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes.

Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, 2004 (see also Eurydice, 2009).
Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes. The timetable above applied to schools with six or more teachers.

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade								
	1	1-2	2	3	3-4	4	5	5-6	6
Modern Greek language	8.5		8.5	7.5		7.5	5.5		5.5
Mathematics	4		4	3		3	3		3
Religious education		1.5			1.5			1.5	
History				2		2	2		2
Geography					2			2	
Environmental studies		3							
Science					2			2	
Physical education		2			2			2	
Art education		1.5			1.5			1.5	
Music		1			1			1	
Foreign language (English)							1		1
Home economics/Design and technology		1						1	
Free activities								1	
Total weekly periods		35			35			35	

Source: Eurydice, 2009. Each teaching period lasts 40 minutes. The timetable above applies to schools with three to five teachers.

Cyprus Primary education: weekly lesson timetable

spent on subjects of interest such as English, computer studies, music, sports, art, design, and ICT. (Eurydice, 2009).

The Cyprus Statistical Service reports that in 2009/10 there were 370 primary schools, of which 341 were public and 29 in the private sector. The total enrolment was 54,522 pupils (including 26,534 girls), of whom 4,164 enrolled in private institutions. The number of full-time equivalent teachers was 4,754 and the pupil-teacher ratio was 11.5:1. The enrolment ratio for the age group 6-11 was estimated at 103.5%. During school year 2009/2010, there were also 11 special schools with 299 pupils enrolled (CSS, 2011).

Characteristics of the Cyprus Educational System

Cyprus, despite being a member of the European Union from the 1st of May 2004, has differences in the Education system that distinct the system from the education systems of the other countries of the Union. The greater characteristics of the Cyprus Education system is the centralization, the mandatory education up until Junior high school, free education and the influence by foreign education systems like they are presented below (Pasiardis,2004; Constantinou, 2005.)

Centralization

Centralization is the most important characteristic of the Cyprus Education system, and at the same time the bigger problem. Although Cyprus population equals the population of a large European city, a very bureaucratic system of management is applied for the control of the education system. Based on the centralized system, which is observed, there is no authority given to the schools and the country offices, but on the contrary they are all controlled by a central authority of which the supervisor is the Minister of Education and Culture. It is observed a fear on behalf of the headmasters to distribute responsibilities. The centralized structure of the system creates voids and promotes competitiveness while it stops the effective function of schools, undertaking responsibilities and introduction of innovative ideas.

Mandatory education

In Cyprus, education is mandatory from preschool to Junior High school. Primary education is mandatory from 1962, while from 1985 Junior High School education also became obligatory. In 2004, preschool education also was decided as mandatory. The Council of Ministers, is the principle in charge that decided the age of children entering education; all children when they reach the age of 4 years and 8 months start their preschool education, while the primary school education is mandatory to all children of age 5 years and 8 months. In total, mandatory education is 10 years (1 in preschool, 6 in primary school and 3 in Junior High School) (Constantinou ,2005).

Free Education

Public education (Preschool, Primary, Junior and High) is provided free by the state. The Government to achieve this invests large amounts of money for building schools, supply them and provide free education to all citizens. Also it supplies the budget for the salaries of teachers and the stationery supplies (Constantinou, 2005). During 2007, a 9,1% increase was noted in the public expenses for Education comparing to year 2006; from 1,017.8 million euros to 1,110 million euros. From the total of the public expenses, Primary education took the 26.7% while High school and Technical education 43.3% (Statistic services of the Republic of Cyprus, 2011).

Influencing from foreign educational Systems

With no doubt, the Cyprus education system is influenced, mostly of the education systems of Greece, Great Britain and the United States of America (U.S.A). These influences of these three education systems are obvious in the structure and management, in the analytical programs and also in the school books (Constantinou, 2005). During the British occupancy of the island (1878-1960) many of the characteristics of the structure and management of the British schools were adopted in Cyprus. Under the control of the Britain for this period of time were the education, the hiring, promotions and salaries of teachers and the structure of the analytical programs. One of the more important characteristics Cyprus adopted from the British was the centralized system, which was followed in all levels of Cyprus Education.

As Ioannides mentions, after the independence of Cyprus in 1960, a very close relationship was established between Cyprus and Greece in the education sector (Constantinou, 2005). This is shown from the schoolbooks of Primary and High School education which are at the larger amount of them Greek. Additionally most teacher studied in Greek Universities. It is also noted that the University professors of Cyprus, of private Universities of Cyprus and also inspectors of schools were educated in Greece, Great Britain or in the USA, as individuals that lead committees of the Ministry of Education and Culture in subjects that are relevant with the Analytical Program (Constantinou, 2005).

Cyprus Traditional Curriculum Today

The analytical programs for the schools of Greek Cypriot community are shared with similar of the other countries the providence for the preparation of young people with goal the energetic and creative participation in the social, political, cultural and financial life.

In contrast with other European cities that, by rule, after the Second World War developed in circumstances of peace, Cyprus undertook colonialism, guardian independence, coup, military invention, foreign occupancy and massive refugees.

It consists an accomplishment that through this difficult and dramatic circumstances Cyprus achieved big steps in sectors of Culture, Economy and

Social coherence, and it is distinguished today in Europe. At the same time the Greek Cypriot community is claiming the right and the possibility to live peacefully without restrictions in a united country.

In this special environment the new analytical programs are coming to establish the educational system that ensures for young people:

The active participation in work, politics, economy and culture.

The contribution if knowledge development

In living it their ancestors' land in circumstances of freedom, democracy, prosperity and social justice.

Education is accomplished in the spectrum of Greek civilization, like this was structured through the years and specifically with its impact with other civilizations. In this spectrum the children of Greek Cypriot community are enhanced to develop individually and with self-confidence their identity (national, religious, cultural) learning at the same time to respect the different characteristics of the identity of other communities in the Republic of Cyprus, and also of their classmates from other countries. For the children with different origin there is a providence to be able to develop all the aspects of their individuality.

Every child has the right to gain all those properties that will characterize him/her an educated person of the 21st century. The constitutional "obligation in education" implies the decision of society not to exclude any child from the successful demand in the right of education. The establishment of equal participation of all children in education is a basic principle of the analytical program.

For the fulfillment of this social promise to the new generation, the analytical program is organized and applied focusing the providence of effective prevention and extinction of negative consequences that often accompany children with disabilities, tough family environment, financial difficulties and different cultural background.

Starting point of this approach is respect of each individual and loyalty to human rights. The above-mentioned goals are aiming to fulfill the establishment in Cyprus of a democratic and humanitarian school.

In Cyprus each department at the Ministry of Education (i.e. primary, secondary, technical) has its own curriculum development unit even though recently there was an effort to create only one unit, which would be responsible for all levels of public education. In fact, this unit became a single operating entity as of 2002. The same curriculum is applied to all schools in Cyprus in both primary and secondary (national curriculum). At school level, there is no much flexibility for curriculum changes except when teachers take their own initiative to create papers and handouts for the enrichment of the education process. All modifications to the curriculum, if necessary, come as a direct result of policy decisions emanating from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

For each lesson there are specific books (students' books and teachers' books) which the Ministry of Education provides. Teachers' books include the time that

must be dedicated, the goals and the method that is suggested to be followed in each lesson. So teachers actually have no say either in topic or method.

School year 2010-2011 has been a year of preparation for the application of the new timetables and the gradual introduction of the new curricula in Primary Education in 2011-2012. Twenty-one committees with 53 academics and more than 400 educationists worked for about two years preparing the new curricula of compulsory education. Since August 2010, a Committee for Promoting the Introduction of the New Curricula has been working, and coordinating a web of 12 support teams, in order to provide: (a) the necessary guides, means and materials, and (b) quality in-service training and support to primary school teachers. Moreover, a small scale introduction of certain parts of the new curricula has been applied to some schools from March to May 2011, a process that involved 187 school teachers.

The main changes that applied in September 2011 in our primary schools were:

- Introduction of “Consolidation” as a separate school subject, in order to promote core

- knowledge acquisition and differentiation for all pupils.

- Increasing the second break from ten to fifteen minutes and decreasing the last period from forty to thirty-five minutes.

- Introduction of “Getting to know my World” (including “Getting to know my Country”,

- Geography and Gardening) as a subject starting from the first grade.

- Introduction of “Natural Sciences and Technology” as a subject in grades one to four.

- Introduction of “English” as a subject taught from the first grade, harmonizing our educational system to European Education recommendations and promoting multilingualism and intercultural understanding and acceptance.

- Introduction of “Life Education” in grades one to four, encouraging involvement in projects of Health Education, Environmental Education, Consumer Education, Traffic Education, and Intercultural Education.

- Introduction of “Life Education” (Health Education and Environmental Education) in grades five and six.

- Emphasis on the promotion of children’s language abilities throughout all school subjects.

Teacher qualification in Cyprus

In-service pre-primary teachers today might have graduated from the University of Cyprus or from the Pedagogical Academy of the Ministry of Education. They also might have studied at one of the recently qualified private universities of Cyprus or might have studied abroad mainly in Greece and Britain. This implies that in-service as well as pre-service teachers receive different kinds of training which can be difficult to identify. However, it is important to note that pre-primary and primary student teachers receive

more or less the same training during their studies.

The Ministry of Education and Culture gives great importance to the high-quality training and development of teachers, since it is a keystone to the quality of education and to the status of the profession. Primary school teachers receive an all-round pre-service education, as well as in-service training throughout their careers. The Pedagogical Institute, in cooperation with the Inspectorate, is responsible for the training provided to teachers and thus prepares a number of suitable seminars each year. Nevertheless, attending these seminars is not mandatory and therefore depends on the willingness of each teacher and not to the needs of the school. Headteachers receive in-service training for one year after they promoted to be able to respond to the needs of their more demanding position.

Teachers also receive training on intercultural education, through seminars and conferences, to respond to the changing socio-cultural environment and be able to transmit the values of tolerance, respect, understanding and equality to their students. Other training seminars prepared by the Pedagogical Institute to response to the new challenges faced by Primary Education include seminars on emotional education, the European dimension of education, teaching English, information technology in education, teaching Greek as a second language as well as on a variety of other subjects.

Conclusion

Cyprus education has specific characteristics that make it differ from the education in other countries of the European Union. For this reason, purpose of this article is to inform the readers for the educational system in Cyprus and not to judge it. However a critical article about the educational system of Cyprus would be necessary in order to point out any weaknesses of the system and will contribute to the educational reformation.

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