

## INTRODUCTION TO THE GREEK EDUCATION SYSTEM

### A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH OF EDUCATION IN GREECE

#### Basic characteristics of the current education system

Education is the constitutionally designated responsibility of the State and is provided free at all levels of the system from pre-school to university. A relatively small private school sector exists, but only State universities and institutions provide tertiary level education and grant degrees. The Greek education system is very centralised; both in terms of organisation and administration. With regard to schooling principles and practices, there is a national curriculum, uniform school timetables and approved textbooks that are compulsory in the private sector as well.

Before looking at the current education scene in detail, a brief outline of the significant reforms and structural changes which have marked Greek education in the post-war period, is presented below. The structure of the formal education system is also presented in Figure 2.1.

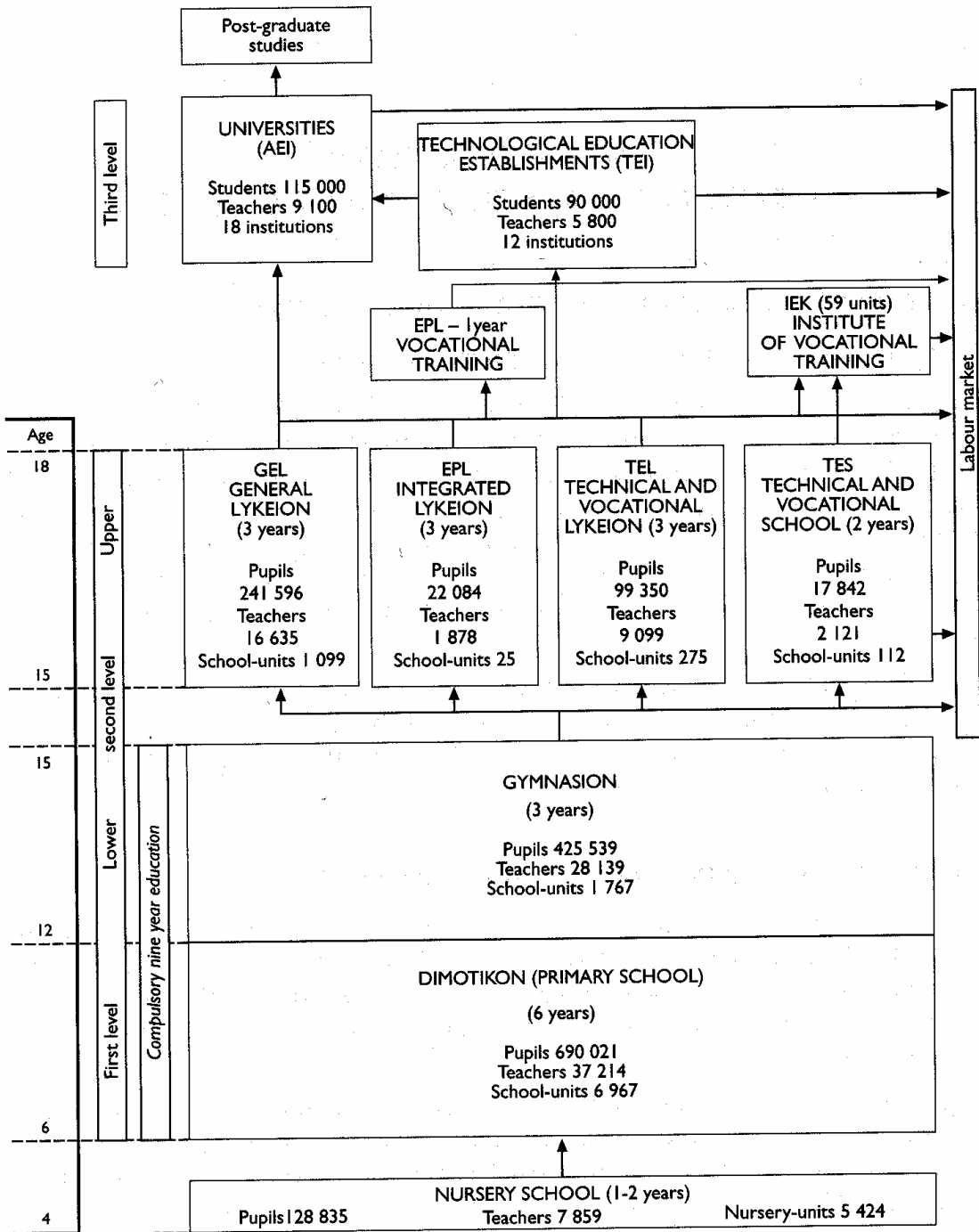
#### Developments during the latter half of this century

In the 1950s, the education system comprised a six-year compulsory primary school; a six-year secondary school or *Gymnasium* that had a profound humanistic orientation; and the tertiary level that included the universities and very few tertiary schools of general education, such as the Teacher Training and the Physical Education Academies.

Towards the end of the 1950s, as the emphasis on modernisation and planned economic development intensified, a comprehensive report on the state of education was drafted and several reforms legislated that sought to expand the technical-vocational sector of education.<sup>2</sup>

The secondary school level was divided into two three-year stages. The first three-grades constituted the lower stage and emphasised general and humanistic education. The upper stage was differentiated and divided into separate types of

◆ Figure 2.1. **Structure of the formal Greek education system**



Source: Greek Ministry of Education, DIPEE, Enrolments 1993-1994.

*Gymnasia*. The two major types were the Practical (scientific) and the Classical (literary), both of which were academic streams, primarily preparing students for university entrance. A parallel system of technical-vocational schools under the MoE was created, covering both upper and lower secondary stages.

The educational reforms of 1964 (a milestone reform but short-lived), further developed the above and extended the reform agenda to fundamental and comprehensive changes in the system that would promote educational equality and economic growth.<sup>3</sup> Free education was extended to the tertiary level, entrance examinations to secondary level were abolished, and basic changes were made in the examination system for university entrance, with a unified national examination system replacing separate examinations by department. The previous two stages of general secondary schooling, were transformed into two separate schools: the non-selective lower secondary Gymnasium – which exists today – and the upper secondary *Lyceum*. The new Lyceum comprised of practical and classical streams and it was no longer divided into distinct types of schools.

One of the most significant changes of this period (since it touched on one of the most acute and hotly contested issues of the century and therefore stirred great debate), was that “demotic” language (the popular form of Greek language), officially replaced the purist form of *katharevousa* as the medium of instruction. Another aspect of this curricular reform was that classical Greek literature was to be taught in modern translation in the lower secondary school and the systematic study of ancient Greek initiated at the Lyceum level.

With the advent of the military junta in 1967 nearly all these measures were withdrawn, with the language issue first on the agenda. During this period, legislation was also passed that set up a new tertiary level of technical-vocational education, that would, on the one hand, supply vitally needed upper-level technicians, and on the other, act as a breakwater against the continuously rising level of demand for university entrance. Five such centres (KATEE) had been established by 1974.

The year 1974 marks the return to democratic government. Educational legislation was enacted thereafter, which essentially restored most of the reforms of the 1964 period. During this period, secondary (general) and secondary (vocational) education was reorganised in order to promote greater parity of esteem between the two sectors. Specific measures included:

- the extension of compulsory education from six to nine years;
- the establishment of the lower secondary Gymnasium as the common school of general education (grades 7 to 9) which meant that:
  - lower-secondary vocational schools were abolished; and

- entrance examinations from primary to lower secondary level were also abolished;
- the re-organisation of post-compulsory secondary education (grades 10 to 12) into two equivalent streams or Lycea, the General Lyceum and the Technical-Vocational Lyceum. General Lyceum graduates could sit for entry examinations into all types of higher education institutes, whereas, Technical-Vocational Lyceum graduates could not compete for entry into the universities;
- the re-introduction of demotic language at all levels, and classics in modern translation, taught as part of the curriculum at the lower secondary school level.

From 1981, when the socialist government first came into power in Greece, reforms focused more on internal changes to the education system, aiming more on democratisation than on major structural issues. Salient changes in the system established during the 1980s were:

- automatic promotion throughout the primary education level;
- abandonment of entrance examinations from the lower secondary to the upper secondary school;
- postponement of stream selection to the final year of general lyceum (grade 12) where students now had four curricular areas to choose from rather than the two as was previously the case;
- at the upper-secondary level, a new type of comprehensive lyceum was established in 1984: the experimental *Eniaio Polykladiko Lykeio* (EPL), or Integrated Lyceum, which sought to bridge the gap between general and technical education. The EPL continues today to enrol a relatively small proportion of student population in spite of social demand and pressure;
- various measures to increase participation in school decision-making processes such as the establishment of student councils and the further development of the responsibilities of the teachers' councils. It should be noted however, that while Law 1566/85 made broad provision for decentralised decision-making, few of these measures were ever implemented through accompanying decrees.

During this period, priority was given to the reform of higher education. The KATEEs, which were exhibiting severe problems related to their rapid growth, were reorganised into their current form of Technological Education Institutions (TEIs); and for the first time, the universities became the object of reform in the comprehensive framework of Law 1268/82. This law sought to expand the basis of decision-making in the universities and to introduce new divisions such as graduate schools. During this period, education departments (for pre-school and primary level teach-

ers) were set up in the universities and the Teacher Training Academies were gradually phased out.

In this first half of the 1990s, a new system of post-secondary vocational training was established that emphasises flexibility and co-operation with the social partners. This system incorporates (subject to accreditation), the private Centres of Free Studies which had not previously been regulated. Both public and private Institutes of Vocational Training (IEKs: *Instituta Epagelmatikis Katartisis*), offer relatively short-term training courses and seek to provide a viable outlet to the thousands of lyceum graduates who do not enter tertiary education. Despite the shifts between emphases on equity or efficiency, a constant dilemma for policy-makers, throughout the whole of the period of this historical overview, has been how to respond to the high level of demand for higher education.

The 1990s, however, have brought to the fore-front another major concern for educational policy. The quality of education at all levels has become a critical issue and the object of continuous discussion. In the 1990s, moreover, fewer and more limited instances of reform and counter-reforms are implemented by successive governments (Kassotakis and Lambrakis-Paganos, 1993, p. 102), and there is greater consensus on defining the current problems of education (though priorities and approaches to their solution vary) such as: under-resourced schools within a general framework of financial constraints in the public sector; an over-burdened and often out-dated curriculum which places an emphasis on memorisation rather than critical-thinking; the number of teachers waiting for placement (often as long as ten years); a general lyceum which no longer functions as an independent and self-contained school, but has been transformed into a preparatory level, like a waiting vestibule, for the universities; the mushrooming of private cramming-schools and private lessons that prepare candidates for tertiary exams; and the increasing numbers of students delaying graduation, not to mention the high level of unemployment among those who do graduate. These issues and problems constitute a demanding agenda for today's policy-makers.

The following sections provide some background on the issues outlined above. The general education level of the population is looked at, as well as some of the quantitative dimensions of the growth of education during the last decades. Finally, Chapter 6 explores the distributive and equity aspects of the contemporary educational scene.

## **EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF THE POPULATION AND LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION**

Currently, over a tenth of the population aged 25 to 64 years holds a tertiary education degree; about a quarter are secondary school graduates; and around half are at least primary school graduates (Table 2.1). Those with no educational creden-

Table 2.1. **Educational attainment of the population aged 25 to 64 in 1991, by sex, and number of women per 100 men at each educational level**

Educational level	Total population		Men	Women	Women per 100 men
	Number (in thousands)	Percentage	Percentage		
Tertiary	663	12.5	15.0	10.0	69
Upper secondary	1 290	24.2	25.4	23.1	93
Lower secondary	367	6.9	7.7	6.1	81
Primary	2 311	43.4	42.3	44.5	108
Less than primary <sup>1</sup>	692	13.0	9.6	16.3	174

1. Includes the following categories: "Attended primary school", "No schooling but literate" and "No schooling and illiterate".

Source: Estimated from ESYE, 1991 Census (Unpublished Data: Population 10+ by Educational Level, Sex, Age and Area).

tials, that is, with less than primary schooling, constitute about the remaining tenth of the population.

More men than women hold tertiary education degrees (69 women for every 100 men), but the proportions are rather equal for other levels. The significant exception is the category, "less than primary schooling", where women far outnumber men (174 women for every 100 men); indeed, women comprise 63 per cent of this group with no educational credentials.<sup>4</sup>

Overall, however, the educational level of the general population has risen considerably in comparison with the period covered by the last country-review. The proportion of graduates of tertiary education has quadrupled from 1971, secondary education graduates have doubled, and the number with less than primary education has been significantly reduced, from 37 per cent in 1971 to 13 per cent in 1991.<sup>5</sup>

Illiteracy rates have also fallen sharply. Whereas in 1971, 14 per cent of the population over 10 years of age was illiterate, in 1991 the figure is 7 per cent. And while only 1 per cent of the under 45-year-olds designated themselves as illiterate in 1991; it should be noted that this translates to around 60 000 individuals.

Participants in the labour force constituted 56 per cent of the population aged 14 to 64 years in 1991 (Table 2.2). The rate for men was 78 per cent and for women, 35 per cent. Labour force participation for women peaks at 55 per cent for those 25 to 29 years of age in 1991.<sup>6</sup> Notably primary and secondary level teachers accounted for about 5.4 per cent of all working women.<sup>7</sup>

Official unemployment in 1991 stood at 8 per cent but was higher among women (Table 2.2) and highest among youths 15 to 19 years of age (33 per cent) and 20 to 24 years of age (23 per cent) (see note 4).

Table 2.2. **Participation rates in the labour force and unemployment for men and women aged 14+ to 64 in 1991**

Population	Economically active		Unemployed	
	Number (in thousands)	Percent	Number (in thousands)	Percent
Men	2 581	77.8 <sup>1</sup>	163	6.3 <sup>2</sup>
Women	1 217	35.2 <sup>1</sup>	147	12.1 <sup>2</sup>
Total	3 798	56.1	310	8.2

1. Ratio of economically active men or women to total population of men or women 14+ to 64 years of age.

2. Ratio of number of unemployed men or women to number of economically active men or women 14+ to 64 years of age.

Source: Estimated from ESYE, 1991 Census (Unpublished Data: Economically Active and Inactive Population by Sex, Age and Urbanisation).

## PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION

### Expansion of enrolments

The above improvement in the level of educational attainment of the population is related to the significant expansion of education during the last decades. In Table 2.3, the growth of education is charted over the period 1970 to 1994. The enrolment figures cover both public and private school enrolments. The proportion of private school students in 1992 was around 5 per cent for most levels of education (4 per cent pre-school, 7 per cent primary, 4 per cent for secondary general) but reached 16 per cent for upper secondary technical-vocational education.<sup>8</sup>

Table 2.3 shows that in the 1980s and 1990s, pre-school and primary school enrolments were shrinking. This negative trend has accelerated from 1989 to 1994, reflecting the continuously decreasing birth rate.

Secondary education, on the other hand, expanded consistently from 1970 to 1994. That trend seems to be slowing-down in the 1990s (4 per cent versus 14 per cent). Within public secondary education, lower-secondary enrolments have been rather stable, while upper-secondary enrolments grew at higher rates. More specifically, general secondary education has currently stabilised after initial growth from 1975 to 1985 while technical-vocational education continues to expand (see Table 2.4).

Higher education enrolments have grown and indicate the highest rates of all, especially during the 1980s. This trend however, does not simply reflect an expansion of entrants to higher education. Since 1984, there has been an increase in the number of registered students not making "normal progress", that is, passing semesters without delay (see MoE, 1994, Table 9). For example, of all registered students in the 1991-92 academic year, 56 per cent were making "normal progress"

Table 2.3. **Student enrolment (public and private schools), 1970 to 1994, and percentage change by level**

Level	Student enrolment			
	1970-71	1980-81	1989-90	1993-94
Pre-school <sup>1</sup>	87 087	145 924	141 576	134 332
Primary	919 984	900 641	846 498	744 542
Secondary	555 709	740 058	845 723	881 280
Tertiary <sup>2</sup>	85 776	121 116	267 587	<sup>3</sup>
All levels	1 648 556	1 907 739	2 101 384	-

Level	Percentage change		
	1980/70	1989/80	1993/89
Pre-school	67	-3	-5
Primary	-2	-6	-12
Secondary	33	14	4
Tertiary	41	121	-
All levels	16	10	-

1. Includes only Ministry of Education Pre-school Centres and not those under other authorities such as the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Thus the drop in pre-school enrolments is perhaps not as marked as shown in the table.
2. Refers to total number of students enrolled in tertiary education (registered) and not to number of active students only.
3. 1993-94 data is not available. However, in 1991-92 there were 294 134 students enrolled in tertiary education, see source (c). This represents an increase of 10 per cent from 1989-90.

## Sources:

- a) Figures for 1970 to 1989 are from Skouras-Varnava *et al.* (1993).
- b) For 1993-1994, from Table IV in ESYE (1994).
- c) Figures for tertiary education 1989 are from Ministry of Education (1994, pp. 68 and 81).

Table 2.4. **Participation rates in education by level and sex, 1989-90**

Level	Total number of students	Size age cohort <sup>1</sup>	Ratio of enrolments to age cohort		
			Total	Girls	Boys
Pre-primary	141 756	245 199	57.8	58.0	57.5
Primary	846 498	872 428	97.0	97.0	97.1
Secondary	845 723	911 465	92.7	90.7	94.6

1. Age cohorts 4-5 year-olds, 6-11 year-olds and 12-17 year-olds.

Sources: Estimated from Skouras-Varnava *et al.* (1993, p. 6) and from ESYE, 1991 Census (Unpublished Data: Population by Age and Sex).



Table 2.5. **Student enrolment and teaching force for public secondary education from 1970 to 1994**

Type	1970-71		1975-76		1980-81		1985-86	
	Pupils	Teachers	Pupils	Teachers	Pupils	Teachers	Pupils	Teachers
(in thousands)								
General	396.9	11.4	486.7	17.2	612.8	30.9	677.4	37.0
• Gymnasia					413.8	19.2	413.3	21.6
• General Lycea					199.0	11.6	264.1 <sup>1</sup>	15.5
Tech.-Vocational	39.7	1.0	71.8	2.5	81.9	3.9	98.3	7.8
Type	1990-91		1993-94		% change 85/75		% change 93/85	
	Pupils	Teachers	Pupils	Teachers	Pupils	Teachers	Pupils	Teachers
(in thousands)					(in percentage)			
General	686.2	46.7	689.2	46.7	39.2	115.5	1.7	26.0
• Gymnasia	424.7	27.0	425.5	28.1			2.9	30.6
• General Lycea	261.5 <sup>1</sup>	19.7	263.7 <sup>1</sup>	18.5			-0.1	19.7
Tech.-Vocational	98.1	9.9	136.0	9.9	36.8	212.6	38.3	27.0

1. Figures for General Lycea include enrolment at Comprehensive Lycea.

Source: Ministry of Education (1994, Tables 5 to 7).

toward their degrees (*op. cit.*, p. 50). Thus, the picture of expanding tertiary enrolment in the 1980s is somewhat misleading since it is obvious that a greater number of tertiary students are delaying graduation. A variety of institutional factors may be responsible for this delay. However, the "warehousing effect" (Walters, 1986) – with youths remaining in school or university when their unemployment chances are high – seems to be obvious.

### Participation rates

Youngsters attending public kindergartens (that is, those supervised by the MoE) constituted 57.8 per cent of the population of 4 and 5-year-olds in the 1989-90 school year. Primary school participation rates stood at 97 per cent for 6 to 11-year-olds; while secondary school enrolment figures represented 93 per cent of 12 to 17-year-olds (Table 2.5).

Participation rates for boys and girls are equal at pre-school and primary levels. At the secondary level, however, the participation rate is 95 per cent for boys and 91 per cent for girls. Participation rates at the secondary level might actually be somewhat lower since repeaters, who would be older than 17, are included in the

enrolment figures.<sup>9</sup> (Repeaters' rates at primary level are extremely low and would not effect the estimates.)

At the tertiary education level, the proportion of new entrants (42 187) to the 18-year-old age cohort was 28.1 per cent in 1992, while tertiary enrolment figures accounted for 47.4 per cent of the 18 to 21-year-old-age cohort.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it seems that, overall, Greece currently has quite high participation rates at all levels of education and that these rates are more or less equal between boys and girls. However, the exact dimensions of the situation are clouded by the nature of the data which *i)* does not identify repeaters within secondary education; and *ii)* refers to the national level, so that differences in regional participation rates are not evident. Chapter 6 looks at such differences by examining equity aspects of the distribution of educational opportunities in Greece.