

**The Evolution in Greek English Language Teaching Curriculum Philosophy: The Comparison of the 1977 Official Curriculum and the 2010 Common Framework for Foreign Languages**

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**Abstract:** The specific article presents the realization that curricula, as the practical expression of education (Richards, 2001), get affected by various determinants (Ayakli, Karavas, Manolopoulou-Serg & Spinthourakis, 2004). More specifically, it seems that not only the methodological developments in Language Teaching (LT) but also the social, economic and political circumstances can deeply affect the way foreign languages are taught in the state school classrooms. The comparative analysis of the 1977 Analytic Program (AP) and the 2010 Common Framework for Foreign Languages (CFFL) in Greece attempts to highlight the ideological, methodological and social changes that occurred within the thirty-three years that separate these curricula, proving that education and evolution are interrelated term.

**Keywords:** 1977 Language Teaching Official Curriculum, 2010 Common Framework for Foreign Languages (CFFL), sociopolitical-methodological comparison

## **Introduction**

English, as an international means of communication, has traditionally played a significant role in the Greek society. It is indicative that 96.9% of all state school students both in primary and in secondary education learn English as a second language, also attending afternoon classes in private institutions and private lessons (Sifakis, 2009). It must be also stressed that currently English is taught from the 1st year of primary school until the 3rd year of high school, obviously throughout their student life. Moreover, in Junior High School the students are divided in Advanced and Beginner levels, depending on placement tests conducted at the beginning of each school year (Sifakis & Sougari, 2016). Nevertheless, the status of the instruction of English in state schools is apparently lower than in the private sector, as it is taught in a “TENOR situation”, without having thus a specific academic goal. Furthermore, English state school teachers are considered inferior to their colleagues teaching for instance Math or Science in the public context (Sifakis, 2009). Last but not least, the Greek Ministry of Education has minimized the teaching hours from 2 to one to the 1st and 2nd Primary classes and from 3 to 2 in the 1st classes of Junior High School and High School.

Despite the obvious difficulties, there have been at times some systemic attempts to enhance the teaching and the syllabus of English in the public sector. The publication of the “Magic Book”, as the new innovative textbook of the 3rd Grade of Primary School and the Pro-

gramme of Teaching English in a very Young Age launched by the English Faculty of the National and Capodistrian University of English are indicative of this tendency. The presentation of the CFFL by the Greek Pedagogical Institution is considered a useful tool in the disposal of Greek English state school teachers.

The specific article presents thus at the comparative analysis of two official curricula concerning the instruction of English in the state educational system<sup>1</sup>. As the space limitations of the paper do not permit an in-depth and thorough presentation of their differences in scope and philosophy, the writer decided to focus on their ideological and methodological orientation and on topics related to teacher roles and needs analysis.

## 1. Conceptualizing the theory of curriculum

A quick look at the bibliography proves that there is no universally agreed definition of curriculum. From a semantic point view, the word curriculum derives from the Latin word *currere*, which means run. As implied by its origin, the word refers to the specific track or path that needs to be taken, as far as learning is concerned (Ayakli, et. al., 2004).

In its very sense, curriculum is a multidimensional term with several meanings. According to Kelly (2009: 7) “*it can be and is used for many different kinds of programme of teaching and instruction*”. This viewpoint assigns a practical dimension to the word and seems to be in accordance with White’s definition (1988) which presents the curriculum as a plan of action and a written document, including strategies for the achievement of desired targets. Similarly, Eisner and Wallace conceptualize curriculum with the official attempt to present what should be taught, to whom, when and how (1974: 2).

Nevertheless, curriculum should not be treated in such a limited scope, defining only the purposes, the content and the objectives of instruction. Kelly (2009: 8) offers an extremely detailed definition, covering a range of educational, personal, social and political aspects. For the specific researcher “*an educational curriculum at all levels should be concerned to provide a liberating experience by focusing on such things as the promotion of freedom and independence of thought, of social and political empowerment, of respect of the freedom of others, of an acceptance of variety of opinion and of the enrichment of the life of every individual in that society, regardless of class, race or creed*”. Obviously, as it will be shown in the specific article the notion of curriculum is not only linked to educational matters but also to the sociopolitical and economic circumstances of each society.

According to Tyler (1949) curriculum development is a complex procedure that necessitates careful planning. The specific educational proposed four basic questions that should be taken into consideration by curriculum designers:

1. What education related purposes should the school seek to accomplish?

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<sup>1</sup>Examples from the official documents concerning each finding will be provided as footnotes. As both the curricula are in Greek the writer of the article tried to translate them into English as precisely as possible.

2. What education related experiences can be offered that can possibly accomplish these experiences?
3. How can we effectively organize the specific education related experiences?
4. How can stakeholders determine whether these goals have been accomplished?

It must be also stressed that curricula take on different forms. First of all, there is the official or planned curriculum that presents the written form of the official educational policy of each state. On the other hand, no one can ignore the existence of the received curriculum which highlights what students learn by taking into consideration their experiences. This duality underpins the gap between theory and practice and between teachers and the other stakeholders (Kelly, 2009). Accordingly, it is very important to recognize the distinction between formal curriculum and informal curriculum. The first incorporates all the formal activities that take place in schools during allocated teaching periods, while the second describes all the extracurricular activities that usually happen outside the school walls.

The notion of the hidden curriculum is extremely when trying to comprehend what a curriculum actually is. Undoubtedly, learners do not only gain knowledge which is overtly stated and included in the official material. Pupils also learn through the way the educational setting of the school is organized and planned. To be more specific, expected social roles and gender identities are acquired in this way, through socialization and collaboration within schools (Kelly, 2009).

Taking into consideration that human knowledge is a social construct, it is thus plausible to talk about the politics of knowledge. According to Harris (1979), education should be perceived as a political act, aiming at the protection of the rights of the ruling class. What is more, it presents itself as the mechanism that ensures the continuation of societal relationships by reinforcing the accepted social beliefs and attitudes. In the researchers own words (1979: 140-1) “*it is an ideological force of tremendous import*” and “*the manipulation of consciousness*”. In this respect, the curriculum serves as the practical revelation of this sociopolitical aspect of education (Kelly, 2009).

## **2. The ideological orientation of the two curricula**

Curricula are not bureaucratic statements but documents which aid Teachers move away from the intuitive approach (Davies, 2006) and reflect specific philosophical beliefs about the nature and purpose of education (Clark, 1987). They usually echo the values, the ideals and the philosophy of each society, realizing White’s claim (1988: 24) that “*teaching programmes must reflect the assumptions and beliefs of those engaged*”. The value system of Classical Humanism as presented in the 1977 AP and the blended orientation of the CFFL demonstrate two contradictory viewpoints concerning the aims and objectives of foreign languages in Greek public classrooms.

## 2.1. The value systems of the 1977 Analytic Program

The choice of Classical Humanism as the ideological core of the 1977 AP can be justified by the sociopolitical circumstances of the specific period. Greece in the aftermath of a seven-year dictatorship is in need of an educational system transmitting an “*esteemed cultural heritage*” (White, 1988:24). The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) helps students gather knowledge<sup>2</sup> and promote their critical faculties (Clark, 1987). This emphasis on content presented through a lockstep teaching model aims at creating “*an elite of guardians to govern the state*”<sup>3</sup> (Clark, 1987: 17). Moreover, the curriculum’s teacher-proof character (Doyle& Ponder, 1977) and its teacher centeredness<sup>4</sup> demonstrate that the system is in complete control. Finally, a hint of Reconstructionism is evident since there seems to be a need for social unity.

## 2.2. The value systems of the 2010 Common Framework for Foreign Languages

The CFFL has a blended ideological basis echoing values inherent in Progressivism, Cultural Pluralism and Social Reconstructionism. Obviously, it is a learner centered and homogeneous document promoting self-awareness, reflection and experience<sup>5</sup> (Richards, 2001). In this learning to learn environment (Clark, 1987) teaching becomes individualized since students can achieve personal and professional self-realization<sup>6</sup> (White,1988) categorized in different competence levels<sup>7</sup>.

From the pluralistic perspective, CFFL complies with the multicultural character of the Greek society by enhancing learners’ cross-cultural competency (Richards, 2001). It sets the framework for foreign languages instruction in public schools in an attempt to promote multilingualism<sup>8</sup> within the European Union and stresses the importance of recognizing cultural differences (Richards, 2001). “*Tolerance, the acceptance of diversity should be encouraged*”<sup>9</sup> (Morris, 1995:10) in Greek classrooms to achieve social enculturation and conscience collec-

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<sup>2</sup>The ultimate prospect of teaching is to offer all the essential elements leading to the fulfillment of students’ awareness of English (AP, 1977: 2520)

<sup>3</sup>The existence of the term “αγγλομαθεια» (AP, 1977: 2520) which can be freely translated as “anglolearning” is indicative of this reality.

<sup>4</sup>The teacher can systematically and effectively teach new grammatical and syntactic phenomena (AP, 1977: 2521).

<sup>5</sup>The CFFL describes what the learner should know during his/her exposure to the learning procedure and not what experts claim he should know (CFFL, 2010: 8).

<sup>6</sup>“Multilingual people can take advantage of the educational, professional and economic opportunities provided by the European Union” (CFFL, 2010:2).

<sup>7</sup>“It underpins the teaching hours that are necessary for each student in order to reach the knowledge level” (CFFL, 2010: 4).

<sup>8</sup>“Multilingualism is both an advantage for Europe and a common commitment, as it promotes solidarity and prosperity” (CFFL, 2010: 5).

<sup>9</sup>Recognizing cultural diversity as an important element of LT instruction is important for the promotion of mutual understanding and true communication among people with different cultural backgrounds (CFFL, 2010: 19).

tive<sup>10</sup> (Sunier, 2009) using language as social behavior<sup>11</sup> (Kelly, 1969). Schools realize social reconstructionism facilitating learners’ empowerment (Richards, 2001) and helping them change their lives (Auerbach, 1992) as “*mobile Europeans of the future*” (Seedhouse, 1995:61).

### 3. The language theories reflected in the two curricula

As already outlined, the 1977 AP and the 2010 CFFL exemplify two contrasting ideologies concerning the nature of formal education and its desirable goals. Accordingly, the two curricula promote differing language theories affecting various aspects, ranging from the teaching procedure and the learning environment to the materials and the linguistic choices made in the classroom.

#### 3.1. The Behavioristic character of the 1977 Analytic Program

A “Skinnerian” attitude towards learning is apparent throughout the document. Being structurally and linguistically-oriented, the AP acknowledges habit formation and performance automaticity<sup>12</sup> as the goal of instruction, through a meticulous emphasis on vocabulary, grammar, syntax and pronunciation. The application of Skinner’s operant conditioning (1957) transforms the classroom into a teacher-centered environment utilizing transmission teaching (Richardson, 2003) to modify learners’ behavior and lead them to accuracy. To this end, the Teachers are advised to use memorization<sup>13</sup>, copy<sup>14</sup> and mechanical repetition techniques to reinforce students’ correct linguistic habits<sup>15</sup> (Richards, 2001), despite the fact that these techniques “*make no pretence of real communication*” (Brooks, 1960:146). Working within the Audio lingual and grammar-translation frameworks, instructors focus solely on form and its controlled practice ignoring Swain’s Comprehensible Output Theory (1985). Lastly, both grammar and vocabulary follow the simplicity-centrality-intrinsic difficulty sequence (Richards, 2001) as instruction revolves around the most simple, frequent and useful aspects of English<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The CFFL treats the learner as a social subject who must utilize language in order to understand and be understood by other social subjects (CFFL, 2010: 18).

<sup>11</sup> Learners should be able to linguistically act successfully in different social environments and situations (CFFL, 2010: 8).

<sup>12</sup> The systematic practice in pronunciation is necessary as it was in the first Grade (AP, 1977: 2520).

<sup>13</sup> Memorizing short poems can be useful (AP, 1977: 2520)

<sup>14</sup> Students should copy certain extracts in a special notebook (AP, 1977: 2520)

<sup>15</sup> It is important to perform systematic phonological exercises in order to help students’ vocal organs get used to correct pronunciation of the English language (AP, 1977: 2520)

<sup>16</sup> The AP advises the instruction of the most common and the most useful grammatical (Present Simple, Present Continuous, Imperative etc) and lexical items (words for daily use) (AP, 1977: 2520).

### 3.2. The Communicative philosophy of the 2010 Common Framework for Foreign Languages

Following Brumfit’s advice (1984), the CFFL displays the transition from an accuracy-dominated era to a fluency-oriented reality, placing meaning at the core of the learning procedure (White, 1988). In this communicative and learner-centered curriculum, learning goes beyond formal education<sup>17</sup> (Ayakli et al.,2004) as teachers are expected to aid students learn how to learn to use language for real life situations<sup>18</sup>. In a classroom that is “*a real world*” (Clark,1987) learners can share personal experiences and engage in simulations, recognizing Bruner’s emphasis on experience as a factor for personal growth (1960). Importantly, they use their top-down processing and their schemata to participate in the teacher-learners’ interaction. The “doing things for or doing things with the learners” philosophy (White, 1988) reveals an adherence to Bruner’s discovery technique (1960) and presents the importance of internet-based learning<sup>19</sup>. Lastly, the introduction of competence levels and the notional-functional structure of the document initiates a new era<sup>20</sup> during which learners need to realize through metacognition that all languages express common messages that they can utter even before mastering all their linguistic aspects (Harrison & Menzies, 1986).

### 4. The linguistic areas and the various skills reflected in the two documents

The two different systems represented in the two curricula affect not only the teaching methodologies but also the emphasis placed on linguistic areas and the skills they promote.

The Classical Humanistic curriculum focuses exclusively on EFL in specific classes and sees “*the purpose of English teaching as self-evident*” (Richards, 2001:112). Its goal is to develop the correct knowledge of English without specifying how, when and where learners will apply this knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Since learners are not expected to use the language “*beyond the confines of the classroom*” (Cunningsworth, 1983:149) and they are treated as a “*homogeneous bunch*”(Young, 2000), as the AP makes no reference to the existence of various linguistic levels within the same state school classroom. Obviously, in this teaching and learning context, English is taught with no obvious reason (Ayakli et al.,2004). Moreover, the linguistic competency is prioritized through tasks aiming at accuracy (copy, dictation, reading). Nevertheless,

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<sup>17</sup> By knowing the language and the way it categorizes and creates reality, learners come into contact with a new way of perceiving the world (CFFL, 2010: 18).

<sup>18</sup> The purpose of the CFFL is to connect the foreign language with all the knowledge and the skills that learners use in order to communicate effectively in modern social environments (CFFL, 2010: 18).

<sup>19</sup>The classroom should be equipped with computers and internet connection (CFFL, 2010: 21).

<sup>20</sup>The CFFL is structured on competence levels (A1-C2) that define what each learner can do in order to be competent in every linguistic level (CFFL, 2010: 13).

<sup>21</sup>The purpose of teaching English is to provide the basic linguistic, phonological, structural and useful lexical elements (AP, 1977: 2520)



“*learning grammar without producing meaning-focused output*”<sup>22</sup> (Cotteral, 2000) does not assure proficiency.

As a competency-based program (Richards,2001), the CFFL prepares learners for the “*unpredictability of languages outside classrooms*” (Widdowson,1983). Moving away from skills-based approaches, it utilizes mediation<sup>23</sup> as a way of recognizing the importance of the mother tongue in the acquisition of the target language<sup>24</sup> (Swan, 1985b) and the subconscious transference of linguistic strategies from it. Furthermore, Munby’s taxonomies of language skills (1978) are prevalent in the document to describe the creation of multiple literacies<sup>25</sup> for effective communication (Calfoglou& Sifakis,2004). As languages are viewed as “communication weapons” and not as sets of rules, language teaching transforms from an abstract notion to a tangible reality.

## 5. The Teacher roles presented in the two documents

The position of teachers in the instructional procedure and their roles are perceived differently in the two curricula. On the one hand, the 1977 AP bestows significant authority on the teachers who “function” as transmitters of knowledge and depositors of linguistic forms<sup>26</sup>(Freire, 1975). Within this restrictive environment, teachers become mere consumers and users of materials (White, 1988) which do not usually consider the needs of learners. Unavoidably, close curricula also view instructors as “*technicians*”<sup>27</sup> *working on a plan*” (White,1988:30).

On the other hand, communicative classrooms are “*conceived as social space*” (Widdowson, 1987) in which teachers become facilitators and guides aiding learners’ acquisition (Breen & Candlin,2002). They are also organizers of content, monitors and feedback providers building students’ competencies and supervising their progress (Harmer,1998) let alone humanistic healers (Hatzigeorgiou,2001) providing emotional security.

## 6. Situational analysis and needs analysis in the curricula

The successful implementation of a curriculum depends on factors to be found both within

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<sup>22</sup> Despite the fact that the 1977 AP advises the utilization of Situational Teaching as a preferable teaching technique (AP, 1977: 2520), nevertheless its overall philosophy of mere memorization and endless repetition disconnects language from its communicative context.

<sup>23</sup>Mediation is a daily social practice which can successfully ensure the participation of speakers in the new multicultural and multilingual societies (CFFL, 2010: 19).

<sup>24</sup>Mediation doesn’t imply the direct transference of information from one language to another. It means “judge” and “interpret” meanings from one language to another with the use of a foreign linguistic code (CFFL, 2010: 19).

<sup>25</sup> The development of multiple literacies is directly connected to the ability to make multiple connections to real world communicative skills

<sup>26</sup>The phrase “students will be taught” is consistent throughout the 1977 AP (pp. 2520-2521).

<sup>27</sup>The teacher can systematically and effectively teach new grammatical and syntactic phenomena (AP, 1977: 2521).

and outside the classroom. Obviously, the consideration of both the teaching and learning environment (Situational Model- Skilbeck, 1976 · Lawton,1983) and the specific needs of learners (Brindley,1989) is extremely important in curriculum design. Nevertheless, the 1977 AP views learning as isolated from its immediate surroundings and the students. The existence of some vague expressions may be hinting though some progress towards more ‘situational-oriented” curricula. In contrast, the external and internal factors affecting curricula (Ayakli et al.,2004) are presented in detail in the CFFL introductory section. The social circumstances, the parental expectations, the economic situation as well as students’ attitudes, recourses availability and teacher-related issues are all given equal attention<sup>28</sup>. It must be stressed that CFFL recognize the “*predominantly utilitarian and materialist*” (Prodomou, 1988: 74), that both parents and students assign to the acquisition of English. Beyond any doubt the majority of the Greek people view English as an essential qualification for professional development and social recognition and for that reason students are obliged to learn it by any means (Dimtrakopoulou, 2017). Nevertheless, the CFFL does not accept the common view that “*equity between English and other foreign languages is far from reality*”, as it is a common framework for reference for all the languages taught in Greek state schools.

## 7. The overall sociopolitical dimension of the two official documents

From a sociopolitical view, the 1977 AP and the CFFL are two extremely distant official documents, reflecting the contemporary social, political and economic reality.

To begin with, the 1977 AP demonstrates the official tendency to re-conceptualize the educational system in the aftermath of the seven-year military dictatorship. The AP is not a document focusing solely on the instruction of foreign languages<sup>29</sup>. It is a general curriculum that includes all the subjects taught at the time in the Greek state schools. Its twenty-three pages comprise a presentation on not only what but also how should teachers work at schools. It may seem to teacher-centered at first, but given the general upheaval caused by the dictatorship and the attempt to overcome this black page in the Greek history, this can be easily explained.

As far as the linguistic aspect is concerned the 1977 AP clearly follows a behaviorist model of teaching, the dominant educational approach for that period. Some hints of Situational teaching notions can be seen both as an attempt to modernize the teaching of English in the state classroom and as a genuine concern to connect the classroom to the real world, the Greek society that has suffered a lot. Last but not least, the 1977 curriculum makes no reference to the different linguistic level existing in the same classroom and seems to ignore the various learning styles of students. This can be explained by the fact that these theories were made widely

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<sup>28</sup>These matters are thoroughly covered in a chapter entitled the socio-economic dimensions of foreign education (CFFF, 2010, 5-7).

<sup>29</sup>Apart from English, which is considered to be the first and the basic foreign language, Greek students are also taught French, German and in few schools Italian and Spanish.



known and applicable some twenty years after the publication of the specific document. Of course, there is no mention to the need to promote multicultural awareness as the Greek society was solidly homogenous back then.

On the other hand, the 2010 CFFL is an extremely progressive document focusing on the instruction of all the foreign languages in the Greek state school. It is a communicative handout that recognizes the social aspect and potential of foreign languages. The teacher is not a mere transmitter of language but a counselor and guide, a supporter and a facilitator. This is in accordance with the general Greek belief that schools should prepare the citizens of tomorrow. What is important though, is that the CFFL practically takes advantage of the current educational trends that emphasize learners’ style and thus the necessity for needs analysis and the existence of various linguistic levels. Finally, the CFFL seems to be socio-politically updated as it recognizes the current intercultural identity of the Greek society and the specific variables that determine the instruction of foreign languages in the Greek schools (the existence of private institutions, the connection of knowledge to official certificates, etc.)

## 8. Conclusion

To conclude, the multidimensional analysis of the 1977 AP for EFL and the 2010 CFFL proves that the Greek curriculum philosophy has altered radically towards the creation of more learner-amiable classrooms. Nevertheless, each step that is taken forward in our understanding of foreign language teaching should not discard previous methodological perceptions as “old hats” (Young, 2000). The good language instructors acknowledge the importance of combining differing methods to suit their learners’ needs even if these techniques are considered old-fashioned (Young,2000). To this end, the introduction of the notion of evaluation by the CFFL can become a powerful utensil at the hands of language teachers who should be given the opportunity to reflect critically on educational material, their personal performance and on the curriculum as a whole.

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