

# Investigating implications for future perspectives: A comparative case study of the status of Modern Greek in South Australian schools

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This paper is part of an ongoing study that explores the status of Modern Greek education in South Australia. The study focuses on 6 South Australian Schools from three sectors of education, namely private, public and ethnic schools. A case study design was utilised for this investigation with particular emphasis given to exploring the historical evolution and the community support for Modern Greek education. The study likewise explored the perspectives of students and other key stakeholders with regards to the benefits of Modern Greek language education and Modern Greek language maintenance. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with people who are directly and indirectly involved with Modern Greek education and learning in South Australia. This included teachers, principals of schools, community leaders as well as students, in order to ascertain their perspectives. This inquiry into the status of Modern Greek education in South Australia will provide informative input for community groups, parents, government bodies and schools and, importantly, possibly assist with the development of interventions that benefit the future of Modern Greek study programs in South Australian schools.

## Introduction

In the past few years, in South Australia, there has been a noticeable drop in students undertaking Modern Greek at the secondary level and also a significant decrease in teachers becoming teachers of Modern Greek (Psaromatis, 2008:7-8). Other identified problems include the discontinuance of Modern Greek programs in some schools and the minimal levels of Modern Greek competency of current teachers of Modern Greek (Psaromatis, 2008:7-8).

The purpose of this study was to identify and investigate the status and state of Modern Greek teaching in South Australian schools. Importantly the study has endeavoured

to produce findings which will inform future recommendations seeking to improve certain problems in relation to Modern Greek education in South Australia. For this reason, research inquiries were conducted in 6 schools from the three main sectors of education: private, public and ethnic schools.

## **Current teacher qualifications**

At primary and secondary levels in both private and public sectors, it is a prerequisite that all teachers must have a Diploma or Bachelor of Education/Teaching from an accredited tertiary institution in Australia. Therefore all Greek teachers in these sectors have the above qualification.

From the 28 teachers surveyed, 32.14% of Modern Greek teachers in the public sector had studied Modern Greek at tertiary level as either a major or minor in their undergraduate degree, whilst 21.42% had completed a Diploma in Language teaching or its equivalent. 3.57% had Modern Greek language qualifications from Greece and Cyprus, 7.14% had completed an interpreting course and 35.71% had not undertaken any formal tertiary education in Modern Greek but were from a Greek background and had an education degree with specialisations in subject areas other than Modern Greek studies.

From the 8 teachers in the private sector who were surveyed, 50% of Modern Greek teachers had studied Modern Greek as either a major or minor in their undergraduate degree, whilst 25% had completed a Diploma in Language teaching or its equivalent and 12.5% had language qualifications from Greece and Cyprus.

There were three main groups of teachers in the Ethnic Schools system. The first group, the majority, numbering 55, was comprised of teachers with no formal teaching or Modern Greek tertiary training. These people, however, felt that they were competent in Modern Greek, having completed studies of the language at secondary level, either in South Australia or in Greece. Another group included 18 qualified Modern Greek teachers who taught in either the public/private day schools or worked as part time teachers in the Ethnic Schools system. Another category of teachers, numbering 14, were those trained in subjects other than Modern Greek but who, through their interest and love for the Greek language and culture, also taught at these schools. It is important to point out, that all ethnic school teachers who do not have tertiary teaching qualifications have to attend compulsory short courses which aim at introducing the basic elements of teaching methodologies, classroom psychology, behaviour management and resource management.

## **Student Numbers**

As a whole, South Australia has a healthy amount of student enrolments, with a total amount of 4540 students, in both primary and secondary schooling, in the public sector, 1490 students in the Ethnic Schools sector and 665 students in the private

(DECS, 2009). Despite these numbers, however, an alarming reality, in relation to the retention of Modern Greek students from primary to secondary levels, can be seen in the following retention rate statistics. Whilst there are 4002 public primary school students undertaking Modern Greek, the number drastically decreases to 538 in secondary schooling. In the last 6 years, the combined primary and secondary public system enrolments have decreased drastically by 1178 enrolments. Further to this in the past 6 years, the numbers of students from both public and private sectors undertaking Modern Greek in year 12 have ranged between 35 and 50 as opposed to 10-15 years ago when the numbers ranged from between 80–150 (DECS, 2009). This statistic helps to explain why fewer students are taking up Modern Greek studies at tertiary level which in turn lowers the rate of students wanting to become Modern Greek teachers.

## **Different student levels in class**

In the public school system, teachers from the schools in which Modern Greek was offered, indicated that language classes had students who were at different levels of Modern Greek competency. This circumstance has created various problems and at times has led to students becoming disinterested and disruptive. The teachers in general expressed the view that this situation was a major problem and that professional development was needed to equip all language teachers so that they might successfully teach all students in their classes, regardless of their varied competencies.

In the private sector this problem was addressed through the introduction of either 3 or 2 levels of Modern Greek teaching, namely, beginners, intermediate and/or advanced. However, in a significant number of cases, private colleges/schools have reverted back to a one class situation because of low student enrolments, particularly at secondary level.

Questionnaire and interview data indicated that there are many instances in which parents have expressed a desire to have both their children in the same ethnic school year level, even though there might be a 2 to 4 year difference between the children. This was requested in order to more readily accommodate drop off and pick up times. In many cases, so as to not lose the students, schools allowed this to happen thereby creating many problems and disturbances for both teachers and classes.

## **Student attitudes to the Study of Modern Greek**

The 15 students interviewed from across the three sectors generally expressed that they had undertaken Modern Greek to fulfil the wishes of their parents. Many stated that although they recognised the benefits of learning Modern Greek they found learning Modern Greek a very tough task. Some complained about their learning experiences, labelling the materials as “very boring” (Student Interviews, 2009). When year 9 and 10 students of Greek background were asked if they were interested in becoming a teacher of the Modern Greek language not one positive or neutral response was

received. Students didn't find the prospect of becoming a Greek teacher appealing both because they believed that financially it wasn't going to assist them in the future, and because they felt that Modern Greek teachers were not popular or in demand.

## Materials and resources

Nearly all 28 teachers from the public school sector asserted that the materials used in their classes had been collected from the internet, the Greek consulate or from resource and cultural centres like that available at the Ethnic Schools Education Centre at 12 Robson Ave Hectorville SA. Many teachers in the public sector complained that there were insufficient materials made available to them and that they had experienced problems accessing certain materials. In addition, some asserted that the materials used, whilst ideal for teaching students who have accelerated knowledge and capabilities in Modern Greek, did not cater for those who were beginners in an Australian context. These same respondents also expressed the view that new materials needed to be constructed by specialists and academics from within Australia, by "people who have had experience with the Australian education system". These people also reiterated that there needed to be a place here in South Australia where such materials and resources might be developed. There were also many teachers who said that they liked certain materials but wished that there was a more structured training and personal development facility readily available to them (Teacher Interviews, 2009).

When other Key Stakeholders were interviewed they suggested that the resources at hand were sufficient but that there needed to be an accompanying "willingness and effort (on the part of) the teachers to attend and make use of the seminars". Such seminars, played "a major role in (creating) awareness (of available resources)" (Key Stakeholder Interviews, 2009). These key stakeholders have also indicated that a limited knowledge of Modern Greek, as well as a lack of teacher training, often created a "psychological barrier" for existing teachers when they were invited to attend such seminars and use such materials. It appears that these teachers were quite comfortable teaching what they had been doing for many years even though they recognised that what they had been doing hadn't been that successful. In addition, it appears that they did not want to jeopardise their teaching style with unknown material which might expose their limited ability to teach Modern Greek. Many teachers therefore persisted with the idea that there wasn't much material out there or that it wasn't relevant (Key Stakeholder Interviews, 2009).

In the private school sector the curriculum for Modern Greek is developed by the school/college usually with advice from academics from the Modern Greek department at Flinders. There have been some attempts to train their teachers to teach the Damanakis series and these attempts will most probably continue in the future. With regards to resources these schools have invested in creating their own miniature resource centres.

Ethnic Schools also appear to implement varied materials and resources. Most, though, follow the materials provided for them by the Greek Consulate. A few have devised their own teaching materials (Ethnic Schools Interviews: Coordinators, 2009).

## **Other Key Issues with Modern Greek Education in SA**

It has been noted by most key stake holders interviewed that levels of Modern Greek language proficiency and grammar skills at all levels are in rapid decline. This unfortunately includes teacher language proficiency and language skills. It has also been expressed that Modern Greek language qualifications obtained by teachers of Modern Greek, from tertiary institutions in Australia, are in most cases not sufficient (Key Stakeholder Interviews, 2009). In support of these statements seconded teachers from Greece have indicated that current local teachers of Modern Greek appear to have inadequate Modern Greek language proficiency, let alone competent Modern Greek language teaching skills (Seconded Teacher Interviews and Key Stakeholder Interviews, 2009). Interestingly seconded teachers who have either taught in South Australia for a period of over 10 years or who have taught Modern Greek in South Australia over 10 years ago, have asserted that the level of Modern Greek proficiency of students has dropped immensely (Seconded Teacher Interviews and Key Stakeholder Interviews, 2009).

The existence of competition and the lack of unity and uniformity between schools has been quite detrimental to Modern Greek education. For example the split between the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese and the Greek Orthodox Community of SA Inc since 1959, has hindered working relations with schools belonging to both sides. That aside, there has also appeared to be a lack of unity between all sectors.

In nearly all the schooling sectors in South Australia analysed above, there appeared to be teacher shortages which indicated that teachers, in general, had a heavy workload. This could, in many instances, have made once effective teachers less effective and enthusiastic (Psaromatis, 2008:9).

There has been a lack of well structured induction programs for seconded teachers. This non-existence of well structured induction programs appears to have resulted in many barriers between teachers and students. This may be due, in part, to the differences in teacher training available in Greek and Australian education systems (Psaromatis, 2008:9).

It appears parents have become less interested in fostering their children's knowledge of Modern Greek. Ethnic Schools have been used, in some cases, as after school care. Parents drop off and pick up children at their own convenience. This has generally disrupted both students and teachers. Many Ethnic Schools teachers have indicated that although parents endeavour to give their children the ability to learn Modern Greek they are inadvertently disrupting their child's progress by not conforming to the teachers requests of the child; for example, many parents do not encourage their children to do homework. (Ethnic Schools Teacher Interviews). Current findings

are coherent with that of a study done by Leo Papademetre and Stephen Routoulas in 1997 which investigated how the shifts in multicultural policy had affected the personal attitudes and views of Australian born and educated Greek background parents towards their children's Modern Greek education (Papademetre & Routoulas, 2001:169). In this 1997 study parents asserted that their children's feelings for this form of schooling had been emphasised in the much used "*why do we have to go?*" query and this, in turn, had replicated their own feelings for Greek School when they were children. One parent was quoted as saying:

At the end of the day it's very difficult for a parent to take their child to school, after hours, to learn another language ... when we want our children to go to University; you're not going to go to University with Greek alone (Papademetre & Routoulas, 2001:175).

## The way forward

As a result of the above inferences which have been made, based on both the statistical and the interview data obtained, the following recommendations have been made. The author is of the opinion that consideration of these recommendations could play an integral role in assisting the successful maintenance of Modern Greek language education in South Australia.

1. There needs to be a shift in attitude towards Modern Greek education and language learning.
2. Modern Greek teachers need to be encouraged to complete certain levels of the Greek Language Proficiency courses offered through the Greek Education office in Adelaide.
3. A teacher training course should be implemented which would be especially designed for teaching Modern Greek as a second language for the Australian context. This course should be made available to applicants after they have completed the required Greek Language Proficiency courses.
4. The above teacher training course should also include comprehensive instruction on how to implement teaching materials such as the Damanakis series. Likewise, there would be a need to construct relevant multimedia and internet materials that relate to teaching Modern Greek as a Second language for the Australian context.
5. The above training course should include teaching methodologies that are adapted to suit the limited instruction time which exists in both Ethnic Schools and Government Schools.
6. There is a need for a well balanced induction program for seconded teachers who come from Greece. It is recommended that this program be developed in consultation with Dr Angela Yiannakis from Western Australia who has dedicated

a vast majority of her research to this matter and who has shown a keen interest in being part of such an initiative (Interview Key Stakeholder D, year?).

7. A South Australian Modern Greek Language Teaching board should be created. This board should specifically look at the curriculum for South Australian Schooling for all sectors. This would eradicate the discontinuity and confusion which exists with regards to teaching materials and the structure of Modern Greek Programs from Reception to Yr 12.
8. There is a need for the positive promotion of Hellenism and the creation of Hellenic awareness in the community. Likewise, more scholarships and further government funding are needed to make Modern Greek more appealing to secondary students. In addition, SSABSA needs to review the severity of scaling that Modern Greek is subject to, in year 12. Promoting healthy community awareness for Hellenism is paramount for the regeneration of interest in both the community and amongst parents.

There is no doubt that as time progresses here in South Australia that certain aspects of Modern Greek education need to be addressed to cater for the educational needs of an evolving Greek Community and a wider Australian society. In order for there to be a successful continuation of Modern Greek education in South Australia, there needs to be a unified reassessment, a rethinking and a restructuring of Modern Greek education at the Primary and Secondary levels. This study may potentially play a critical role in the assistance of such a process by providing new insights into what has become, unexpectedly for some, a very fragile subject — the current state and future of Modern Greek Education in South Australia.

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