

## PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ANCIENT ATHENS AND TODAY

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### ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the study is to draw a picture of the education system in terms of the curriculum, the physical condition of schools, the attitudes of the teachers and the perspective of the society towards education in ancient Athens and today. Education was an important issue for free Athenian citizens. Athenian children were taught at home, sometimes under the guidance of a master or a paidagogos, until they began elementary education at approximately seven years of age. At school, the children were taught how to read and write, to count and draw. In this study also the importance of the paidagogos and the family structure in the education of the primary school students is investigated. In doing so, the body of the study is based on a literature review, where available the modern sources has been supported by the ancient sources. In this study is compared the ancient times and today's education system. Many similarities and differences were observed.

**Key Words:** Education, History of education, Ancient Age, Athens, Ancient Greece, Primary School.

### INTRODUCTION

Greek children had learned primarily by watching the world around them and imitating respected elders. Few people in antiquity knew how to read, and most formal education involved listening and reciting from memory. But the circumstances of life were different for boys and girls. Boys were seen as being the means of continuing the family, while girls could build connections between families through arranged marriage and they were expected to be good wives and mothers (Joyal, McDougall, Yardley, 2011), . Actually it is unclear if they attended the same schools or received education in the seclusion of their homes. Most girls were denied any sort of education other than the running of a household. Therefore, often childhood was very short for girls; they could be married as young as 13. In this context mostly, a girl's education would end at the point her brother starts school (Lacey, 1968: 163). Girls tended to be taught domestic skills such as the arts of spinning and weaving cloth at home by their mothers and they would learn finer points of manners and the skills required to run a household from the slave girls. And in addition to that, it is known that parents sometimes had daughters instructed in basic reading and writing skills in case they needed this knowledge to supervise household accounts or to manage temple properties if they became priestesses. (Pomeroy, 2004: 189; Powell, 2001:252-256)

For the sons of wealthier citizens, the options are far more appealing. The little children both girls and boys were getting education at home before start to school. When he is about seven, the boy is removed from his nurse and given to the care of a paedagogos, a selected household slave (Plato, Lysis, 208cl-d2,223al5) who accompanies him everywhere as well as the school (he stays with him at school to ensure he pays attention to his lessons and works hard) and is permitted to punish the boy if he behaves badly (Adkins, 197: 275). Each family had one paedagogos no matter how many children there were. For example in Euripides' Medea there is one for Medea's two children and Themistocles' two children. (Herodotos, Historiai, VIII, 75) So the "Paedagogos" had a big importance in pupil's life. Although the slave position (Friedell, 2004:187) paedagogos and nanny had an important and respectable place in the house and except to watch over the children they instruct them at a basic level. Also there are plenty of hints in the theatre plays that Paedagogos and nannies

would have given advices or scold the children. But at the same time they are full of love and when the children grown up, they would show respect and love them. (Bonnard, 2004: 155)

Greek parents, like those of our own day, often sent their children to school at an early age to keep them out of mischief at home so six or seven appears to have been a common age for attending and fifteen or sixteen for leaving school (Hobhouse, 1910: 9).

School hours began early in the morning (Thuc. vi. 29; Hobhouse, 1910: 9) but it is uncertain how long they continued; the child was not forced to go out from the home too early. Also schools were not allowed to be open before dawn and after sunset. So classes takes place from about half an hour after sunrise until half an hour before sunset. This makes for a particularly long day in the summer, but a mercifully short one in winter. The reason of that was to prevent sexual abuse of adolescenes. In this context it was forbidden for a teacher to stand alone with a student and also it was forbidden for a foreigner to get inside the school building unless being the teacher of the school or a private teacher (Deighton, 2005: 44).

In this respect, Aiskhines states these; "In the first place, consider the case of the teachers. Although the very livelihood of these men, to whom we necessarily entrust our own children, depends on their good character, while the opposite conduct on their part would mean poverty, yet it is plain that the lawgiver distrusts them; for he expressly prescribes, first, at what time of day the free-born boy is to go to the school-room; next, how many other boys may go there with him, and when he is to go home. He forbids the teacher to open the school-room, or the gymnastic trainer the wrestling school, before sunrise, and he commands them to close the doors before sunset; for he is exceeding suspicious of their being alone with a boy, or in the dark with him. He prescribes what children are to be admitted as, pupils, and their age at admission. He provides for a public official who shall superintend them, and for the oversight of slave-attendants of school-boys. He regulates the festivals of the Muses in the school-rooms, and of Hermes in the wrestling-schools. Finally, he regulates the companionships that the boys may form at school, and their cyclic dances. Dances by specially trained groups of boys, often completive between tribes, were popular features of many of the Greek festivals. Those dances which were arranged for a circular dancing-ground were called "cyclic" (Aiskhines, Timarkhos'a karşı, 1. 10).

The schools were as small as the houses and approximately ten-twelve students were given training. The archaeological evidence is scanty, especially since a teacher did not necessarily occupy a special building. Classes are held in teachers' private homes. Letters, arithmetic, and geometry could be taught in any room large enough to contain benches for the students (Griffith, 2001: 66). At this point we have to emphasize that; in elementary education the children would sit on a stool or a bank, but if they are reading a text by heart, or attending a flute lessons, they would spend large part of the time by standing.

In Athens the three main branches of education were writing, music and gymnastics (Freeman, 1996: 221), although it is uncertain if they were taught in one or more buildings. Reading, writing, arithmetic and literature were taught by a grammatistes (teacher of letters); literature involved reciting and memorizing passages from poets, especially Homer (Marrou, 1956: 42)- any child who wished to take place one day at the banquets as an educated person had to certain amount of Homer's poetry-, for moral training (Beck, 1964:117-22). Music and lyric poetry were taught by a kitharistes (lyre player), and physical education by a paidotribes (trainer.) Aristoteles also counts the drawing as a traditional education subject. Since music is such an important part of life in Greece, boys are also taught to sing and play the lyre and flute. Parents of the upper classes, however, paid for their sons to be instructed in what was called mousike, a subject that included the memorization of poetry. Since ancient poems were sung, mousike also involved learning to play the lyre.

Writing was done on tablets covered with wax with a pointed stylus (a pencil which has two edges-one to write and one to erase), and was taught by means of copies; great quickness in writing does not seem to have been generally aimed at, as copying work was performed by slaves. A skilled student would use papyrus as a writing material but it was really expensive material. In Greek world as a scratch paper students often used broken vessels, which could be picked up anywhere outside where people threw them away (Cribiore, 2001: 27).

At the beginning, children were taught letters and then syllables, followed by words and sentences (Athenaeus, X. 453; Plat. Protag. 326). When the pupil had attained a very moderate proficiency in reading and writing he was introduced to the works of the great poets of his country, and was taught the "praises of famous men", and especially of the Homeric heroes. Homer was read aloud both by the teacher and the pupil, and great stress was laid upon good reading; large portions of the poems committed to memory, and we hear of instance of men knowing them by heart all through (Ksen. Sympos. iii.5).

The books were in the form of long scrolls so, while reading, it must be done to wrap and open at the same time. This feature makes it difficult to control to backwards but however, Greek people's memory was trained. The children were memorizing the works of Homer regularly (27.000 string).

Turning from the literary to the scientific side we do not find much to record. Counting was taught either by the fingers or on the abacus, by means of pebbles. (Hobhouse, 1910: 11) Ruler, compass and miter also were used to calculate in geometry.

As we mentioned boys had a luckier position than girls in education, but it does not mean all the boys were sent to school in Greek world. The problem was not simply that poverty usually compelled children to stay home and work on the farm or ateliers (Deighton, 2005: 48). The main fact was, with the exception of Sparta, Greek states did not provide public schooling. Accordingly, the age for beginning school life and its duration, depended largely on the incomes of the parents (Pseudo Plato, Axiochus 366).

Mostly the person who has the responsibility to equip young minds with valuable information were worthless in the eyes of society and were poorly paid. Fees were paid every month by the parents of their students (Griffith, 2001: 67). Their amount is unknown, but evidently small in the case of the ordinary school; nevertheless, payment not unfrequently fell into arrears or was vaded (Hobhouse, 1910: 9; Demosth. in aphob. i. 828; theophr. char. 22). Most teachers were slaves, but were sometimes freedmen, with the head teacher usually. (Adkins, 1997: 275).

Furthermore, there were some special holidays in Athens daily life. For instance Holiday of Muses was a special event that pupils were carrying some gifts to school. (Theoph., Charac., XXII-XXVI) And during the other religious festivals schools were closed. In this context an economizing parent did not send his children to school at all during the month of Anthesterion, as it contained so many holidays that he did not think it worth while pay the fees of teachers (Theoph, Charac., XXX.14). But in the same paragraph, we learn these payments should be made on time, even though the child couldnt go to school due to illness.

In the 5th century BC no organized system of higher education existed. Sons of wealthier parents usually continued their children's education to the age of 18 with specialist teachers in medicine, law, rhetoric or the increasingly popular courses given by the sophists. But the sophistes were far luckier in salary than the teachers who has to teach to younger pupils. And there were some traditions as to give some money to Sophistes in some holiays such as holiday of wine (Athenaios, VII. 437).

In the literature we witness that some teachers are quite cruel in their fines. For instance in a poem of Phanios, we see the tools of beating; such as sticks, slippers, whips. But we don't find any objections raised to it by Greek writers. What we know of Athenian schools in the fifth century B.C.E. suggests that a stress on discipline and punishment tended to outweigh the teaching of skills. This bias was certainly due in part to the need for soldiers, but it may also reflect Athenian understanding that, for their democracy to survive, young men had to learn to temper their competitive drives. (Nortwick, 2008: 47).

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## METHOD

In this study, literature review method has been used.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Education in general was considered a leisure pursuit only available to the privileged few but on the other hand played a significant role in ancient Greek. In their early years, Athenian children were taught at home, sometimes under the guidance of a master or pedagogue. They were taught basic morals, until they began elementary education at approximately seven years of age. In literacy instructions commenced with the alphabet (which is developed from Phoenicians) (Powell, 1991) and learning to read, children being first taught to recognize separate letters, and then proceeding to their combinations in syllables. When children were ready to begin reading whole works, they would often be given poetry to memorize. An elementary education was the only education available to most people, especially the poor and the rest of education in general was considered a leisure pursuit only available to the privileged few. Children belonging to the upper social classes would receive formal elementary education since their parents would be able to afford to hire a tutor or to send them to a public school. For most free, non-elite Greeks, the main occupation for which they had to be trained was that of their parent. In addition to not having the money to pay for a formal education, members of the lower class most likely would have required their children's services at home just to be able to afford food and other basic necessities.

The national focus on basic skills and testing is diverting attention from the broad liberal education that students need to live and function effectively in a multicultural nation and World. It is essential that all students acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, students also need the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to live, interact, and make decisions with fellow citizens from different racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and religious groups. The schools need to teach about social justice issues in addition to basic skills. An education that is narrowly defined as academic achievement and testing will not prepare students to become effective citizens who are committed to social justice. We should educate students to be reflective, moral, caring, and active citizens in a troubled World (Banks, McGee Banks, 2010).

System-wide excellence in student learning is attainable at reasonable cost, using education policies differing from conventional market-oriented reform strategies prevalent in many other countries. In this respect, Finland is an example of a nation that has developed from a remote agrarian/industrial state in the 1950s to a model knowledge economy, using education as the key to economic and social development. Relying on data from international student assessments and earlier policy analysis, this article describes how steady improvement in student learning has been attained through Finnish education policies based on equity, flexibility, creativity, teacher professionalism and trust. Unlike many other education systems, consequential accountability accompanied by high-stakes testing and externally determined learning standards has not been part of Finnish education policies. The insight is that Finnish education policies intended to raise student achievement have been built upon ideas of sustainable leadership that place strong emphasis on teaching and learning, intelligent accountability, encouraging schools to craft optimal learning environments and implement educational content that best helps their students reach the general goals of schooling (Sahlberg, 2007).

Technological and information literacy is essential for living and working in contemporary society (Morrison, 2007). Technology continues to advance at breakneck speed, taking with it transformation of thinking about how we learn, and forcing revision of thinking about how we teach. These changes in turn offer opportunity to forward-thinking educational administrators, and they compel others to reconsider how their institutions are organized and their budgets allocated. In other words, the revolution represented by distance education continues apace. It is because so much has changed in the Technologies used for teaching at distance, in the ways distance education is organized, in who is learning and how they are taught, and in state and institutional policy that it has been decided to prepare a fresh edition of Distance Education (Moore, Kearsley, 2012). Educational technologies can solve several educational problems of the developing countries. The learning

issues are: 1. Shortage of qualified and skilled teachers. 2. Low level of learning achievements. 3. High drop-out rates at all levels of education. 4. Lack of opportunities for remote areas. 5. Lack of study materials and resources (Nawaz, 2013). In the context of education, “open(ness)” has become the watermark for a fast growing number of learning materials and associated platforms and practices from a variety of institutions and individuals. Open Educational Resources (OER), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC), and more recently, initiatives such as Coursera are just some of the forms this movement has embraced under the “open” banner. Yet, ongoing calls to discuss and elucidate the “meaning” and particularities of openness in education point to a lack of clarity around the concept. “Open” in education is currently mostly debated in the context of the technological developments that allowed it to emerge in its current forms (Peter, Deimann, 2013).

Education was important to simulate and community orientation. Education was based on rote learning, but today the understanding of education is based on learning by doing and experiencing. At that time, rather than education of the girls were expected to be housewives. Now, however, with equal rights for girls and boys. Some families give children basic math and reading courses have. 'Paedagogos called' training coaches were working in a similar way today. Although schools were found to have a certain sense of class. Writing, music and gymnastics were the most important subject matter, but now a lot of issues other than writing are not acknowledged. Now it has become obligatory education is not compulsory. These days the school was closed off as religious holidays. Training offered to wealthy families seem like something like today was an important issue. As mentioned above, technology and globalization have changed the education system too.

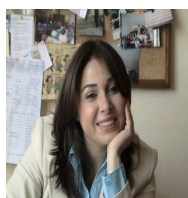
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