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## Greek Primary School Teachers Dream of the Ideal School Library

Ioanna Arvaniti

*Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, i\_arvaniti@hotmail.com*

Argyris Kyridis

*University of Western Macedonia, Greece, akiridis@uowm.gr*

Konstantinos Dinas

*University of Western Macedonia, Greece, kdinas@uowm.gr*

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# **Greek Primary School Teachers Dream of the Ideal School Library**

Ioanna Arvaniti

PhD student

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
Greece

Argyris Kyridis

Professor

University of Western Macedonia  
Greece

Konstantinos Dinas

Associate Professor

University of Western Macedonia  
Greece

## **The Modern School Library**

School libraries developed during the 20th century. Because of the great technological and cultural strides made especially in the west, the term "school library" has taken on a new and wider meaning, and does not simply denote a place used for filing and storing books. The development of contemporary school libraries keeps abreast with introducing new, radically different views about educational systems and the relationship between teachers and pupils.

The influence and importance of libraries for young people has been extensively discussed, from public figures like Franklin Roosevelt, who remarked that, "after the church and the school, the library has the most positive effect on young people" (*Big Pedagogic Encyclopaedia* 1968), to scholars such as Stathopoulos (1960), who wrote that "the library is rendered essential for every intellectual institution, it is really essential and necessary for the primary school, since it constitutes a big and rare treasure," and who quotes Jean Mace as saying that the "supplement of the primary school is the constitution of libraries. The first one is the key but the second one is the residence." Haralampopoulos (1963) states that that "the library is a basic element that leads to the education and to the spiritual culture of students." Nevertheless, even in the late 20th century, the school library is still sometimes a metal cupboard with books, locked in the office of the school director, seldom updated. It may also coexist with an audiovisual centre, a collection films,

transparencies, disks, etc. (Lowrie, 1992). The revolution in information technology has changed that situation, resulting in a new type of school library. The word library itself has sometimes been replaced with the term "Media Centre" or something similar (Sina, 1998).

What does "school library" mean today? Changes in the meaning and mission of school libraries are part of the social and educational changes of the 20th century (Law 1566/85; Kavagia, 1998; Venetsanou, 1998; National Study Housing, 1995; School Library Manifesto, 1999). The traditional model of teaching and learning has gradually been replaced with a "student-centered" model. The teacher is no longer the exclusive transmitter of knowledge or the one who knows everything, but the coordinator of the process of learning. The student does not use one and only textbook for each course, which is learned by heart. Students formulate their own questions, select sources of information, and the process of learning, to develop the skills of critical and inquiring thinking (Kyridis & Arvaniti 2002). Knowledge is no longer something finite and definitive that students assimilate, but is something built progressively over a lifetime. Consequently, the educational system must act as a helper and regulator in student learning. The modern school library plays a crucial role in the new educational system (Marchant et al. 1984).

The modern school library is also essential to curriculum and teaching. During the 1990s, both UNESCO and IFLA considered this question. In 1996, a statement on the modern school library was issued. The statement was approved by the IFLA in 1998 and ratified by UNESCO in 1999 (School Library Manifesto, 1999).

### **School Libraries in Greece**

School libraries in Greece are part of discussions of the country's national education policy (Kapsalis, 1989; Delopoulos, 1985 & 1989; Sapoudakis, 1986; Charamis, 1997; Chronopoulou & Giannopoulos 1995). Act 1566/85 attempted to upgrade school libraries as an institution and stated that "in every Primary or Secondary education school there is a school library ...", which can be used by pupils, the teaching staff, and local residents. Concern for the function of school libraries is very limited, however, with little discussion of the role of school libraries in primary education, no presidential decrees concerning the job of the librarian, and no teacher training programs in school library management (Charamis, 1992). School libraries have not thrived in Greece for several reasons:

- They have not been treated as a fundamental aspect of educational policies.
- Overall educational objectives have been incongruent with curricula
- There is no appropriate equipment available
- Teachers are not aware of the value of school libraries and how they can be exploited

### **Research Purpose and Objectives**

The present study investigates primary school teachers' views and attitudes toward school libraries, including what they would consider the ideal. Specifically:

- The role of school library operation and functional potential
- The significance of school libraries and their role in teaching
- The uses of the school library

- Alternative types of use
- Organization and management

### **School Libraries in Europe**

Along with a number of other European countries (Sakellariou, 1998), Denmark has a tradition of providing libraries for all schools (Fragkos 1998). In this small country of 5,000,000 inhabitants and 500,000 students, there are 1,700 legally-mandated school libraries for 1,700 public schools. School libraries in Denmark 's public schools are managed by Municipal Councils and by the Administrative Council of each school, which includes parents, teachers, students, and the school's director. These school libraries employ librarians who help teachers and students in the choice of material, teach information literacy skills, as well as being responsible for selecting material. The libraries' collections have a significant number of audiovisual resources. Students use these for multimedia projects. The school library is also a library for teachers, who collaborate with librarians in lesson-planning. There also the municipal or prefectorial pedagogic centres, which function as infrastructure for school libraries and support teachers by lending books or other educational material, with information about new resources, by organising seminars for teachers, and by offering technical support on library issues. The use of a single textbook to teach a course or subject is almost non-existent Denmark . About 75% of all students visit the library once a week. The total circulation of materials in school libraries every year amounts to 33,000,000, an average 66 books per year per student.

School libraries in England are similar to those in Denmark . The School Library Association (SLA), an independent organisation founded in 1937, supports and encourages anyone working in school libraries. In France , since 1968, the library is found in the centre of the school, both the architecturally and educationally. Independent research is an important component of the French educational system. Each school day, students have at their disposal 1-2 hours to visit the library and prepare their lessons (Sakellariou, 1998). Internationally, there is IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, which collaborates with UNESCO.

### **Methodology**

The analysis uses quantitative and qualitative approaches to discourse analysis of written texts produced by teachers. There were two pilot studies. The first took place in Thessaloniki in April 2001 and involved a small sample (ten teachers from different schools). The subjects were asked to write an essay about their views on the subject of school libraries. The essay subject proved too comprehensive and could not generate adequate research. The topic was modified and the second pilot project derived from texts produced by ten teachers working in different areas of Thessaloniki . The essay subject was explicit and the data generated from the analysis of the texts were satisfactory. The same instrument was used in the final research.

According to Berelson (1971), discourse analysis is appropriate for investigating the views and perceptions of individuals or groups of people. De Sola Pool (1959), however, suggests that it can be used for semantic analysis of written or oral speech. Palmquist (1990) applies discourse analysis to written texts produced

by teachers and pupils (Weber 1990). French scholars, employing a conventional thematic analysis, introduced new elements to both the methodology and potential of discourse analysis (Mucchieli, 1988; Veron, 1981; Bandin, 1977; Grawitz, 1981). A fundamental principle is identifying and grouping the thematic units that make up a message (Berelson, 1971; Holsti, 1969). Analysis of what is omitted from texts can also be significant (Ghiglione et al. 1980).. The thematic categories used here were examined by two people and the percentage of similarity was very high (98.4% - 12 statements). Microsoft Access was used for data analysis, and the descriptive statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 10.0.

## Sampling

The sample consists of 100 texts produced by teachers who work in six counties in West and Central Macedonia: Kastoria, Kozani, Thessaloniki, Serres, Kilkis, and Pieria. The sample was randomly drawn from volunteer participants who worked in more than one county. Very short texts or texts with no relevant information were excluded. Participants provided information about gender, place of work, school district, educational status, and previous experience.

## Results

### Quantitative Analysis

Subjects produced 726 statements total. Each teacher used 2-25 statements (with an average of seven statements per text). The 726 statements were classified in seven main themes. Thematic categories 3-7 include subcategories. Table 1 shows the distribution of statements by theme and subcategory.

**Table 1. Distribution of Themes**

Thematic categories and subcategories	Frequency	Percentage	
1	Critique of current situation	18	2.5
2	Importance of libraries	64	8.8
3	Utility	198	27.3
3.1.	Information – knowledge	28	3.9
3.2.	Support to taught subjects	20	2.7
3.3.	Learning procedures	28	3.9
3.4.	Enhancing skills – abilities	47	6.5
3.5.	Compensational role	12	1.6
3.6.	Relationship with books	45	6.2
3.7.	Recreation	18	2.5
4.	Operation	193	26.6
4.1.	Type of school library	52	7.2
4.2.	School library users	9	1.2
4.3.	Types of operation	96	13.2
4.4.	Working hours	26	3.6
4.5.	Working requirements	10	1.4
5.	Working specifications	94	12.9
5.1.	Staff	38	5.2
5.2.	Organizational structure	49	6.7

5.3.	Structure of materials	7	1.0
6.	Collections	90	12.4
6.1.	Collection types	18	2.5
6.2.	Types of books	44	6.1
6.3.	Selection criteria for book collections	17	2.3
6.4.	Person responsible for the selection of book collections	6	0.8
6.5.	Funding	5	0.7
7.	Exploitation of its potential	70	9.6
7.1.	Activities	45	6.2
7.2.	Alternative use	25	3.4
	Total	<b>726</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The correlation of statements by theme and subcategory with the personal traits of the subjects was not statistically significant. However, it is worth noting that, in general terms, women produced longer texts.

### Qualitative Analysis

**1st Thematic category.** The first category is the current situation of school libraries (18 statements, 2.5%). In three cases, the subjects highlighted the absence of school libraries, probably due to lack of space or inadequate funds:

it cannot work because of lack of space

it is unfortunate that in most cases organizing libraries is contingent on the citizens' concern and donations, not on state initiatives

In most cases, (15 statements) the subjects described the inadequate use of school libraries, which, as emphasized in one third of the statements, was attributed to lack of adequate or suitable space:

if there is one, it is in a corner or an unhealthy small room

the school library was in a small, dark room or it was a metal locker in a corridor

or to various other reasons which could be summarized in one statement:

Reasons for inadequate use: no keys, fear that books would be lost, headmasters' or teachers' fear of responsibility. Furthermore, it is attributed to the fact that there is lack of a creative relationship between teachers and children and - why not - teachers and books

**2nd Thematic category.** A number of statements (64, 8.8%) emphasized the Importance of libraries at schools as well as all the educational procedures; a word most frequently used was the word *essential* (43 times), which can have only one interpretation. Most subjects did not even elaborate on the specific argument

I consider that school libraries are essential

School libraries are essential in every school.

Some of the subjects, however, elaborated on and highlighted the significance of libraries

A school library must be the hub in a school

There cannot be progressive schools without a library

it can be the hub of school life

**3rd Thematic category.** The specific broad thematic category (198 statements, 27.3%) includes statements related to the utility of school libraries and is divided into seven subcategories:

**3.1.** The first (28 statements, 3.9%) involves information, the knowledge that can be provided to pupils using a library:

In school libraries, pupils can have access to a number of information sources.

One can acquire everlasting knowledge, since this knowledge is acquired with determined efforts.

**3.2.** The role of school libraries is considered significant (20 statements, 2.7%), as indicated by the frequency of use of the item "Support to taught subjects." Specific statements highlight the supportive role of libraries, which can help pupils with work at school:

It can be used as an information centre for work assigned to pupils.

School libraries enrich school curricula with plenty of supporting material and information.

**3.3.** In addition, school libraries contribute to creating the suitable environment to promote Learning procedures at school and their role is complementary to the role of schools.

School libraries are complementary to schools

its primary goal is support the work done at school

either as a place where pupils will become familiar with research and inquiry, which are instrumental to consolidating school as a medium for active learning

In libraries children learn how to work, explore, discover

It teaches children how to acquire knowledge by means of scientific or research work.

**3.4.** The role of school libraries in enhancing skills and abilities is strongly emphasized (47 statements, 6.5%). Special emphasis is given to:

***imagination***

School libraries contribute to stimulating imagination

***creativity***

School libraries encourage pupils' creative skills

***judgment***

In school libraries pupils can develop critical thinking

***co-operation***

when pupils work in a school library they learn how to co-operate and work in teams

and other skills and abilities, such as linguistic skills

Working in a school library, pupils can enrich their vocabularies

School libraries help pupils improve written and oral speech

**3.5.** Another thematic subcategory (12 statements, 1.6%) involves the compensational role of school libraries, which can make up for the lack of books at home:

... it could be particularly helpful to those pupils who are considered indigent (repatriating, foreigners)

...in particular children whose families have financial problems and cannot afford extracurricular books for their children.

**3.6.** Very significant (45 statements, 6.2%) is the role of libraries in promoting pupils' relationship with books and love for reading

A well-stocked library helps pupils become familiar with the world of books

School libraries motivate and stimulate children to love reading

the specific role can make children love books for life



I believe that when children get involved in such a process they can finally love books and - why not - they can have books as a companion for life

**3.7.** Some statements (18 statements, 2.5%) are related to the recreational role of school libraries:

in day-long schools the function of school libraries is recreational

school libraries help children escape the restrictions posed by school

In a school library, pupils have a nice time reading extracurricular books

**4th Thematic category.** This category is as broad as the third (193 statements, 26.6%) and involves the operation of school libraries with five thematic subcategories:

**4.1.** In the first subcategory there are statements (52 statements, 7.2%) with suggestions about the type of school library. An overwhelming majority (38 out of 52 statements) of the subjects maintain that libraries should be located in a separate, specially-equipped room:

A necessary requirement for a library to work properly is a separate or specially equipped room

In every school there must be a specially equipped room available to be used as a library

The subjects suggest that for every school form there must be a separate library organized or there must be a combination of a central library with general interest books with small special libraries (bookcases) in classrooms:

There should be libraries for every school form, not only for the school as a unit

There should be a special room available for a library but there should also be small libraries in every classroom so that they could cover specific needs

**4.2.** As regards school library users (9 statements, 1.2%), it was asserted that students are the primary user group, but also the teachers, parents, or the general public:

school libraries should meet the needs and interests of the pupils and the teaching staff in every school or its role should be enhanced and embrace the people in a community

**4.3.** Regarding school library operations (96 statements, 13.2%), almost half of the participating teachers (45) maintain that school libraries should work as lending units and the rest (48) hold that they should also work as reading rooms

one of its functions should be lending books

They should be large and comfortable rooms where children could sit and spend some time choosing a book or studying.

There are some statements (3), however, that suggest a more "exceptional" operation for school libraries:

School libraries should be online with other schools and institutions.

**4.4.** Many statements concerned hours of operation (26 statements, 3.6%). It was suggested that school libraries should be open during the school year and during school hours, but also during other days and hours of the week:

a school library should be open during specific days and hours of the week

It should be open for some hours in the afternoon

It should also be open on Saturdays, on a permanent basis.

Most subjects (15 statements out of 26) asserted that school libraries should be open during the school year and during the hours that schools are open:

It is essential that they be open during the school working hours and also during the day-long school hours of work.

The reading room should be open for daylong school pupils. Teachers in daylong schools should have access to school libraries.

**4.5.** With regard to working requirements (10 statements, 1.4%), a special room, staff training, and regular use by pupils are essential:

... teachers should know about the operation, structure and use of school libraries

Pupils should be taught about its use and utility and be encouraged to be regular users.

In addition, well-trained staff and a different mentality in the educational policies applied are fundamental:

It requires trained staff

An essential requirement for a school library is a change in the scope of our educational system

**5th Thematic category.** This category includes working requirements for a school library (94 statements, 12.9%). There are comments about the staff, organizational structure, and organization of material.

**5. 1.** Most subjects (21 out of 38 statements) maintained that the most appropriate person is a specially trained librarian who could help and support the educational staff and guide pupils:

There must be a librarian to organize, and manage a school library

... to provide information to the teaching staff of a school ...

... and also help children choose and find a book.

In case there are no librarians, the subjects suggest that teachers with special training and education are assigned the task, in co-operation with pupils; pupils, guided by teachers, can also be assigned the care of a classroom small library:

a teacher, who would be educated in library science, should be responsible for managing the library

... should be supported and operated by 1-2 fifth- or sixth-formers.

**5.2.** As regards the organizational structure of school libraries, (49 statements, 6.7%) the rooms should be comfortable, decorated in good taste, friendly and attractive

the school library should be the most attractive room in the school

The room... should be comfortable, functional and pleasant

It should also be nicely and functionally decorated

In a corner with wall-to-wall carpet, there must be sofas, equipped with electronic systems

there should be an Internet connection to enable access to information networks and DVD equipment in a special section in the library

**5.3.** Finally, the available material should be organized on the basis of specific criteria, i.e., age or thematic category:

The books should be sorted out separately for each school form

equipped with full collections of books, classified by school subject

**6th Thematic category.** This category concerns the library's collections (90 statements, 12.4%):

**6.1.** Suggestions made about the collection are about formats and genres for a school library: books and magazines for children, video tapes and multimedia, slides and music CDs, and also toys:

E-libraries are also necessary

.... up-to-date maps with valid historical and geographical information

**6.2.** Many respondents emphasized the importance of various kinds of material in the collection (44 statements, 6.1%)

I also feel that they must be enriched with a number of literature books

general interest and specialized books

libraries should have a varied collection of reference books available, not only literature

dictionaries and encyclopedias

School libraries should have small sets of encyclopedias

and extra handbooks or companions

when an extract from a language or literature handbook is taught, there should be an extra book in the library.

**6.3.** Selection criteria for books (17 statements, 2.3%) should consider suitability for the children's age, knowledge, and interests, as well as replacement of older books:

School libraries require replenishing book collections with books written by new authors, according to contemporary trends

**6.4.** The people responsible for selecting books must be the teaching staff, the children, and the librarian:

Teachers should replenish the collections...

The children themselves should make suggestions about the books they prefer...

School librarians, pupils and teachers can make suggestions about books and, in general, about library facilities

**6.5.** Finally, as regards funding, respondents feel that the state is mainly responsible for granting funds for school libraries:

library equipment and books should be provided mainly by the state

**7th Thematic category.** The last thematic category involves the use of school libraries (70 statements, 9.6%):

**7.1.** The first thematic subcategory involves activities in the library (45 statements, 6.2%). Among the educational activities that subjects suggest are learning about books, which would include a special subject called "library time

In the library, children could attend a class called "library time", which must be included in the syllabus

The library can be used as a classroom for teaching "school life"

The research participants also suggest that the library be used as a classroom for attending everyday classes, whenever visual aids or supplementary materials are required

so that teachers can organize some lessons in the library, in particular for subjects requiring research

Finally, school libraries can be used as reading rooms where pupils can collect material for short studies

All pupils can sometimes go to the library and look up encyclopedias when they need information about their homework

**7.2.** In the second thematic subcategory, there are suggestions about the alternative use of school libraries. The subjects suggest that libraries be used as a recreation room, where pupils can spend their free time

... pupils should enjoy themselves by playing various educational games

but they can principally be used as a cultural centre for the general public, with art exhibitions, films, plays, puppet shows, discussions with authors or discussions about various issues etc.

School libraries can be used as a gallery, a room for discussions, films

In school libraries there should be held cultural events

## Discussion

In contemporary Greek schools, students and teachers are constrained by the use of a single textbook to teach a course. Other books are considered as mere supplements to promote "love of learning." Textbooks promote the dominant ideology and a selective version of knowledge. Students are obliged to use, study, and learn them by heart. Where are the other books? If they are not in homes, they are definitely in libraries, public or school. Children spend 4-6 hours each day in school, where, among other things, they can learn about books and learn to love them.

Teachers have acknowledged the significance of school libraries. They dream of well-equipped libraries, with trained librarians, rich collections of books, and cozy rooms. They are eager to work more systematically toward integrating the library and the curriculum. However:

the worst of it is that most of them [school libraries] are found in school corridors, there are no librarians, the number of books is very small and most of them are very old books

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