

Attitudes of students and teachers towards the course "Ancient Greek Language" of the first grade of Secondary school

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Abstract

The contribution of teaching ancient Greek language to humanitarian education constituted the reason why we started studying the effectiveness of the way of teaching ancient Greek language in the first grade of Secondary School. During the first phase of the study (preliminary work) mismatch points were identified between the textbook and the Curriculum rendering the investigation of the students' and teachers' attitudes towards the textbook and the course as a whole, with a main goal to draw conclusions and formulate a proposal aimed at improving the effectiveness of the way of teaching the ancient Greek language. This paper presents part of the initial indicative results of the research which is being carried out that confirms to a certain degree the findings of the preliminary study on the correspondence between the Curriculum and the textbook of the course. The results of the research will offer the basis for formulating an alternative proposal to upgrade the way of teaching the course.

Keywords: Textbook, Curriculum, Ancient Greek Language, Student, Teacher.

JEL Classification: O30, Z11

Introduction

In our country the teaching of ancient Greek is related with a problem, which has been ideologically and emotionally bothersome. Essentially, the problem has always focused on whether the teaching of ancient Greek should be based on the original text or on its translation. In the past the problem was intensively appeared as one of the most important keystones of reform efforts (Vrettos, 1988: 54-55). According to records of the Pedagogical Institute "after experimenting in 180 schools, teaching the older forms of the Greek language has been introduced in Secondary School since September 1992 ("The Greek language through ancient, Byzantine and literary texts") (Presidential decree 451/93)" (Pedagogical Institute, 2010: 56). Since then the student with his entering in the Secondary School is being brought in a first contact with older forms of the Greek language, while he is taught the lesson of ancient Greek literature in translation. Today, the teaching of Ancient Greek Language, in our country, is based on the Curriculum and the Inter-disciplinary Unified Framework Curriculum of 2003, which reflect the educational reform

including, among others, the writing of new textbooks for all subjects of the compulsory nine-year education (Fountopoulou, 2010: 18-19). More specifically, concerning the course "Ancient Greek Language" based on the original text, under the present conditions there has been a drafting of new school textbooks, the structure of which is different from the previous ones and as well as of new manuals for teacher's use, where specific teaching suggestions are provided for conducting the course in a more effective manner.

It is noted that in the Nationwide Research that was conducted by the Pedagogical Institute concerning the previous textbooks of the course "Ancient Greek Language" in Secondary School before the release of the new textbooks (<http://www.pischools.gr/download/publications/epitheorisi/teyxos12/glavas.pdf>) teachers and students largely were in favor of replacing the manuals. This point motivated us to deal with the study of the methodology of teaching the ancient Greek from original text in the first grade of Secondary school taking into consideration the bibliographical lack of research in this area concerning the use of the present textbooks.

Being strongly concerned on this issue, there are questions raised, such as:

- A. Are the general goals and specific objectives achieved, as they expressed and defined by the Curriculum, while teaching the course "Ancient Greek Language" in the first grade of Secondary school? Is the textbook in harmony with the principles of organization, the teaching methodology and the standards that are set by the Curriculum?
- B. What is the effect of the course and the textbook "Ancient Greek Language" on the student and the teacher?

The attempt of finding specific answers to the above questions in theoretical and empirical level constituted the basis for undertaking a doctoral thesis, which is in progress, under the title "Methodology of teaching of the first approach of the ancient Greek language. A proposal for the course "Ancient Greek Language" of the 1st grade of Secondary school" by Despoina Sakelli in the Pedagogy Section of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens with Professor Mrs. Fountopoulou Marisa as a supervisor. More analytically, the doctoral thesis aims to provide answers to these questions using sample survey data. Specifically, the main objectives are:

- 1 To examine the effectiveness and functionality of the existing textbook "Ancient Greek Language" of the first grade of Secondary school.
- 2 Next, to investigate and identify any weaknesses and malfunctions.
- 3 To formulate a comprehensive and reasoned alternative proposal relating to the teaching contents and the structure of the textbook of the course, which have to meet the student's and teacher's needs and will contribute to an effective teaching of ancient Greek language.
- 4 To end up with an integration of the proposal in the everyday school practice, we pursue its full implementation after the investigation and assessment of its functions.
- 5 Finally, the ultimate aim of the study, will be the improvement - if it proved necessary - of the textbook of the course "Ancient Greek Language" of the 1st grade of Secondary school. The improved textbook can become an attractive and functional tool for both the student and for the teacher, and, thus, it will contribute to the

effectiveness of the way of teaching of ancient Greek language creating a productive and meaningful student's relationship with ancient Greek. The first indicative results of the sample survey are presented in this paper.

Methodology and organization of research

According to the Inter-disciplinary Unified Framework of Ancient Greek Language and Literature Curriculum (translation /original) the main purpose of teaching the course is to have an acquaintance with humanity and antiquity by deeper understanding and interpretation of texts, through the parallel study of ancient Greek language. More specifically, through the teaching of Ancient Greek Language (based on the original text) the students will be capable (FEK303, 2003: 3811-3812):

- 1 To understand the historical continuity of the Greek language.
- 2 To get familiar with the structure and expressive specificity of the Ancient Greek language.
- 3 To comprehend the basics of the Ancient Greek language in the linguistic, semantic-lexical level.
- 4 To understand the phenomena of language through the parallel and combined teaching of grammar and syntax of Ancient Greek and Modern Greek (path from the synchrony to diachrony) wherever this is feasible.
- 5 To understand a simple, comprehensive and interesting ancient text and render it in Modern Greek language.
- 6 To cultivate their interest in the ancient culture by studying texts of various themes of the ancient Greek world (e.g. national, political, social, religious, etc.).

Furthermore, the standards set for the book of the institutional texts among others are (FEK303, 2003: from 3824 to 3825):

- 1 Each module is structured in a way to distinguish its purpose, its main subject and the didactic path that should be followed while processing.
- 2 Systematic teaching of basic elements of grammar and syntax, based on examples but mostly documents diagrams and tables, some or general. Very useful is the link with the corresponding phenomena of the Modern Greek wherever possible.
- 3 The book contains a wealth of visual material from the ancient world and characteristic epigrammatic phrases, explicitly or sayings through which the spirit and customs of the ancient Greeks can be perceived.

Initially it was considered necessary to study the textbook "Ancient Greek Language" of the first grade in terms of its correspondence to the goals and standards set by the Curriculum. After a thorough study of the textbook with parallel investigation of the corresponding teacher's book and using the method of "content analysis", we concluded that the textbook corresponds to some extent to those provided in Curriculum and Inter-disciplinary Unified Framework Curriculum, but without achieving the perfect match, as in certain points does not cover what is defined by the institutional documents. Specifically, below are listed some of the points identified as deviating (or should be extensively studied if differ) from the goals of Curriculum as follows:

- 1 In the book the knowledge of grammatical-syntactic categories of the Modern Greek used only in some sections and in most of them not with extensive reference and examples, but with a simple reference related to the Modern Greek. It was studied whether and how the knowledge of these categories of Modern Greek is utilized for teaching the respective categories of grammar and syntax in Ancient Greek and it was observed that out of 35 chapters listed in the textbook, in 20 of them the knowledge of Modern Greek is not utilized on teaching ancient Greek phenomena. In addition to those 20 chapters there are 8 chapters of grammar and syntax where a simple reference to the Modern Greek is made ("as in the Modern Greek"). It should be noted that the simple reference made in the Modern Greek cannot be essentially considered as a utilization of the knowledge of the basic grammatical and syntactical categories of Modern Greek. It is observed that the first learning objective of the Curriculum (understanding the temporal continuity of the Greek language) is not covered and not diffused throughout the book, only occasionally and often to a simple reference: "as in the Modern Greek".
- 2 On the semantic level, while in Part B1 of each section of the textbook there is a clear link between Ancient and Modern Greek, in Part B2, where etymological remarks are included, it is observed that there is no direct etymological connection between Ancient and Modern Greek in any section of all the 18 sections of the textbook. In some sections of the teacher's manual it is recommended for better understanding of the course the use of examples where correspondence with words of Modern Greek is made. This is observed in 8 out of a total of 18 sections of the teaching manual. Therefore the purpose of the students' acquaintance with the basic elements of ancient Greek in semantic-etymological level (one of the objectives of the Curriculum) can be covered. On the contrary, the first objective of the Curriculum concerning understanding the temporal continuity of the Greek language, is not fully covered.
- 3 Another point that is worth noting is that in contrast to what is provided by Curriculum regarding artistic and cultural support of the textbook, the book includes a limited number of images, which are found only in the first part of each section, a fact that does not help to attract the student's attention, but rather leads to the opposite direction. Besides the modules 1 and 2, which include enough visual material, in all other modules (3-18) the visual material is limited to Part A of each section with 1-2 images, or even 3 or 4, which accompany each text. Specifically, the images are found in Part A of each section, while both the Second and Third Part of all modules and the Addendum do not include any visual material. Therefore, only 35 pages out of the total 182 pages of the textbook contain artistic material-that is the 19.23% of the total, while the remaining 147 pages-that is the 80.77% - contain no image.
- 4 Regarding the extent to which students are familiar with the structure and expressive specialty of ancient Greek speech and their ability to understand simple, comprehensive and interesting ancient texts -as defined by the curriculum-, the 17 texts of the First Part of the textbook are under consideration in terms of their degree of difficulty and attractiveness, given that they are addressing to students that come for the first time in contact with the Ancient Greek. Undoubtedly language comments following each text, make easier the comprehension of the text. Nevertheless, the attitude of students and teachers towards the texts can be thoroughly examined, because the difficulty of certain texts may be a key factor in creating a strong aversion to Ancient Greek and there is

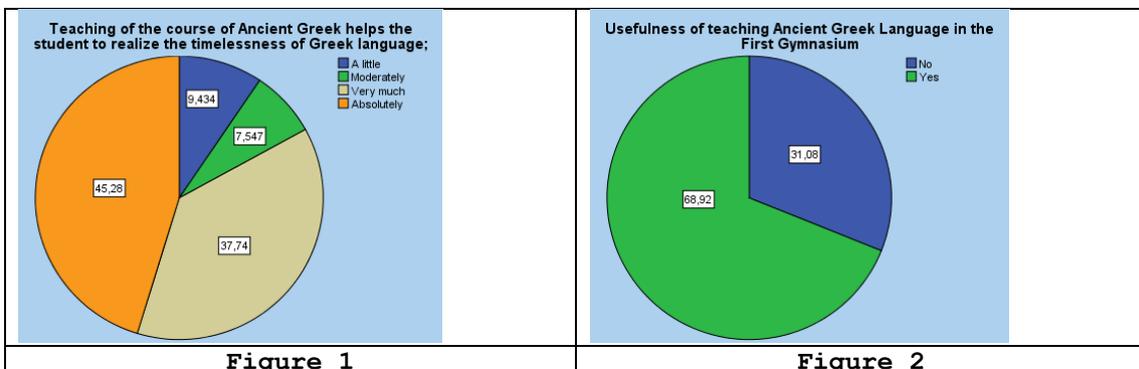
an increased possibility that the student will face Ancient Greek as a foreign language. The results from the survey are those that will give us a strong indication of the degree of difficulty and attractiveness featuring texts.

In order to study the students' and teachers' attitude towards the textbook and the lesson as a whole, two questionnaires were formulated, the one is addressed to students of the first grade of Secondary school and the other one to teachers-philologists who teach the course in this grade and the survey was conducted in 25 schools of Greece. More specifically the research which has been conducted focused on: a. the overall attitude of students and teachers towards the course of Ancient Greek Language (from the original text) in the first grade of Secondary school and b. the functionality of textbooks and applied teaching method.

To ensure maximum reliability and representativeness, the survey was nationwide and was conducted using anonymous questionnaires, which were completed by students of the first grade of Secondary school and philologists who teach the lesson in this class. The secondary schools that took part in the research were selected from the 13 educational regions of the country and the selection was exclusively based on proportional representation of urban, semi-urban, rural and island regions. It should be noted that we were given approval by the Ministry of Education for 39 schools to participate in the research, but only 25 of them agreed and participated in it. The remaining 14 of the 39 schools declared an inability to participate in the survey, a fact that is open to many interpretations. The total participation in the research were 820 students and 50 teachers.

Research results

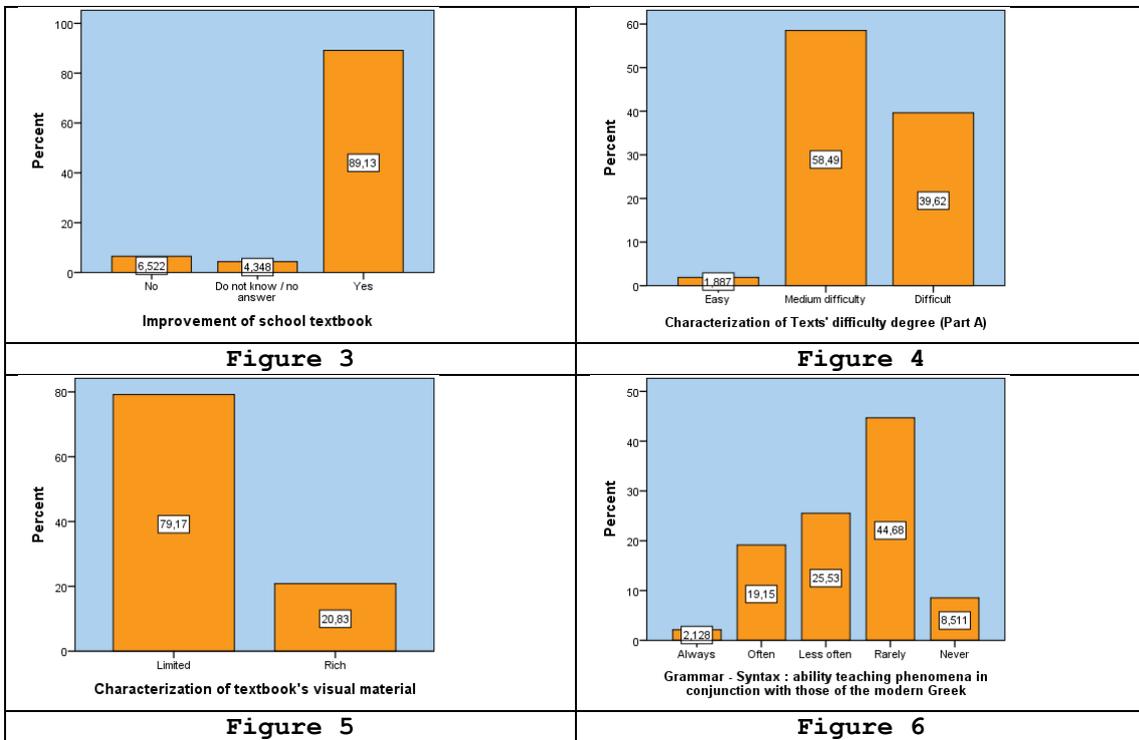
1. As far as their attitude towards the learning of ancient Greek is concerned:
 - . **The teachers** think that the teaching of the course of Ancient Greek at the first grade of Secondary school helps the student:
 - a) To enrich his vocabulary at the rate of 63.34% (Very much: 56.67% and absolutely 6.67%)
 - b) To realize the timelessness of Greek language at a rate of 73.33% (Very much: 37.74% and absolutely: 45.28%) (Figure 1).
 - . **The students** answered positively ("Yes") at a rate of 68.92% when asked if they consider useful the teaching of Ancient Greek language in the first grade of Secondary school. (Figure 2).



2. As for their attitude towards the textbook "Ancient Greek Language" of the 1st grade of Secondary school:

. The teachers:

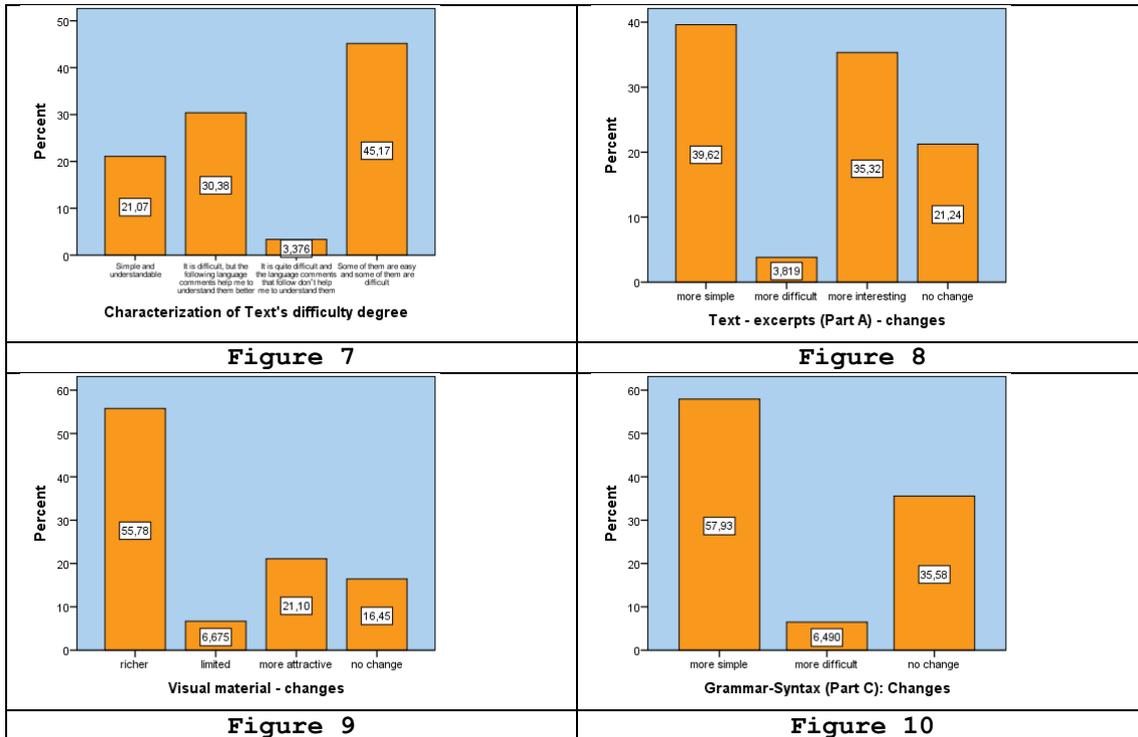
- a) At a rate of 89.13% believe that the textbook needs improvement in certain points (Figure 3).
- b) Characterize the text-excerpts in Part A of each module in the degree of difficulty with respect to the level of student's knowledge in ancient Greek language as follows: 58.5% consider that they are of medium difficulty, 39.6% difficult, while only 1.9% characterize the texts as easy (Figure 4).
- c) 64.2% believe that the appearance of the textbook is not attractive for the student, while 79.17% think that the visual material in the textbook of the course is limited (Figure 5).
- d) To the question whether the textbook enables them to teach grammatical phenomena in conjunction with those of the new Greek phenomena, 25.5% answered "Less often", 44.68% "rarely" and 8.5% "Never" (Figure 6).



The students:

- a) To the question "How do you characterize the text-excerpts of the First Part?" at a rate of 45.2% chose the answer "Some are easy and some are difficult," while 30.38% answered that "they are difficult but the language comments that follow help me to understand them better." (Figure 7)
- b) To the question "What would you like to change in the text-excerpts of the first part of the modules" 39.6% said they would like them to be simpler and 35.3% prefer them to be more interesting. (Figure 8)
- c) To the question "what they would like to change in the visual material (pictures, tables, diagrams)" 55.8% said they would like it to be more extensive and 21% that would be more appealing. (Figure 9)
- d) To the question of what they would change in vocabulary-Etymological of Part B 56.55% answered that they would like it to be simpler and

to the question of what they would change in Grammar-Syntax of Part C 58.29% responded they would like it to be simpler. (Figure 10).



Conclusions

According to our first indicative results of the survey, it comes out that both teachers and students seem to recognize the multiple usefulness of a systematic teaching of Ancient Greek Language in the 1st grade of Secondary school. Particularly important is the fact that students recognize the usefulness of the teaching of ancient Greek language in the first grade of Secondary school, which is shown by the high positive response rate to the corresponding question.

But it is worth highlighting the following: a large percentage of teachers state that: (a) the textbook needs improvement, (b) the appearance of the manual is not attractive and (c) the visual material is limited. In addition, large percentage of teachers considers that the textbook does not give largely the possibility to teach the grammatical phenomena of Ancient Greek in conjunction with those of Modern Greek. And from the students' answers, however, we can draw the conclusion that learning Ancient Greek using the present textbook is not helpful enough, as many of them propose: (a) the change of the texts that are included in the first part of the modules -pointing out that they would like them to be more simple and interesting-, (b) the enrichment of the textbook with additional visual material and (c) the selection of simpler exercises in Part B (Lexical-Etymologically) and Part C (Grammatical-Syntax). It should be noted that the results and conclusions about the method and how to teach the course, as determinants of the teaching effectiveness of the course, are not presented in this paper due to the fact that the processing of all survey data has not been completed yet.

The first results presented above indicate a mismatching of points we identified in the preliminary study of the correspondence between the textbook and the Curriculum. Specifically it comes out from the survey that the visual material of the book is considered limited and the texts of the First Part of each module are characterized as of medium difficulty or difficult. Furthermore, the knowledge of the Modern Greek is not utilized for teaching grammatical and syntactical phenomena of the ancient Greek and, finally, the selection of simpler lexical-etymological and grammatical-syntactical phenomena in the Second and Third Part of each section of the student's book is suggested. All the above should be treated with caution until the completion of processing all the survey data. In general we can say that the book "Ancient Greek Language" of the First grade of Secondary school largely follows the traditional form of a manual. Based initially on the presentation of the text with language comments and interpretive comments and questions of comprehension -which in some sections might include some interdisciplinary content activities- and continues with the presentation of the lexical-semantic and grammatical-syntactical parts, each of which is accompanied by consolidation exercises (and all this accompanied by a limited visual material). To complete our approach, the textbook of ancient Greek, although generally follows the Curriculum, fails in some aspects, creating difficulties in achieving and implementing the goals and objectives set by the institutional texts.

Indicative proposals

Firstly, we believe that the student of the First grade of Secondary school should learn the language phenomena of ancient Greek gradually, i.e. should start with those that are considered as easily approached, close to the Modern Greek and fundamentals such as: the auxiliary verb εἶμι and phenomena that frequently occur and which would be useful and indispensable for an essential learning of ancient Greek (Voskos, 1992: 272-280). We believe that the course should have as its primary purpose to familiarize the student with the language and not the acquisition of phenomena. Considering (a) the aforementioned points from the preliminary study on the comparability of the textbook with the Curriculum and (b) the results presented above from the sample survey on the attitudes of students and teachers towards the textbook and the course of Ancient Greek Language at the first grade of Secondary School, we can proceed to the following suggestions for the improvement of the textbook -always with caution, since the processing of all data has not been so far completed-:

Firstly, we consider that it would be very helpful for the students of 1st grade to have a start-up and be acquainted with short, simple and comprehensive texts, including: various legends, funny stories, paradoxes through which the daily life of ancient professions is appeared, (the market, at home, in the war etc.) or it would be helpful to present terms and axioms either individually or integrated to papers of authors of various sciences such as medicine, mathematics, physics, etc. These texts can be organized into thematic units, which should take into account the needs and interests of students (Papakonstantinou-Voskos-Theodoropoulou, 1992: 263-268).

Moreover, we believe it is very important, when teaching the course, to use visual aids, which play a crucial role in attracting and maintaining the interest of students. Primarily, the textbook is considered as a basic teaching aid. The format, the layout of the

contents, the presence of auxiliary tables, different colors, pictures and expressions, as well as the presence of references to phenomena of grammar and syntax in the corresponding chapters of the books of grammar and syntax, the illustration and generally the whole appearance of the textbook contributes significantly to its attractiveness and to a more effective contact of the student with the ancient Greek language (Kapsalis-Charalampous, 1995: 160-170 • Fountopoulou, 1995: 49). Apart from the form of the textbook, it would be helpful to seek for other additional means, such as the use of the PC, use of educational films, visiting archaeological sites, analysis of ancient art, the construction of characteristic objects of the ancient world, etc. (Giakoumis, 1992: 83-84 • Dellasoudas, 1992: 233).

Furthermore, equally important at the first contact of the student with Ancient Greek is the constant reference and continuous connection -where possible- with the phenomena of the Modern Greek when teaching both the lexical-etymological, and grammatical-syntactical phenomena. It is very useful, when teaching any new element, there to be a parallel to the already acquired knowledge of Modern Greek. Dealing with the etymology is a good way to attract the attention and admiration of students, but also to learn and understand more efficiently the new subject to be taught (Voskos, 1992: 279 • Debut, 1979: 58-61). There are many words that have been kept alive since Homer, and that is a proof that the language despite its evolution maintains most of its elements. Moreover, it is advisable for the students to deal with the etymology of various scientific terms encountered in other subjects, especially those which have ancient Greek origins.

In summary, although the textbook follows the specifications set by the institutional texts, it could be pointed out that there is room for improvement, so that it will be for the student a multimodal tool, which apart from (a) the messages' transmission and the supply of the new knowledge, (b) the cultivation of critical thinking, (c) the interdisciplinary approach to knowledge and (d) the enhancement of dialogue in the classroom, it will allow the student's participation in the learning process, the discovery of knowledge, team cooperation teaching form while seeking to attract his interest and attention through a properly utilization of the artistic and cultural material. To this end, we hope that with the completion of processing of all available survey data we will be able to formulate a comprehensive alternative proposal aiming at upgrading the way of teaching and the textbook and thus enhancing the effectiveness of the Ancient Greek language in the 1st grade of Secondary School.

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