

School Psychology in Greece

1. Context of school psychology

Greece, a peninsula of the Mediterranean Sea, lies at the southeastern part of Europe and shares borders with Turkey, Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Albania. It is made up of more than 3,000 islands and has a population of 10,964,020, with 93% of the inhabitants having Greek origin and 7% who are immigrants. The Greek economy has been characterized by a lot of changes and rapid development, with a gross domestic product in 2004 of US\$226.4 billion. At present the economy in Greece is largely oriented toward tourism, shipping, and commerce.

The Greek educational system is highly centralized and schools follow the National Curriculum set by the Ministry of Education. Within public school, education is free and course books are also provided by the state. However, private schools are also an option if parents are willing to pay tuition fees. Nine years of education (elementary and junior high school) is compulsory for all children, and approximately 95% of children complete the nine years. The educational system include:

- Nursery school (ages 3–4 years)
- Kindergarten nipiagogeio (ages 5–6 years)
- Primary education level: elementary school dimotiko (6 years, ages 6–12)
- Secondary education level: junior high school gymnasio (3 years, ages 13–15)
- High school lykeio (3 years, ages 16–18)
- Technical schools, and tertiary education level: universities and technological educational institutes.

The Greek education is characterized by high pressure on children to succeed on the university entrance exams. Approximately 20,000 children received special education services in 335 special schools and 1,067 resource classes at all educational levels (i.e., primary, secondary, and technical) in 2004. Among these special education students, approximately 67% were classified as learning disabled, about 15% as mentally retarded, 4% with motor difficulties, and another 4% with sensory problems.

2. History and current status of school psychology

Psychology in Greece has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy (Protagoras, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), which introduced many psychological concepts and approaches in their attempts to explain human behavior and communication. Such attempts made them precursors of many theorists in modern psychology. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, independent departments of psychology were established at the University of Crete, the University of Athens, the University of Thessaloniki, and the Panteion University and degrees were offered in psychology.

At present data regarding number, demographic characteristics, roles and functions of school psychologists in different settings is still lacking, although there is a rough estimation of 400 psychologists working in public and private educational settings. The salary of school psychologists working in public schools and centers depends on the number of years of experience. The starting salary is about 1,100 euro per month on average though this gradually increases depending on the years of experience, level of graduate studies, and family status. Psychologists working in the public education system are typically employed on a permanent basis and, as a consequence, attrition rates are very low or nonexistent. Opportunities for career advancement occur, as psychologists can take managerial positions after a set number of years of practice. There are also opportunities for professional development for school psychologists and psychologists may also take a leave of absence to obtain a higher degree.

3. Infrastructure of school psychology

There are two major psychology associations in Greece:

- i. The Association of Greek Psychologists:
 - Published the Ethics Code (Association of Greek Psychologists, 1997), which addresses issues concerning standards of practice.
 - The journal *Psychologika Themata* (Psychological Issues) is also published periodically.
- ii. The Hellenic Psychological Society (affiliate of ISPA):
 - Biannual Panhellenic Conference of Psychological Research, in collaboration with a university department in a different city each time
 - Publication of the peer-refereed journal *Psychologia* (Psychology), published four times a year.
 - Regular newsletter distributed to all members.

4. Preparation of school psychologists

Briefly describe professional preparation of school psychologists in terms of:

- a) Scope of Training (Knowledge & Skill Areas)

Training is offered in developmental psychology, school psychology, developmental neuropsychology, intelligence and learning, social psychology–small group dynamics, psychology of personality–developmental deviations, assessment of cognitive skills, assessment of learning disabilities, assessment of personality and social assessment, assessment of school career guidance, abnormal psychology and special educational needs, counseling psychology, psychological consultation, prevention programs, psychotherapeutic interventions, research methodology and advanced-level statistics, and internship and supervision.
- b) Field Experiences Required

A practicing psychologist in Greece requires a license, as regulated by laws enacted in 1979 and 1998 (278/79, 1331/B/98). This license is generic and requires at least a bachelor's degree in psychology. Currently, there is no specialty licensure for psychologists in Greece.

c) Years of Study

The undergraduate studies leading to a ptychion in psychology (equivalent to a bachelor's degree) are 4 years long. The graduate studies leading to a metaptychiako (equivalent to master's degree) are 2 years, and for the doctoral studies 4 years (the first two years include the master's course). Access to the didaktoriko (equivalent to the doctorate) requires a successful completion of the master's degree (in cases where master's programs run in the respective departments). Attainment of a bachelor's degree typically requires (a) compulsory and optional courses and seminars in psychology (equivalent to 160 credits at the University of Athens), (b) internship in institutions of applied psychology (equivalent to 10 credits at the University of Athens), and (c) a dissertation (equivalent to 10 credits at the University of Athens).

d) Training Programs

Approximately 650 students are enrolled each year in the four psychology departments across the country (University of Crete, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and Panteion University of Social and Political Studies). There are two graduate programs in school psychology leading to a master's degree:

- i. *The Graduate Program of School Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Athens* (started in 1993). Studies last four academic semesters. Attainment of the master's degree typically requires completion of 20 courses, an internship (800 hours in regular and special schools, mental health centers, counseling centers), a master's dissertation, and participation in research and educational activities. Each year, 15 to 20 students are accepted.
- ii. *The Graduate Program of School and Developmental Psychology, Department of Psychology, University of Thessaloniki* (established in 1993). Studies last four academic semesters and include theoretical courses, an internship (800 hours), research, participation in teaching and educational activities, and a dissertation. Seven students are accepted each year. In addition, a graduate program with a major in school psychology recently started at the Department of Psychology, University of Crete.

e) Where Graduates are Typically Employed

Most psychologists tend to be employed by the Ministry of Education, however others tend to work in private schools, mental health centers, special needs centers,

university settings and in private practice. Respectively more psychologists work in urban areas and fewer in suburban areas.

5. Roles, functions, and responsibilities of school psychologists

Typically, a school psychologist's role includes conducting psychoeducational evaluations; counseling individual students; consulting with parents and/or other family members, teachers, and staff; providing direct interventions; conducting staff training; delivering in-service programs; and fulfilling administrative responsibilities.

6. Current practice impacting school psychologists

- i. The field of psychology has rapidly expanded over the recent years and a lot of effort is being put into promoting the discipline of school psychology. As a result of this, there is a need to respond to the challenges, which impact the Greek educational system.
- ii. Providing a specialty license (with a master's degree as a minimum level) and developing strategic planning regarding the provision of psychological services in the mainstream public schools (currently nonexistent). This could be accomplished by either expanding the role of school psychologist at the recently founded Centers for Diagnosis, Assessment, and Support and/or by establishing new services.
- iii. Preparation and training is also a current issue. More graduate programs of school psychology must be established. They must also include all recent developments regarding theory, research, and practice in school psychology, with a particular emphasis on the scientist-practitioner model and evidence-based interventions and the development of models connecting school psychology programs with the school community.
- iv. It is essential to continue the efforts of the associations in the development of a specialty definition, standards of practice, guidelines for the provision of school psychological services, and position statements generated by task forces on advocacy issues for appropriate educational services for all children.