



Defending the Anthropocentric Purpose of Secondary Education: The Role of the Teacher in Open and Distance Education in Greece

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Abstract

The fundamental aim of secondary education ought to be anthropocentric. However, despite legislative intentions mandating secondary education to foster the intellectual and psychophysical development of students, this goal remains unmet. Contemporary schools, influenced by various factors, uphold principles that diminish their human-centred essence. The pedagogical role of the teacher emerges as a critical factor in this discrepancy. Within an open and distance learning framework, the teacher's role transitions towards that of an advisor, enhancing student autonomy. In such settings, the educator acts as a facilitator of learning, focusing on effective communication with students to address their needs, which emerge from active engagement in the learning process. This paper aims to investigate, through a literature review, how the teacher's role in open and distance education environments can cultivate a human-centred dimension in Greek education. Key findings highlight that the advisory role of the teacher includes fostering collaborative learning experiences for students by promoting the creation of online research communities, developing digital educational resources, encouraging self-directed learning and providing them with critical feedback. This role, when effectively executed, promotes student autonomy and active participation in the learning process, thereby enhancing their educational experience and fostering positive sentiments towards their involvement.

Keywords: anthropocentric education, teacher's role, aim of education, open education, distance education

1. Introduction

Secondary education in Greece, as delineated from its foundational objectives and within its institutional framework, is designed to foster the intellectual, emotional, and physical capabilities of students. This is with the aim of ensuring that, irrespective of their gender and background, students emerge as well-rounded individuals (www.minedu.gov.gr). Informally, therefore, the Greek secondary education system espouses a human-centered approach to the

educational process (Verdis, 2002). However, a discrepancy exists between the proclaimed anthropocentric goal of secondary education in Greece and its implementation (Verdis, 2002). This discrepancy manifests as students engage in what is perceived by many as a sterile process of knowledge acquisition, failing to lead to meaningful learning. Consequently, in their adult lives, these individuals encounter difficulties in seamlessly integrating into society (Sakkoula, 2022). This issue is attributed to a variety of factors and is exacerbated by the rapid advancements in technology and globalization (Carter et al., 2017; Zhang, 2019). Additionally, the teacher, despite potentially being an unwitting participant, may contribute to this issue through a teacher-centered role mandated by the institutional nature of Greek education (Serin, 2018; Verdis, 2002).

Contrarily, within the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL), the facilitative role of educators has been identified as conditionally effective in aiding students to master self-directed learning. Consequently, this empowers students to develop the capacity for autonomous learning and, by extension, lifelong learning (Karvounis & Anastasiadis, 2019; Kounatidou et al., 2022). Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated a swift transition to Open and Distance School Education (ODSE), inadvertently demonstrated the potential benefits of such educational approaches (Anastasiades et al., 2021; Anastasiades, 2022; Lichand et al., 2022). This realization emerged as it became apparent that the evolved supportive role of teachers, in enhancing student satisfaction, is indispensable not only during crises but also to refine the educational process overall. This adjustment could potentially lead students to feel more actively engaged in an educational paradigm that is continuously adapted to meet their diverse needs, thereby nurturing a sustained interest in learning (Anastasiades, 2022; Kounatidou et al., 2023; Perry et al., 2020).

The supportive role of educators within the realm of secondary education in Greece presents a complex challenge (Anastasiades, 2022; Kounatidou et al., 2022). This complexity stems, on one hand, from the necessity of a comprehensive pedagogical framework to ensure a seamless transition of students into novel learning environments. Such a framework is critical in delineating its defining characteristics. On the other hand, it involves a significant investment of time as it demands the cultivation of a vision that aligns with the principles of open education, characterized by collaborative and investigative learning approaches (Anastasiades et al., 2021; Hernández-Sellés et al., 2020; Park, 2011). Through such a paradigm shift, there is potential to mitigate and transform one of the critical shortcomings of Greek secondary education—its traditionally teacher-centered nature—into a more "open" form of education. This means fostering an accessible learning process for all participants, thereby not only fulfilling the anthropocentric objectives of education in Greece but also honoring the human right to equal educational opportunity, as established in 1948 (United Nations Human Rights, 1948).

The aim of this paper is to elucidate, via a comprehensive review of the literature, the way educators can embody the human-centred ethos of secondary education in Greece. To this end, the structure of the paper is organized as follows: the second section outlines the methodology employed to fulfill the objectives of this study. The third section delineates the findings from the literature review. Specifically, it explores the attributes of a human-centred educational framework, the features of an "open" school environment, the educator's role within traditional educational settings, the pedagogical implications of the teacher's role in ODSE. The fourth section presents the discussion and the fifth presents the recommendations. The final section, the sixth one, presents the conclusions drawn from the study.

2. Methods

This paper is predicated on a systematic literature review. The selection of international literature for review was conducted through searches in the online library of the Hellenic Open University, the library of the University of Western Macedonia, and various electronic databases accessible via the internet. The databases utilized for this research include Google Scholar, ERIC, Science Direct-Elsevier, Web of Science, and SpringerLink.

Specifically, this review examined articles from journals focused on Open and Distance Learning (ODL) and educational technology, such as "The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology," "Open Education: The Journal for Open and Distance Education and Educational Technology," "Online Learning," "The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning," "Smart Learning Environments." Additionally, pertinent articles from journals across education and other disciplines, including "Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice," "Research, Society and Development," "International Journal of Instructional Media," "Economics of Education Review," "International Journal of Lifelong Education," "Internet and Higher Education," "Journal of Information Systems Education," "International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education," "Information & Management," "Research in Learning Technology," "Journal of Education and Human Development," "International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies," "International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning," "Technology, Pedagogy and Education," and "International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology." Proceedings from international conferences on ODL, organized by the Hellenic Network for Open and Distance Education, were also considered.

Key words including "Human-centred education," "Role of the teacher," "Distance education," "Open and Distance Education," "Open and Distance School Education," and "Pedagogical Framework" guided the search for relevant academic texts. This process resulted in the collection and subsequent selection of international bibliographic materials, encompassing books, e-journal articles, conference papers and proceedings, as well as unpublished dissertations. Initially, a temporal restriction of the past five years was imposed. However, given the scarcity of international research on the topic, the search parameters were expanded to encompass a broader time frame. Ultimately, approximately forty-five (45) out of the eighty (80) literature sources reviewed—including articles, unpublished theses, and books—were chosen for this study, aiming to investigate how the teacher's role can fulfill the human-centered objectives of secondary education in Greece.

The selected sources were coded using specific themes as identified through the literature review. Specifically, through this thematic approach, findings and data from different studies were grouped according to specific themes that were identified and presented in the results. This method was chosen because it is suitable for understanding the existing body of knowledge and comparing different sources in relation to the specific topics under researched (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Coded themes included the characteristics of conventional and open and distance school, the role of the teacher in conventional and open and distance learning and the pedagogical framework in open and distance school education. This coding helped to organise the findings into respective chapters as presented below.

3. Results

3.1 Characteristics of a Human-Centered Education System

A human-centered approach to secondary education emphasizes the holistic development of the learner, aiming not only to enhance academic skills but also to nurture personal, social, and emotional competencies (Gill & Thomson, 2012). This paradigm underscores the importance of a comprehensive education system that caters to the multifaceted growth of students, as advocated by various educational authorities (www.minedu.gov). Achieving such a system necessitates a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including teachers, students, educational institutions, and society at large (Verdis, 2002).

Within the framework of a person-centered approach to secondary education, significant emphasis is placed on fostering the personal development of students, as delineated (Gill & Thomson, 2016). This educational philosophy champions the cultivation of self-esteem, self-awareness, and the enhancement of essential personal competencies, including time management, problem-solving, and empathy. Additionally, it prioritizes the development of students' critical thinking abilities (Gill & Thomson, 2012), advocating for an educational environment that stimulates critical and creative thought processes. Such an environment enables students to adopt more analytical perspectives and cultivate innovative thinking (Alsaleh, 2020).

Moreover, this approach encourages students to engage actively in society, promoting social sensitivity and participation in community activities, thereby shaping individuals into conscientious citizens. An integral component of this educational strategy is the emotional nurturing of students. It focuses on teaching self-regulation, empathy, and effective emotion management skills, which are crucial for building healthy interpersonal relationships and fostering a sense of well-being (Gill & Thomson, 2016). Through these concerted efforts, a person-centered approach to education seeks to prepare students not only for academic success but also for a fulfilling and responsible life within their communities (Sakkoula, 2022).

In stark contrast to these approaches, the modern teacher-centered education system positions the teacher as the pivotal figure within the educational process, as outlined by Verdis (2002). This model assigns a passive role to students, wherein the entirety of the learning process is spearheaded by the teacher through the dissemination of subject matter. Rather than facilitating an environment where students actively discover knowledge, this approach relies on direct transmission, expecting students to absorb and memorize information (Kounatidou et al., 2023). Memorization, to a significant extent, serves as the primary method of assessing student knowledge in secondary education within Greece (Gunes, 2020). Consequently, the evaluation of students in Greek secondary education predominantly measures their ability to recall the information imparted by their teachers. This method does not promote a comprehensive development of students, as it bypasses experiential learning, thus failing to nurture their multifaceted growth (Wurdringer, 2005).

Over time, the consequence of a predominantly memorization-based educational approach is that students may either struggle to apply the knowledge they have acquired or simply forget it, rendering their educational experiences both ineffectual and dissatisfying (Kounatidou et al., 2023). Consequently, they embark on their adult lives equipped with a limited set of skills, hampering their ability to seamlessly integrate into societal roles (Park, 2011). This situation underscores a potential inefficacy within the modern secondary education system in Greece, particularly in achieving its human-centered objectives (Verdis, 2002).

3.2 The Characteristics of Open Schooling

The principles of democracy and equality can be effectively nurtured within an open educational system (Lionarakis, 2008). In contrast, the traditional secondary education system in Greece is characterized as "closed" due to its limited accessibility among other factors (Kounatidou et al., 2023). The evolution towards an open educational paradigm, however, is a complex and protracted endeavor. This is attributed to the fact that educational institutions, despite being influenced by the contemporaneous socio-economic, political, and educational landscapes, exhibit inertia in adapting to changes (Baker, 2017; Kounatidou et al., 2023). Further complicating this transition is the absence of a universally acknowledged definition of 'openness'. Indeed, the concept of openness within the educational context is subject to diverse interpretations, thereby complicating its seamless integration into a universally applicable pedagogical framework, particularly within a schooling environment (Baker, 2017).

Among the many definitions that facilitate the delineation of openness within school education, one pivotal definition conceptualizes an open school as an educational paradigm that acknowledges the inalienable right of every student to access quality education (Sakkoula, 2022; United Nations, 1948). This study delineates an open school as an institution embracing diversity in demographics, ideas, and pedagogical methods, fostering inquiry-based learning, promoting collaborative creativity, upholding social solidarity, and integrating advanced technologies (Anastasiades, 2022; Kounatidou et al., 2023).

Within the context of an open school characterized by exploratory learning and collaborative creativity, the teacher's role emerges as a pivotal element in the orchestration of the educational process, fundamentally contributing to the establishment of a novel open learning ecosystem (Anastasiades, 2022; Kounatidou et al., 2023). Specifically, the embracement of open educational practices necessitates a reevaluation of the teacher's role, aligning it with the facilitation of skill development essential for students' future success in contemporary societies. These skills include autonomy, embracing diversity, and fostering collaborative endeavors (Lionarakis, 2006; Liyoshi & Kumar, 2010). Such competencies are instrumental in enabling students to master the art of self-directed learning, a principle that underscores the teacher's crucial impact not only in open educational settings but also in traditional educational frameworks, thereby advancing the agenda of human-centred education (Anastasiades, 2022; Lionarakis, 2008; Verdis, 2002).

3.3 The Role of the Teacher in Conventional Secondary Education in Greece

Within the contemporary educational landscape of Greece, the pedagogical paradigm significantly emphasizes the teacher's centrality to the learning process. This characteristic delineates the Greek secondary education system as predominantly teacher centered. Such a model positions the teacher as the pivotal figure in the educational experience, wherein they assume the primary responsibility for disseminating knowledge. The teacher's role extends to guiding, instructing, and evaluating students, adhering to a curriculum rigorously outlined by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (www.minedu.gov.gr).

Central to the teacher-centred educational paradigm are methodologies such as lectures, a stringent curriculum, and the assessment of student performance (www.minedu.gov.gr). Lectures are predicated as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge to students (Verdis, 2002). Within this framework, students are relegated to a passive role in their learning journey. This approach not only precludes experiential discovery of knowledge but also

prioritizes memorization as the pinnacle of the learning process, equating it with academic achievement (Verdis, 2002).

In Greece, the domain of education is inherently political, with the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs mandating a standardized and inflexible curriculum across all educational institutions (www.minedu.gov.gr). This policy framework necessitates that educators adhere strictly to a prescribed program, which offers minimal latitude for adaptation to meet the diverse needs of students, thus fostering a uniform educational experience. Consequently, teachers find themselves constrained in their capacity to assess and address the unique requirements of their pupils through direct engagement (Sakkoula, 2022). Such rigidity in the educational process not only formalizes learning but also fails to accommodate the varied needs of all learners, thereby exacerbating existing disparities within the educational system (Black & William, 1998, 2018).

In conclusion, the assessment methodology underscores the teacher-centred paradigm prevalent in educational systems, as evidenced by recent studies (Kounatidou et al., 2023). Students are predominantly evaluated through written examinations that prioritize rote memorization over critical thinking or problem-solving skills (Liyoshi & Kumar, 2010). This approach inherently rewards students who can recall information most effectively, thereby equating academic success with the quantity of memorized content (Kohn, 2011). Such a narrow focus on memorization not only engenders a competitive environment among students but also perpetuates a 'grade culture' within educational institutions (Kounatidou et al., 2023). This competitive ethos, fostered from early education, may detract from the intrinsic values of education—namely, the development of knowledge, critical thinking, and skills essential for becoming independent and socially responsible members of a democratic society (Kounatidou et al., 2023). The ultimate objective of education should be to nurture individuals who are not only self-reliant but also possess a collective consciousness, aligned with the principles of human-centered education (Kounatidou et al., 2023).

3.4 The Pedagogical Dimension of the Educator's Function in ODSE

For educators within secondary education to effectively address the diverse needs of students in an open school environment, it is paramount that they are immersed in and fully comprehend the philosophy, principles, and methodologies underpinning ODSE (Anastasiades, 2022). The ODSE champions a learner-centered approach, positioning teachers in a consultative and supportive role, thereby facilitating students' journey towards autonomous learning (Camacho et al., 2020). Consequently, articulating the pedagogical framework of ODE is essential, enabling educators to attune to the "culture" of ODE within the framework of enhancing their capacity to support student learning (Anastasiades, 2022).

Articulating the pedagogical dimensions of distance learning is imperative for educators to effectively sustain student engagement in the learning process, thereby augmenting and enriching traditional face-to-face instruction (Kumar et al., 2021). Within this framework, distance learning emerges as a pivotal conduit for re-establishing and enhancing the student-teacher connection, progressively fostering the reinvigoration of interpersonal communication among students, or what is termed as 'social presence' (Kear et al., 2014). Concurrently, it aids students in re-engaging with critical aspects of the curriculum, placing emphasis on pedagogical strategies aimed at teaching students the methodologies of learning, referred to as 'cognitive presence' (Turula, 2018). Ultimately, educators are tasked with facilitating students' interaction with learning materials and promoting collaborative knowledge construction, with

the paramount objective of nurturing self-regulated learning capabilities, denoted as 'instructional presence' (Lehman & Conceicao, 2010).

The above describes the dimensions of a basic model of distance learning which is the Community of Inquiry (Garrison et al, 2000; Sidiropoulou & Mavroidis, 2019). This demonstrates how this role could be implemented gradually if the necessary conditions are met and by helping to 'open up' the conventional school by first modifying the role of the teachers and giving them new perspectives to be effective regarding the differentiated needs of students and, by extension, of secondary schooling (Anastasiades, 2022; Kounatidou et al., 2023).

4. Discussion

The pedagogical framework of distance learning, as encapsulated by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, offers substantial support for educators in enhancing their effectiveness within a human-centered secondary education milieu (Anastasiades, 2022). This framework fosters an environment where educators can cultivate collaborative and immersive learning experiences, thereby facilitating comprehensive student development (Lionarakis, 2020). Within such a pedagogical context, educators are positioned to promote the establishment of online communities of inquiry among students. These communities serve as platforms for students to discuss and collaboratively address issues and challenges related to their coursework, fostering a collective problem-solving approach (Hayashi et al., 2020; Hrastinski, 2008).

Additionally, educators will possess the capability to guide students in the development of digital educational resources, including videos, presentations, and electronic documents, which can be disseminated within their community. This initiative is poised to foster active engagement and creativity among students, attributes that were notably diminished during the pandemic period (Marshalsey & Sclater, 2020). Indeed, teachers could establish online forums, creating virtual learning environments that emulate the interactive and communal aspects of traditional, in-person educational settings (Garrison, 2007; Lehman & Conceicao, 2020). Within these forums, students are encouraged to share insights, pose questions, and engage in discourse, thereby cultivating an interactive educational sphere. This approach addresses a significant challenge observed during the pandemic: the pronounced reticence among students, which hindered participatory learning (Carter, 2001).

Within a school's community of inquiry framework, educators have the capability to oversee student activities, providing critical feedback on both the level of engagement and the substantive quality of the discussions that take place (Karvounis & Anastasiadis, 2019). This monitoring and feedback mechanism is crucial in distance learning contexts, where the overarching goal is to empower students with the skills necessary for self-directed learning. The evaluation of their activities plays a significant role in fostering this autonomy, contributing to their overall educational development (Kounatidou et al., 2023).

In addition to facilitating online learning, educators can motivate students to pursue learning opportunities beyond the confines of the virtual classroom (Karvounis & Anastasiadis, 2019). By encouraging independent research and self-directed learning, teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students towards one of the quintessential aims of education: the lifelong intellectual and personal growth of individuals (Garrison, 2006).

The future challenge emerging from this study involves the development of an open school in secondary education that can function complementarily, rather than in opposition to, the

existing conventional secondary education in Greece (Kounatidou et al., 2022). To implement this effectively, an appropriate pedagogical framework is required that supports not only the role of teachers but also the necessary changes that will enable both teachers and students to embrace a new culture centered on the human-centered role of education in Greece (Kounatidou et al., 2023).

5. Recommendations

This study represents a preliminary step in exploring the relationship between the pedagogical dimension of open and distance schooling through the community of inquiry model and the human-centered nature of secondary education in Greece (Garcia, 2023). As this is a theoretical approach, the effectiveness of such a project has not yet been explored empirically or practically. Furthermore, this study focused on the relation between conventional and open and distance education. It is possible that other relations could also serve the human-centred goal of education. It could, therefore, be possible in the future to study the way the human-centered purpose of secondary education is served internationally, the way open and distance education is implemented internationally and teachers' and students' views on the effectiveness of similar projects on students' learning (Sewart et al., 2020). Finally, the institutional coexistence of conventional and distance education is proposed, as distance education is not a panacea for all the problems of conventional education, so that the different needs of students can be met in a context of providing perhaps learning opportunities (Kounatidou et al., 2023).

6. Conclusion

The exploration of the pedagogical dimensions of ODSE is deemed crucial for enabling educational institutions to respond adeptly to exigent circumstances, such as pandemics, or during instances where traditional methodologies are identified as ineffective. This approach facilitates the establishment of innovative strategies aimed at fulfilling educational objectives, thereby ensuring the efficient operation of schools to the benefit of students and all stakeholders involved. Consequently, it underscores the principle that education should serve as a conduit for the holistic development of individuals, accessible to all, irrespective of the prevailing circumstances (Anastasiades, 2022).

The integration of the pedagogical principles of ODSE holds the potential to further the dual objectives of transforming schools into institutions that embody the ethos of human-centered education and uphold the principles of human rights within educational contexts (Lionarakis, 2020). The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, recognized for its efficacy in engaging youth within remote learning environments, could serve as the foundational pedagogical model for schools (Anastasiades, 2022; Garrison, 2007). Adopting this model may not only diminish the prevailing teacher-centred educational approaches in secondary education in Greece but also transform the school into a dynamic and enriching learning space for students (Anastasiades et al., 2021). This paradigm shift aims to create educational environments that are not only effective in fostering learning but also enjoyable for students, thereby realizing the vision of a more inclusive and supportive educational system (Lionarakis, 2020).

This progression could potentially facilitate a seamless transition for all stakeholders towards innovative learning environments, concurrently cultivating a novel perspective on the educator's role and, by extension, the function of educational institutions in Greece. Educators are likely to benefit from the support offered by a clearly defined pedagogical framework,

which may alleviate their apprehensions regarding their professional efficacy (Anastasiades, 2022). Moreover, the establishment of such a framework might address societal concerns regarding the viability of implementing an open school concept, whilst underscoring its indispensability within a human-centered educational paradigm. It posits that the aspirations of human-centered education could, in part, be achieved through the principles of open education and the methodologies employed in distance learning, which collectively represent a comprehensive educational model.

However, the adoption of a new educational culture is a gradual process and may encounter resistance (Kounatidou et al., 2023). This resistance stems from the challenge of embracing changes in every sector of society, particularly in education, which has traditionally operated in a 'closed' manner in Greece (Kounatidou et al., 2023). Additionally, the introduction of distance education in secondary education in Greece, unlike in higher education, represents a novel undertaking. Practically, this entails the need for all stakeholders in education to adapt to its methodologies. The pedagogical framework proposed, particularly through the dimensions of the community of inquiry, may pose challenges as it requires educators to comprehend the workings of distance education (Kounatidou et al., 2022). Looking ahead, the establishment of an open school aligned with the principles of human-centred education may contribute to advancing advocacy for human rights in education.

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