27 - 29 November 2026 Vienna , Austria

Teaching Greek as a Second Language to Incarcerated Refugees: Functional Literacy and Critical Pedagogy in Prison Education

Alexandra Tsarkou , Maria Ivrinteli

University of Crete, Greece

Abstract

This study examines the educational provision of Greek as a second language to adult refugees who entered European territory and are currently detained in Greek prisons. The educational intervention consists of fifty-hour language courses designed to promote functional literacy and facilitate learners' social and institutional integration within the prison environment. The primary objective of the program is to develop learners' communicative competence in Greek at a level that enables them to meet their everyday needs within the correctional setting, interact effectively with prison staff and fellow inmates, and understand and exercise their rights in relation to legal and administrative procedures. Particular emphasis is placed on the acquisition of practical language skills that support self-advocacy and informed participation in matters concerning their legal status. The program is grounded in the principles of Critical Pedagogy, emphasizing dialogue, critical consciousness, and learner empowerment, while challenging asymmetries of power inherent in both linguistic acquisition and the carceral educational context. The research is conducted at the Chania Correctional Facility, Crete, and involves twenty incarcerated refugees originating from Sudan. The study explores the contribution of Greek language instruction to the development of functional literacy among detained refugee populations and highlights the role of prison education in promoting linguistic empowerment and social inclusion.

Keywords: Adults; Empowerment; Prisoners; Social Institutional