Initial French language teacher education policy in Greece and curriculum evaluation among student teachers of FLE

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This paper presents initial language teacher education policy adopted in Greece and describes a study which examines student teachers' of FLE (Français Langue Étrangère) perception of their initial teacher education and its contribution to their future professional life. The sample comprised 67 student teachers in their fourth year of studies for a bachelor degree in the department of French language and literature in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece. Data were collected through questionnaires which included both a structured and an open-ended part. The questionnaire's content was based on the European Profile for Language Teacher Education – a Frame of Reference (Kelly et al 2004), which identifies 40 items as important elements in foreign language teacher education. Prominent among the findings is student teachers' perception that the current academic curriculum should place more emphasis on teaching practice, on ways of reinforcing communication with other universities and research institutes, and on using the European Language portfolio and the European Portfolio for student teachers of languages (Newby et al. 2007). The paper concludes by proposing ways of improving the existing French language teacher education degree program and actions at national level for restructuring language teacher education policy in Greece.

1 Introduction

This study aims to illuminate the policy for initial French language teacher education adopted in Greece and to present student teachers' perception of the academic curriculum of language teacher initial education in the French language and literature department of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The study observes student teachers' opinions regarding the 40 key elements proposed by the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – a Frame of*

reference (Kelly et al. 2004), hereafter referred to as *EPLTE*. The study focused on student teachers' views on the teacher education program based on the 40 key elements proposed by the *EPLTE*, at a time where there is a global concern about the perception of teacher education, in Europe and worldwide. This concern coincides with a growing demand for reform in teacher education in Greece which incites universities to reform their teacher education programs. For this reason, it was interesting to examine how student teachers perceived the initial teacher education program and its contribution to their prospective professional life. The findings shed light on the relationship between the teacher education program and the teachers' expectations and professional aspirations. In addition, the study revealed the world of the prospective French language teacher, including their sentiment of self-efficacy in teaching, content and pedagogical knowledge they estimate to have acquired during their studies, and their motivation to engage in teaching as a profession. Finally, it attempted to ascertain if student teachers' answers correspond to the answers given by two educators of the school of French language and literature.

1.1 Theoretical Background

Language policy has been defined as "the deliberate choices made by governments or other authorities with regard to the relationship between language and social life" (Djité 1994: 63). The place and nature of language in the area of education is one key dimension of the relationship between language and social life about which governments make such deliberate choices. This aspect of language policy is conventionally known as language-in-education policy (Baldauf 1990; Kaplan & Baldauf 2002; Paulston & McLaughlin 1994) or acquisition planning (Cooper 1989).

The key document for language policy is the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (Council of Europe 2001). The CEFRL is intended to provide a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. The CEFRL acknowledges the interrelationship between methodology, curriculum, materials and assessment and argues that questions of method are important within the context of language policy and proposes a comprehensive approach, "presenting all options in an explicit and transparent way and avoiding advocacy or dogmatism" (Council of Europe 2001: 142). In accordance to the language in education policy there has been a growing concern over the past decade about initial language teacher education across European countries in order to help language teachers develop a European frame of mind (Willems 2002). The report *The Training of Teachers of a Foreign Language: Developments in Europe (*Kelly et al. 2002) proposes ways in which language teacher training can be strengthened by actions at European level, and sets the grounding principles for the *European Profile of Language Teacher Education – a Frame of Reference* (Kelly et al. 2004) that aims to serve as a checklist for the existing language teacher education programs and a guideline for those still being developed. In 2003, the European Centre of Modern Languages published the book *Facing the future: Language educators across Europe* that examines the future of language education and its impact on initial language teacher education. *The Common European Principles for Teacher Competences* (European Commission 2005) and the Commission's Communication *Improving the quality of Teacher Education* (2007) have identified teacher education as a key factor in securing the quality of education in

European countries. Finally, the recently released *European Union Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism* (European Commission 2011) aims to develop a coherent framework for multilingual policy in the European Union as part of a larger political agenda for "bringing Europe closer to its citizens and strengthening a pan-European identity in harmony with national and regional identities" (ibid: 5) and stresses the significant role of language teacher training. Teacher education has thus moved from representing a national concern towards becoming part of the discourse around Europeanization. In this context, this paper sheds light on the policy for initial language teacher education adopted in Greece in an attempt to make possible a Europe-wide mapping of skills, competences, and knowledge that the current training systems consider necessary for language teachers in Europe. The process of registering the skills, competences and knowledge that different European academic curricula integrate during language teachers' initial training could contribute towards the introduction of a "European Benchmark Statement for Language Teacher Training" (Kelly et al. 2002) by adapting a common European language teacher education policy between member states.

1.2 European Profile for Language Teacher Education – a Frame of Reference/EPLTE

The *EPLTE* (Kelly et al. 2004) proposes a toolkit for language teacher education in the 21st Century. It was created by a team comprising teacher trainers from the United Kingdom in consultation with a group of international teacher educators. It is also important to add that the *EPLTE* is not a mandatory set of rules, but it is rather a voluntary frame of reference that policy makers, teacher trainers and language educators are recommended to use and eventually adapt to their needs and incorporate in already existing initial and in-service language teacher education programs. "*One way of thinking about the EPLTE is as a toolkit that allows institutions to improve the programmes they offer. Another way is to see it as a set of building blocks that policy makers, teacher educators, teachers and trainee teachers can assemble to support their provision of foreign language teacher education. Some of the EPLTE items could form 'add-ons' to existing teacher education programmes. However, one of the key concerns of the EPLTE is to promote an integrated approach to language teacher education*" (p. 19). It presents 40 key elements in language teacher education courses that "deal with the **structure** of educational courses, the **knowledge and understanding** central to foreign language teaching, the diversity of teaching and learning **strategies and skills**, and the kinds of **values** language teaching should encourage and promote" (p. 4). The present study takes these 40 key elements as its starting point in order to examine if they have been incorporated into the curriculum of the department of French language and literature of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and attempts to discern the extend that they influence the teacher language education policy adopted in Greece.

1.3 Initial language teacher education policy in Greece

Language teachers in Greece follow a four-year Bachelor degree corresponding to 240 ECTS points in Universities and they specialize in one language. There are two Universities that offer initial language teacher education degree programs for perspective language teachers; the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The

department of French language and literature in the Faculty of Philosophy in both universities offer a four-year bachelor degree program in French language and literature that qualifies graduates to teach in primary and secondary publicly funded schools, to teach in private sector (schools, language learning institutes), to follow a career as researchers/academics, to work as translators and/or interpreters, to work in publishing houses and other private and public companies. Up to now, those wishing to work as French teachers follow the four-year bachelor degree program in French language and literature, which, is considered in Greece a per se teacher education degree program, being the only prerequisite in Greek teacher education system qualifying French teachers, though it also offers other career paths. The OECD's *Country Background Report for Greece* (2004: 64) remarks that "*to become a secondary school teacher in what can be considered as the core school disciplines, i.e. of language (including foreign languages), mathematics, science, religious studies, art, physical education, home economics and music-it is sufficient for one to obtain a first degree in the relevant field of specialization by the corresponding university department. Minimum attendance for the award of such a university degree is 4 years. A reform proposed in 1997 (Law 2527/97) stipulated the need to improve the quality of teacher training and thus announced the introduction of an additional compulsory year of professional training for all future teachers in secondary education*". This reform originally planned to come into effect in 2003, has not yet been implemented.

Holders of a bachelor degree wishing to work in publicly funded schools need to succeed in the competitive ASEP[1] national exam. The "ASEP" written contest examines the candidates on the content knowledge of the language they wish to teach, on the didactics of the language and on pedagogy. It is worth mentioning that the candidate teacher participates in the "ASEP" contest without having attended a school-based teaching practice during or after the university studies and preparation for the "ASEP" contest is left entirely to the candidate's discretion. At present, the only chance for prospective language teachers to participate in actual teaching practice is via some courses offered by university foreign-language departments, which in most cases are elective and therefore not all prospective teachers follow them. Newly appointed teachers have direct access to classrooms with inadequate training for classroom management. According to Eurydice (2002) Greece has been somewhat unusual in providing initial training to teachers of an exclusively general nature for most of 30 years; the initial education of secondary teachers is of general nature and does not include any systematic, sufficient or well-organized pedagogical training. In addition, recent research (Karatsiori 2013) has shown that initial language teacher training in Greece requires the fewest study years when compared to other European countries.

1.4 Department of French language and literature, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

The department of French language and literature of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki comprises three sections: Linguistics and didactics, literature, and translation studies. Each section offers a variety of courses. For successful completion of the Bachelor course of study, a student is required to attend a minimum of 58 courses that correspond to 240 ECTS units over a period of at least eight semesters (the period of study may be extended), at the rate of approximately 30 ECTS units per semester. The balance of ECTS units is as follows:

- 40 core courses that comprise 19 courses from the linguistics and didactics section, 15 courses from the literature section, and 6 courses from the translation section.
- 6 basic courses
- 8 specialization courses focusing on one of the three sections of the department and a research project or, alternatively, two more specialization courses
- 3 elective courses that may derive from courses taken, at the student's own discretion, from either elective courses within the French language and literature department or from other related departments chiefly within the Faculty of Philosophy (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki 2011).

In 2011, school-based teaching practice courses at the department of French language and literature do not constitute mandatory courses for all student teachers. Only a minority of students attend and participate in a school-based teaching practice course. From 2013-14, it is foreseen that all student teachers will attend at least one school-based teaching practice course during the fourth year of their studies.

2 Method

The basic principles of descriptive and inductive statistics were used for processing the findings. The software PASW Statistics 18 was used for the analysis of data. The method of analysis used was a mixed method research. The term mixed methods research is used to refer to all procedures collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in the context of a single study (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). Researchers have been conducting mixed methods research for several decades, and referring to it by an array of names. Early articles on the application of such designs have referred to them as multi-method, integrated, hybrid, combined, and mixed methodology research (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007: 6). Some researchers have taken issue with the term mixed methods to describe research designs that consciously blend both approaches within or across the stages of the research process (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). They suggest the term mixed model be used to differentiate research designs integrating qualitative and quantitative data from those who merely employ both types of data. These include transformative designs that change one form of data into another (most often qualitative to quantitative data) so that the data collected by mixed methods designs can be merged (Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989; Onwuegbuzie and Teddlie 2003). In order to offer the chance to student teachers' to evaluate the academic curriculum, the 40 key elements of the *EPLTE* were quantitized by the use of a 5-point Likert scale. The 5-point Likert scale classified student teachers' opinion by type (1. No importance 2. Low importance 3. Moderate importance 4. High importance 5. Very high importance.); student teachers could thus express their positive or negative views regarding the integration of the 40 key elements into the curriculum. The responses to the open-ended question were analyzed qualitatively through content analysis, guided by the grounded theory approach (Straus and Corbin 1990) which focuses on discovering categories of content which emerge from the data rather than looking for pre-determined categories.

2.1 Participants

The sample, collected by random sampling, consisted of 67 students of the department of French language and literature of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece. Student teachers received the questionnaires in their classes. The questionnaires were distributed to student teachers that were toward the end of the second semester of their fourth year of studies or to those that had gone beyond the fourth and final year of studies, without accumulating the necessary ECTS points allowing graduation. This was intended to allow for a retrospection evaluation of the fourth year, in addition to the previous three. The participants remained anonymous and were assured that the data would be used for research purposes only.

2.2 Instrument

The main instrument of data collection was the survey questionnaire[2]. The distribution of the questionnaires was completed by May 2011, at the end of the spring semester of the academic year 2010-11. The questionnaire comprises three parts. The first part refers to the personal information of student teachers. The second part, which is divided into five sections, includes the 40 key elements presented in the *EPLTE*. It should be noted that, while the *EPLTE* identifies 40 key elements that are classified in four sections, a fifth section was added to the questionnaire, which focuses on teaching practice and includes the items that concern the teaching practice of student teachers, and which are scattered among the previous sections of the *EPLTE*. The third and final part of the questionnaire aimed at illuminating student teachers' views regarding their plans after graduation and their proposals for the improvement of the current curriculum.

3 Results

Personal Information of the participants
89.4% of the participants were women and 10.6% men. 67% were 20 to 22 years old, 18.4% 23 to 25 and 14.4% are above 26. The 63.3% attended the eighth and final semester of their studies, while the 36.7% had exceeded the normal length of studies.

3.1 Key elements: Structure

Table 1 incorporates the key elements that concern the structure of language teacher education programs and records the opinion of student teachers concerning the importance that the academic curriculum gave in 13 key elements via an evaluation scale. Student teachers were not asked about the key elements 2, 9, 11 and 12, since they do not refer to the quality of the curriculum content, but they concern the overall organization of language teacher education and refer to policies adopted by either the University itself or by other educational authorities.

For example, the key element 2 of the *EPLTE*: "The flexible and modular delivery of initial and in-service education" refers to education programs that have at least one of the following characteristics (Kelly et al. 2004: 24):

"i. Multiple entry points throughout the academic year;
ii. Courses available through distance learning and online media, complemented by online tutoring;
iii. Programs that have modules taking place in parallel to highlight the links between them;
iv. The possibility of studying part-time, in the evening or at weekends."

The structure of the French language and literature academic curriculum does not include any of the aforementioned characteristics. It envisages, though, the possibility of extending the normal duration of studies by three years and in some cases even more. Regarding the "key element 9: A European-level evaluation framework for initial and in-service teacher education programs, enabling accreditation and mobility", the academic education program adopts an accreditation system that is directly linked to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) system. As for the "key element 11: Ongoing education for teacher educators", teacher educators in the French language and literature department have access to new learning environments and though their participation in international conferences and workshops is encouraged by the University, it does not lead to a further qualification, as recommended by the *EPLTE* but simply reinforces their academic development. Finally, there is no provision for the "key element 12: Training for school-based mentors in how to mentor" neither by the university nor by other educational authorities. Moreover, given the fact that teaching practice is not obligatory for all student teachers in the current curriculum the key elements 3 and 4 were answered only by those having attended a teaching practice course, and are presented in table 5.

Table 1. Evaluation: Structure.

How do you characterize the importance that the curriculum gave on the following elements?	1. No importance	2. Low importance	3. Moderate importance	4. High Importance	5. Very High importance
1. A curriculum that integrates academic study and the practical experience of teaching.	2.7%	4.5%	30.4%	49.1%	13.4%
2. *The flexible and modular delivery of initial and in-service education.*	-	-	-	-	-
5. Experience of an intercultural and multicultural environment.	7.1%	28.6%	42.9%	17%	4.5%
6. Participation in links with partners abroad, including visits, exchanges or ICT links.	46.8%	31.5%	16.2%	4.5%	0.9%

7. A period of work or study in a country or countries where the trainee's foreign language is spoken as native.	9.2%	21.1%	36.7%	22.9%	10.1%
8. The opportunity to observe or participate in teaching in more than one country.	10.2%	21.1%	36.7%	22.9%	9.1%
9. *A European-level evaluation framework for initial and in-service teacher education programs, enabling accreditation and mobility.*	-	-	-	-	-
10. Continuous improvement of teaching skills as part of in-service education.	12%	12%	44%	24%	8%
11. *Ongoing education for teacher educators.*	-	-	-	-	-
12. *Training for school-based mentors in how to mentor.*	-	-	-	-	-
13. Close links between trainees who are being educated to teach different languages.	38%	37.8%	16.7%	6.1%	1.5%

Since spending a period abroad is not obligatory for all students, there were two additional questions asking participants if they had spent a period of work or study in a country where the trainee's foreign language is spoken as native and if they attended a school based teaching practice course during their stay abroad. It turns out that the majority, 51 individuals (77.3%), declared that they have not spent any part of their studies abroad, and only 15 individuals (22.7%) have participated in an exchange program abroad. Only 1 individual (6.7%) had the possibility of observing and participating in a school based teaching practice course during his/her stay abroad. It is worth noting that despite this low percentage of student teachers having spent a period of work or studies abroad, the 36.7% considered that the curriculum gave moderate importance in spending a period of work or study in a country where the trainee's foreign language is spoken as native and in the opportunity to observe or participate in teaching in more than one country; making it possible to assume that even though the department of French language and literature encouraged student teachers participation in exchange programs, it did not adopt the appropriate resourcing policy to fund students' stay abroad and actually influence their decision to spend a period of studies or work abroad.

3.2 Key elements: Knowledge and Understanding

The key elements referring to knowledge and understanding based on the *EPLTE* are demonstrated in table 2. The "key element 14: Training in language

teaching methodologies, and in state-of-the-art classroom techniques and activities" is presented in table 5.

Table 2. Evaluation: Knowledge and Understanding.

How do you characterize the importance that the curriculum gave on the following elements?	1. No importance	2. Low importance	3.Moderate importance	4. High Importance	5. Very high importance
15. Training in the development of a critical and enquiring approach to teaching and learning.	6%	28.4%	46.3%	19.4%	0%
16. Initial teacher education that includes a course in language proficiency and assesses trainees' linguistic competence.	9%	17.9%	44.8%	25.4%	3%
17. Training in information and communication technology for pedagogical use in the classroom.	4.5%	29.9%	46.3%	14.9%	4.5%
18. Training in information and communication technology for personal planning, organization and resource discovery.	6%	19.4%	40.3%	28.4%	6%
19. Training in the application of various assessment procedures and ways of recording learners' progress.	11.9%	22.4%	41.8%	20.9%	3%
20. Training in the critical evaluation of nationally or regionally adopted curricula in terms of aims, objectives and outcomes.	12.1%	27.3%	47%	10.6%	3%
21. Training in the theory and practice of internal and external program evaluation.	3%	23.9%	44.8%	25.4%	3%

Moderate importance is the prevailing answer among student teachers. It is, also, noteworthy, that the second choice of respondents in the key elements 15,

17, 19 and 20 is "low importance". This remark could lead to the conclusion that though student teachers' acquired sufficient insights for developing their "Knowledge and understanding" during their training, there is still room for improvement.

3.3 Key elements: Strategies and Skills

Table 3 illustrates student teachers' evaluation of the key elements referring to *Strategies and Skills*, as presented in the *EPLTE*. The "key element 29: Training in peer observation and peer review" is presented in table 5. An additional question (34a) was added to the questionnaire concerning the training in the use of the *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages* – *EPOSTL* (Newby et al. 2007). This item is not integrated into the 40 Key elements of the *EPLTE*, most probably because at the time the *EPLTE* was produced the Council of Europe had not published the *EPOSTL* yet. The *EPOSTL* encourages student teachers to reflect on their didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages and enables them to monitor their progress and to record their experiences of teaching. Since the two *European Portfolios* share a common rationale underneath that promotes the notion of self-evaluation and lifelong learning, this supplementary question could be considered as a parameter to be integrated in the key element 34.

Table 3. Evaluation: Strategies and skills.

How do you characterize the importance that the curriculum gave on the following elements?	1. No importance	2. Low importance	3.Moderate importance	4. High Importance	5. Very high importance
22. Training in ways of adapting teaching approaches to the educational context and individual needs of learners.	9%	28.4%	46.3%	14.9%	1.5%
23. Training in the critical evaluation, development and practical application of teaching materials and resources.	3%	23.9%	44.8%	25.4%	3%
24. Training in methods of learning to learn.	3%	23.9%	50.7%	19.4%	3%

25. Training in the development of reflective practice and self-evaluation.	6%	25.4%	41.8%	25.4%	1.5%
26. Training in the development of independent language learning strategies.	7.5%	31.3%	34.3%	25.4%	1.5%
27. Training in ways of maintaining and enhancing ongoing personal language competence.	7.6%	25.8%	40.9%	24.2%	1.5%
28. Training in the practical application of curricula and syllabuses.	9%	28.4%	46.3%	14.9%	1.5%
30. Training in developing relationships with educational institutions in appropriate countries.	21%	41.8%	20.8%	9%	1.5%
31. Training in action research.	6%	23.9%	44.8%	23.9%	1.5%
32. Training in incorporating research into teaching.	19.4%	29.9%	38.8%	10.4%	1.5%
33. Training in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).	85.1%	14.9%	0	0	0
34. Training in the use of the European Language Portfolio for self-evaluation.	27.3%	37.9%	27.3%	7.6%	0
(34a). Training in the use of the European Portfolio for student teachers of languages.	82.1%	17.9%	0	0	0

As shown in table 3, the majority of student teachers' characterized the importance that the curriculum gave to most of the key elements as of "moderate importance". The majority of student teachers estimated that the curriculum they attended gave low (41.8%) and no (21%) importance to the key element "30: Training in developing relationships with educational institutions in appropriate countries". In addition, according to student teachers' opinion the curriculum gave no importance to the key elements "33: Training in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)", and "34a. Training in the use of the EPOSTL", and low importance to"34: Training in the use of the ELP for self-evaluation". Once again, it is observed that student teachers gave a rather reserved evaluation for the key elements referring to the enhancement of the aforementioned skills and strategies, making it possible to assume that the curriculum adopted by the French department of Aristotle University should be reorganized or at least reinforced. For instance, new courses could be introduced into the curriculum that could inform students about innovative methodologies in language teaching (CLIL and others), European Institutions (i.e. European Center for Modern Language, Language Policy Division of the Council of Europe etc.), tools (i.e. ELP, EPOSTL) and ways of creating a network or/and a community with other language professionals.

3.4 Key elements: Values

Table 4 includes the 6 key elements referring to values that the *EPLTE* recommends for language teacher education programs to promote and encourage to the prospective language teachers.

Table 4. Evaluation: Values

How do you characterize the importance that the curriculum gave on the following elements?	1. No importance	2. Low importance	3.Moderate importance	4. High Importance	5. Very high importance
35. Training in social and cultural values.	6%	31.3%	28.4%	26.9%	7.5%
36. Training in the diversity of languages and cultures.	9%	28.4%	32.8%	26.9%	3%
37. Training in the importance of teaching and learning about foreign languages and cultures.	7.5%	31.2%	31.4%	25.4%	4.5%
38. Training in teaching European citizenship.	17.9%	37.3%	29.9%	13.4%	1.5%
39. Training in team-working, collaboration and networking, inside and outside the	23.9%	35.8%	26.9%	13.4%	0

immediate school context.					
40. Training in the importance of life-long learning.	11.9%	37.2%	37.4%	9%	4.5%

It is noted that according to the majority of student teachers' opinion the curriculum did not give adequate importance to teaching European citizenship and to team-working, collaboration and networking, inside and outside the immediate school context.

3.5 Teaching practice

The key elements that are related with teaching practice are depicted in table 5. The *EPLTE* does not recognize a separate part for key elements referring to teaching practice; the key elements presented in table 5 are included in the previous sections (Structure, Knowledge and Understanding, Strategies and Skills). Since, at present, the teaching practice constitutes an elective and not a mandatory course at department of French language and literature of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the following questions were answered only by students who had attended a teaching practice course. Only 25 (15.2%) student teachers of the total sample (67 student teachers) attended a teaching practice course and replied to the following questions.

Table 5. Evaluation: Key elements concerning teaching practice.

How do you characterize the importance that the curriculum gave on the following elements?	1. No importance	2. Low importance	3.Moderate importance	4. High Importance	5. Very high importance
3. An explicit framework for teaching practice (stage/practicum).	20%	16%	28%	32%	4%
4. Working with a mentor and understanding the value of mentoring.	20%	12%	20%	32%	16%
14. Training in language teaching methodologies, and in state-of-the-art classroom techniques and activities.	12%	12%	44%	24%	8%
22. Training in ways of adapting teaching approaches to the educational context and individual needs of learners.	16%	16%	40%	20%	8%

29. Training in peer observation and peer review.	16%	16 %	32%	20%	16%

The majority of student teachers who have attended a teaching practice course evaluated it favourably by characterizing the importance given to all key elements of "moderate" and "high importance". However positive the evaluation of the teaching practice course may be, the fact that teaching practice does not constitute a mandatory course, it is a 2 to 4 hour weekly course and it only lasts for a semester, arouses questions of whether it could be comparable with the teaching practice schemes integrated into other countries initial teacher training programmes. In other European countries (i.e. Luxembourg, Switzerland, Finland, United Kingdom etc.) teaching practice duration varies from 1year to 2 years and, in most cases, it lasts more than three hours per day.

3.6 Student teachers perception and recommendations for improving the curriculum

The last section of the questionnaire asks student teachers to express their views for their future, their professional or academic aspirations and to propose ways of improving the academic curriculum they attended. The majority of participants (51.5%) held the view that the curriculum they attended did not equip them with the necessary skills, strategies, knowledge and values for entering the teaching profession and 56.1% declares to be moderately satisfied from the overall content and structure of the curriculum. When asked to recommend what nature of courses would improve the curriculum, the 37.3% proposed the introduction of more teaching practice courses, the 29% proposed didactic courses, the 19.7% proposed more courses on Information Communication Technology and their pedagogical use, the 10.6% proposed translation courses and 3.4% recommended the introduction of more literature courses.

Concerning their plans after graduation the 42.4% wishes to prolong their studies by attending a Master degree, the 24.2% intends to work as teacher of French in private educational institutions, and the 22.7% wishes to work in publicly funded schools. The 62.8% of student teachers believe that a master degree would equip them with more skills for entering the teaching profession; the 29.9% says that a master degree would probably help, and only 7.3% declare that a master degree would have nothing more to add to their training. Finally, the 68.7% state that they wish to work as teachers of French in primary and/or secondary education, the 23.9% as translators and the 7.4% as researchers or academics.

The final question was an open ended question where student teachers were invited to propose ways of improving the curriculum. Only 36 out of 67 participants answered this question. 11 student teachers propose that the curriculum should give more emphasis on teaching practice and suggest that teaching should be mandatory for all students and not optional. 5 student teachers propose the integration of more courses in the curriculum and 5 student teachers recommend a better, more-structured organization of the department. The rest 15 answers could be classified in the following three categories. A few representative comments are also presented in each category: Recommendations concerning the courses:

- "More courses focusing on innovative teaching methodologies"
- "Pedagogical courses, psychology and child-psychology should be introduced in the curriculum"
- "More interaction during courses, especially those of literature"
- "Research project should be obligatory for all student teachers, along with teaching practice in Greece and abroad"
- "More student centered curriculum and communication with universities abroad"

Recommendations concerning the structure of the curriculum:

- "A higher level of linguistic competence in French should be a prerequisite in order to enter the department"
- "Student teachers should be offered some guidance during their studies informing them about career opportunities and professional development"

Recommendation concerning student teachers' educators:

- "Educators should be friendlier and more helpful"

Student teachers' remarks offer some insights in the ways that the curriculum should be restructured. The majority of their recommendations seem to be at the same wavelength, since they propose a more active role for them via school-based teaching practice, research papers and presentations, more interaction during courses, more courses in didactics/ICT skills/ improvement of linguistic competence/communication with universities abroad. They recommend a better and more digitalized organization of the department. Finally, student teachers state a few remarks that could imply their wish for better and friendlier educators in the department.

3.7 Correlation of findings between student teachers curriculum evaluation and evaluation performed by two educators of the French department

This section attempts to correlate student teachers answers with the answers given by two educators at the French language and literature department, and to investigate whether the educators and student teachers share the same perception of the academic curriculum. The educators filled in the questionnaire presented in table 6, by evaluating each of the 40 key elements recommended in the *EPLTE,* and by awarding either 0, when the key element was not taken into consideration, or 2.5 points, when the key element was covered by the curriculum. The educators also mentioned the title of at least one course from the current curriculum that appears to implement the respective key element. For this reason, the following table was created, the left-hand column presents the 40 key elements, along with the rating given to each item by the educators and, when possible, the title of courses[3] covering or implementing the key element; the right column depicts the mean score of student teachers' answer. The mean score fluctuates between 0-5. The closer to 5 the mean score is the more favorable student teachers' evaluation is.

Table 6. Comparison between educators' and student teachers' evaluation.

	Educators' evaluation	Student teachers' evaluation
	Key Elements-structure	How much importance was given by the curriculum to the following elements? 0-5 (0-2,5: No, low, moderate importance. 2,51-5: moderate, high very high importance)
1	A curriculum that integrates academic study and the practical experience of teaching **Educators' evaluation: 2.5** **Courses:** Introduction to Didactics, Methodology of teaching French as a foreign language (F.L.E. laboratories), Teaching practice program.	3.18
2	The flexible and modular delivery of initial and in-service education **Educators' evaluation: 0**	-
3	An explicit framework for teaching practice (*stage/*practicum). **Educators' evaluation: 2.5** **Courses:** Teaching practice program	3.08
4	Working with a mentor and understanding the value of mentoring. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5** **Courses:** Teaching practice program	2.84
5	Experience of an intercultural and multicultural environment. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5** **Courses:** Cross-cultural communication, Sociolinguistics, Didactology of foreign languages/Cultures	2.69
6	Participation in links with partners abroad, including visits, exchanges or ICT links. **Educators' evaluation: 0**	2.20
7	A period of work or study in a country or countries where the trainee's foreign language is spoken as native. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5** **Comments**: The French department participates in the European student-and-staff exchange program LLP/ERASMUS and in various forms, such as ERASMUS, LINGUA, TEMPUS, SOCRATES etc.	3.29
8	The opportunity to observe or participate in teaching in more than one country. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	3.29
9	A European-level evaluation framework for initial and in-service teacher education programs, enabling accreditation and mobility. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5** **Comments:** A number of credits corresponding to ECTS is awarded to every course.	-
10	Continuous improvement of teaching skills as part of in-service education. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	3.03

	Courses: ICT in improving linguistic performance, Introduction to Didactics, Teaching Practice Program, Methodology of teaching French as a foreign language (F.L.E. laboratories), Developing teaching materials (F.L.E. laboratories)	
11	Ongoing education for teacher educators. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	-
	Comments: Teacher educators' participation in conferences and international events is encouraged by the institution, but it does not lead to a further qualification, as suggested by the *EPLTE*, it contributes though to their academic evolution.	
12	Training for school-based mentors in how to mentor. **Educators' evaluation: 0**	-
13	Close links between trainees who are being educated to teach different languages. **Educators' evaluation: 0**	1.76
	Key elements- Knowledge and Understanding	
14	Training in language teaching methodologies, and in state-of-the-art classroom techniques and activities. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.96
	Courses: Introduction to Didactics, French language: writing skills I/II, French language: speaking skills I,II, Mediation: Methodological and didactical approaches, Teaching practice Program, Methodology of teaching French as a foreign language (F.L.E. laboratories), development of teaching materials (F.L.E. laboratories)	
15	Training in the development of a critical and enquiring approach to teaching and learning. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.79
	Courses: Introduction to research methodology, Research Methods in lexicology	
16	Initial teacher education that includes a course in language proficiency and assesses trainees' linguistic competence. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	3.10
	Courses: Enhancing French linguistic competence I/II	
17	Training in information and communication technology for pedagogical use in the classroom. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.85
	Courses: Development of teaching materials (F.L.E. laboratories), Networks and multimedia in teaching languages, introduction to computer networks, database technology in language teaching and learning, multimedia databases for teaching for specific purposes, ICT in improving linguistic performance.	
18	Training in information and communication technology for personal planning, organization and resource discovery. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	3.19
	Courses: Networks and multimedia in teaching languages, introduction to computer networks, database technology in language teaching and learning, multimedia databases for teaching for specific purposes, ICT in improving linguistic performance.	
19	Training in the application of various assessment procedures and ways of recording learners' progress. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.81
	Courses: Evaluation techniques	

20	Training in the critical evaluation of nationally or regionally adopted curricula in terms of aims, objectives and outcomes. **Educator's evaluation: 2.5**	2.65
	Courses: Designing Programs for learning languages, developing teaching materials, Production of learning material (F.L.E. workshops), designing teaching materials for improving linguistic competence for specific purposes.	
21	Training in the theory and practice of internal and external program evaluation. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	3.04
	Courses: Evaluation techniques	
Key elements-Strategies and skills		
22	Training in ways of adapting teaching approaches to the educational context and individual needs of learners. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.88
	Courses: Designing Programs for learning languages, developing teaching materials, Production of learning material (F.L.E. workshops), designing teaching materials for improving linguistic competence for specific purposes.	
23	Training in the critical evaluation, development and practical application of teaching materials and resources. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.72
	Courses: Designing Programs for learning languages, developing teaching materials, Production of learning material (F.L.E. workshops), designing teaching materials for improving linguistic competence for specific purposes.	
24	Training in methods of learning to learn. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.96
	Courses: ICT and language learning and teaching	
25	Training in the development of reflective practice and self-evaluation. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.91
	Courses: Teaching Practice Program	
26	Training in the development of independent language learning strategies. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.82
	Courses: ICT and language learning and teaching	
27	Training in ways of maintaining and enhancing ongoing personal language competence. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.99
	Courses: French language: writing skills I/II, French language: speaking skills I,II, Enhancing French linguistic competence I/II	
28	Training in the practical application of curricula and syllabuses. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.72
	Courses: Teaching practice program	
29	Training in peer observation and peer review. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	3.04
	Courses: Teaching practice program	
30	Training in developing relationships with educational institutions in appropriate countries. **Educators' evaluation: 0**	2.06
31	Training in action research. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.63

	Courses: Introduction to research methodology	
32	Training in incorporating research into teaching. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.45
	Courses: Introduction to research methodology	
33	Training in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). **Educators' evaluation: 0**	0.85
34	Training in the use of the European Language Portfolio for self-evaluation. **Educators' evaluation: 0**	2.15
	Key elements-Values	
35	Training in social and cultural values. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.99
	Courses: Cross-cultural communication	
36	Training in the diversity of languages and cultures. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.87
	Courses: Cross-cultural communication, the structure of languages	
37	Training in the importance of teaching and learning about foreign languages and cultures. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.88
	Courses: Cross-cultural communication	
38	Training in teaching European citizenship. **Educators' evaluation: 0**	2.43
39	Training in team-working, collaboration and networking, inside and outside the immediate school context. **Educators' evaluation: 0**	3.04
40	Training in the importance of life-long learning. **Educators' evaluation: 2.5**	2.57
	Courses: ICT and language learning and teaching, Designing Programs for learning languages, developing teaching materials, Production of learning material (F.L.E. workshops), designing teaching materials for improving linguistic competence for specific purposes.	

According to both educators the table's evaluation is 77.5, when the highest possible evaluation could be 100 (40 x 2.5). It is found that the majority of the key elements rated with "2.5" by the educators, were also evaluated by student teachers with "moderate", "high importance" or "very high importance" (mean score fluctuating from 2.51 to 5). Conversely, the key elements that were rated with "0" by the educators were evaluated by student teachers with "no importance", "low" or "moderate importance" (mean score fluctuating from 0 to 2.5).

To the contrary, as far as the key elements 6, 13, 30, 32, 33, 34 and 38 it is found that there is no correlation between the educators' and student teachers evaluation; educators' evaluation was "2.5", while student teachers mean score was lower to 2.5. This remark could lead to the statement that educators evaluated more favourably than student teachers the curriculum. Also, it could be stated that there is an obvious need of restructuring the French language teacher education degree program in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, since even in the answers that the mean score is above 2.5, student teachers give a moderate evaluation of the program they attended (the highest mean score is 3.29 in key elements 7 and 8; only 10 key elements received a mean score above 3). In a nutshell, the educators' evaluation and the student teachers evaluation

correlate to an 80.55% percentage, since out of the 36 questions they both answered, they agree on 29 questions.

3.8 Limitations

This survey captured the external characteristics of the 40 key elements of the *EPLTE* and attempted to correlate student teachers perception of the French language teacher education program at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki with the opinion of two educators teaching at the department.

   It appeared that, though, the majority of the key elements are present in the curriculum, student teachers did not rate them as favourably as educators. This could be due either to a lack of more elaborate questions concerning the specific ways in which student teachers were introduced to the key elements, in the quality (specific methodologies used, quality of pedagogical support by the mentor), means (infrastructure, ICT, networking) and time (for instance number of hours devoted to teaching practice compared to theories) or to the different structure of the questionnaire given to educators. The questionnaire that the educators filled in did not provide the possibility to assess each of the 40 key elements via the Likert scale. Moreover, having more than two educators to rate the integration of the 40 items of the *EPLTE* would deliver a more objective and concrete overview of the educators' opinion of the curriculum.

4 Overall appraisal of the study and recommendations

The present study attempted to draw light on the language teacher education policy adopted in Greece via student teachers' perception about the French language teacher education degree program they were about to complete, regarding 40 items that are considered to be important elements of foreign language teacher education by the *EPLTE*.

   The vast majority of respondents wish to work in the educational sector and consider that a postgraduate qualification will help them in entering the teaching profession, letting us assume that the respondents do not feel that the French language teacher education degree program they attended (and which, at the time being, is the only qualification needed in Greece for teaching in the private sector[4]) provided them with the necessary equipment to work as teachers. In particular, student teachers' responses indicate the need to restructure certain aspects of methods, materials and curriculum policy. Firstly, student teachers suggest that the French language teacher education degree program they attended would improve by integrating more school based teaching practice courses, while it is noted that only 16.2% of the sample participated in a school-based teaching practice course during their studies. Hence, not only for fulfilling the student teachers proposals for improving the curriculum, but also for meeting the standards of initial teacher education policy adopted in other European countries, the attendance of a school-based teaching practice course from all prospective French language teachers seems imperative. Secondly, it appears that respondents consider that the existing French language teacher education degree program did not give importance to the use of the *European Language Portfolio* nor to the *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL)*. The *EPOSTL* could be incorporated into a school-based teaching practice or could constitute a single course on its own.

Following the example of other countries (e.g. Netherlands, Luxembourg), the European portfolios could take the shape of a digital folder, containing audiovisual material from the actual teaching practice course. This material could be presented among student teachers enhancing peer observation and peer review and motivating classmates to be involved in reflective practice, self-assessment, exchange of information and promotion of lifelong learning. The European Language Portfolios facilitate personal awareness, develop independent learning and make it possible to record the wide range of skills acquired in a number of languages and the intercultural experiences.

In addition, the majority of respondents consider that the French language teacher education degree program did not focus on encouraging participation in links with partners abroad, including visits, exchanges or ICT links (video-conferencing, e-twinning, interactive forum between institutions), on enhancing collaboration between students studying to be teachers of other languages, on developing relationships with educational institutions in appropriate countries and on teaching about European citizenship. Therefore, it would be possible to propose either a course or a seminar, which will present to student teachers of languages useful websites and research centers that play an important role in the field of language teaching and learning (e.g. Council of Europe, European Commission, European Centre for Modern Languages) and the research projects that have already been realized as well as those that are still in progress. This course could also refer to European citizenship and could be aimed at students of all foreign language departments, in order to enhance cooperation between student teachers of different languages, and to promote interdisciplinarity.

Finally, in sync with European developments, where in 2008 the European Parliament and Council formally adopted the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF)[5], Greece accepted the recommendations of the European Parliament, and launched the creation of the Greek Qualifications Framework[6] through the Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs. Within this context, and following the example of other European countries, it would be desirable for the Greek educational authorities to create a national framework of qualifications for teachers of foreign languages, where there will be a detailed report on the competences that student teachers will develop during their initial training. It is recommended that each course existing in the academic curriculum of foreign language departments is accompanied by a detailed description which would notify students about the precise competences that the particular course aims to develop. To this end, apart from the *EPLTE* that could be used as a benchmark for training prospective language teachers, the national reports of countries that propose a competency-based approach in initial language teacher training could also be useful (see e.g. British Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2007).

In conclusion, the implementation of these proposals does not seem unrealistic, as the French language teacher education degree program refers to almost all key elements of the *EPLTE*, which are communicated to student teachers to a certain extent. However, a better use of the existing human resources and the technological infrastructure could foreshadow a change of direction in the initial training of language teachers at the department of French language and literature of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, which would facilitate prospective language teachers to be smoothly introduced to the modern multicultural society accepting the multitude of skills, knowledge,

values, needs of the current world, while preserving the uniqueness of their thought, their love for teaching, by developing the pupils' unique personal abilities, as an integral part of their professional and personal development.

5 Discussion

The heightened expectations of teachers have led to an unprecedented political, professional and research interest of teacher education worldwide. This is evident in the number of reviews in various countries and cross-national studies of teaching and teacher education in the last few years, including OECD's *Teachers Matter* (2005), UNESCO's *Global perspectives on teacher learning: Improving Policy and Practice* (2007), World Bank's *Learning to Teach in the knowledge Society* (Moreno 2005). In addition, there seems to be a huge variety of approaches to the definition and implementation of teacher competence frameworks in national educational policies, ranging from a vague definition of broad competence sets to prescriptive lists, linked with professional standards and career advancement. On the whole, the presence of teacher competency frameworks seems to be no guarantee of actual quality standards, since the interpretation and the actual implementation is what important is (Conway et al. 2009).

On this context, many institutional documents, reports, tools, frameworks and other kind of quality standards should be examined with a critical point of view. Critics of standards raise the objection that teacher standards can imply taking on a neutral, technical perspective, overlooking the nature of teacher knowledge as context- and person-bound. This perspective could lead to making linear and causal connections between teacher behaviours and student outcomes, with the danger of forgetting contextual factors (Pring 2004). For instance, the *European Profile of Language Teacher Education* has received criticism for not addressing possibilities for integrating multilingualism in pre- and in-service education of language teachers, for not embedding the Content and Learning Integrated Learning (CLIL) and early foreign language teaching. Ziegler (2013) remarks that teacher education frameworks fail to present the practical knowledge from these approaches and notes that the *EPLTE* runs the risk of being considered too general when addressing overall issues. Similarly, regarding the *Common European Frame of Reference*, Zarate (Neuner et al. 2003) suggested further refinement in the conceptualisation of intercultural competence in order for the CEFR to respond to change. Thirdly, although the *European Language Portfolio* was acknowledged to be, from its early versions, "a tool to promote learner autonomy" (Council of Europe 2006: 9), it was criticized to link the self-evaluation procedure with behavioural criteria rather than linguistic and intercultural criteria.

On the other hand, all these policy documents are driven by concerns about how to respond to the challenges of the digital era, globalisation, sustainable development and the knowledge society. The *Supporting Teacher Competence Development for better Learning Outcomes* report (European Commission 2013) emphasizes that the development of comprehensive frameworks that define and describe the competences that teachers are expected to deploy, can bring numerous benefits to education systems. In conclusion, teacher education needs to consider diverse points of views and the multiplicity of relationships between teaching, training, schooling, learning processes, actors and contexts. Such

complexity is further increased when it aims to qualify itself with a European dimension. There is a general agreement that no course of Initial Teacher Education, no matter its excellence, can equip teachers with all the competences they will require during their careers, but it could enable tomorrow's teachers to primarily consider their own learning needs, to be versatile and knowledgeable, to respond to new demands and to be resourceful in order to foster a culture of knowledge generation and sharing in schools.

Endnotes

[1] ASEP is the acronym for the Supreme Council for Personnel Selection (Greek: Ανώτατο Συμβούλιο Επιλογής Προσωπικού, Α.Σ.Ε.Π., *Anótato Symvoúlio Epilogís Prosopikoú, ASEP*), which is tasked with the selection of personnel for work in the Greek public sector.

[2] The survey questionnaire may be obtained directly from the author.

[3] The titles of the courses were translated to English by the author of the paper.

[4] For teaching in publicly funded schools, success in the ASEP national exam is also needed.

[5] For more information regarding the European Qualifications Framework see: https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f%5B0%5D=im_field_entity_type%3A97

[6] For more information regarding the Greek Qualifications Framework see: http://www.eoppep.gr/index.php/en/qualifications-certification-en

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