

Economics in combination with ancient Greek literature: an innovative teaching proposal in vocational training in Greece

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Abstract

The current paper evaluates an interdisciplinary approach to teaching economics through ancient Greek literature, in the context of Vocational Training Institute. The research uses ancient Greek elements in teaching the unit “Factors of Production” in the 1st year of vocational training institute. The main research goal is to examine whether this method can be implemented in vocational training institutes and the extent to which it appeals students’ knowledge and enhances their cognitive background.

Keywords: teaching economics, Ancient Greek Literature, interdisciplinary, critical though, innovative teaching proposal

1. Introduction

It is well known that in Greece the Vocational Training Institutes do not have a leading role in adults’ education even though the majority of students prefer to study there. The reason is that they are very promising in finding job and offer practical experience based on theoretical knowledge. For this reason, it is important to upgrade their role and generally their approach to knowledge (Brinia, 2015) ^[9-12].

Regarding teaching Economics in Vocational Training Institutes, teachers have to face negative attitudes towards this subject because students which are adults have already formed their personal opinion towards this issue based on the economic situation of Greece. It is necessary for the teachers to overcome such problems by discovering and implementing new teaching methods which are compatible with the interests, needs, and the abilities of their students (Brinia, 2015) ^[9-12]. One innovative teaching method that seems to appeal students’ interest and attention is the below one presented method.

Our proposing method is a connection of Economics with Ancient Greek Literature. The method relied on a research that carried out in vocational training institute and had remarkable results regarding the didactic methodology. The purpose of this research is to present this innovative method and to investigate the extent to which can be implemented in a vocational training institute and whether it appeals students’ interests by enriching their knowledge.

2. The link between Economics and Ancient Greek Literature

In order to conduct our survey, we had to select one economic topic to link it with Ancient Greek Literature. The issue that we have chosen is the Factors of production because we found a lot of similarities with ancient Greek literature which are going to be presented below.

First of all, as for the term of production process, we mean all the ways in which a man can transform the material to give form useful for his life. Essential elements are the human effort and nature (land and environment). Without these, production process cannot be done (Principles of Economics).

The elements that contribute to the production process are called factors of production. The factors are classified into three categories the labor, land and capital.

i) Labor

As labor it is defined the human effort, physical and intellectual, to produce a product. The worker who builds a house, the farmer who plows the land, the teacher who teaches etc. offer work in the production process. In their work, people use knowledge that have acquired at school, in various technical colleges, in the University, but also from their experience of work. The set of knowledge and skills that are acquired by the man through the education and experience is called human capital (Principles of Economics).

As for Ancient Greece, work is one of the most important factors of human life because it occupies a significant portion of personal time compared with any other activity and it contributes in the definition of the economic capacity and lifestyle. Hesiod in the didactic poem *Έργα και ήμέραι* believes that work is the basic moral law of human life and specifically mentions that “*εργάζεσθ έργα, τά τ’ ανθρώποισι θεοί διετεκμήραντο*”, indicating in this way the categorical imperative of work. Thus as prime social duty and moral duty of man is considered the work, which is a fundamental experience of human life, a natural need with which man creates something new, using its physical and spiritual powers (Despotopoulou, K. 1987) ^[13]. Work is a deliberate and conscious human activity and it is intertwined with the human being because it occupies the greater part of human life and through this, man experiences positive emotions (joy, interest, pleasure), which contribute to personal growth, maturation and personal completion. It is therefore something essential for the nature of man and his relationship with his nature and according to the poet Askraio “*εργον δ’ ούδέν δνειδος, άεργλή δέ τ’ όνειδος*”.

ii) Land (or Earth)

The factor of soil or land includes the geographical area, surface, subsurface, lakes, rivers, seas and soil properties that are useful in the production process. The land on which is

built a factory or a home is a productive factor, as it is the ground on which different crops grow (Principles of Economics).

Since ancient times, agriculture was one of the main forms of economy of Greece, with the result that the economic dimension of agricultural production to employ significantly the intellect of ancient writers and philosophers. The topography not only did not prevent the ancient Greeks to systematically occupy with the land, but it helped in their particular dependence on agricultural production activity, because agricultural products were the primary basis of their daily diet. The basic food of the ancient Greeks was mainly cereal which, together with the wine and oil production, were supporting the agricultural economy, whose importance is reflected in the popular religious celebrations of the 5th century b.c. (Zaidman, L. & Pantel, P. 2009) [24]. The Greek goddess of agricultural production and fertility was Demeter, which together with her daughter Persephone, was worshiped by the rural population of mainland and islands (Pachi, P. 1998) [18].

The great Athenian historian, strategist and philosopher Xenophon (430-354 b.c.) wrote a writing, which was to become a landmark in agric economic data. The writing is titled *Οικονομικός* and deals with the organization and management of household economy based on agriculture. Agriculture in Xenophon contributes greatly to the development of the economic system. He says the following: “*Γεωργίαν τῶν ἄλλων τεχνῶν μητέρα καὶ τροφὸν εἶναι. Εὖ μὲν γὰρ φερομένης τῆς γεωργίας ἔρρωνται καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι τέχναι ἅπασαι, ὅπου δ’ ἂν ἀναγκασθῆ ἢ γῆ χερσεύειν, ἀποσβέννυνται καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι τέχναι σχεδόν τι καὶ κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν*”. His writing, then *Οικονομικός* has a leading role in interactive form, which extends into twenty-one chapters, in which Socrates wants to guide Kritovoulos about the issue of economy, administration and efficient management of the assets. The conversation of Socrates with Kritovoulos begins with the research of the meaning of “economy”. With the guidance of Socrates as economy is defined that the knowledge sector, which covers the techniques and means which may lead to the increase, strength and adequately exploitation of the house.

iii) Capital

The factor of capital includes all products used in the production process for the production of other products. The capital includes the different machinery, buildings, facilities, tools, utensils, etc. (Principles of Economics).

The development of theater in ancient Athens consistent with the origin and perfection of the drama. The Greek drama of the classical era recommends the creation of complex speech, music and orichitis. The theater performances in Athens of the 5th century b.c. addressed to all citizens and made in the content of games, organized by the city-state. So the ancient theatrical performances were not an everyday experience, with limitless possibilities of repetition, because they permanently formed as part of the celebrations, which, in contrary to what happens today, had spiritual-religious character (Blume, H.D. 1993) [3].

The god to who was dedicated the theatrical acts in ancient Athens was Dionysus, who did not belong to the standard twelve Olympian. The most important festival which held in his honor was the *Μεγάλα ἢ Ἐν ἄστει Διονύσια* which took

place the month *Ελαφηβολιώννα* (March-April), when the period of navigation and commerce began and a great number of guests and representatives of allied towns went to Athens for the payment of the annual tax. Therefore, theatrical performances had religious and political character and formed into a set of activities, which were intended to praise the power of Athens (Saïd, S. *et al.* 2001) [21].

The preparation for the dramatic contests required longer than six months. Once the responsible officials for the festivals undertook their duties in the summer, they have first to take into consideration to elect the three candidate contestants poets who “give chorus”. The cost to set up the chorus was undertaken by a wealthy Athenian citizen. The sponsorship undertaking regarded as a service of general interest (operation). So the sponsors covered the costs of the chorus’s education, took care of the supply of costumes and masks, as well as any other running costs of the performance. Since in the tragic competition the three or four projects of a poet were a single entity, while in the comic competition each project was start from nothing, it was only required for the Great Dionysia at least twenty-eight sponsors. During the months of trial the sponsor was required to maintain both members of the chorus and the dance teacher and the piper.

Nowadays, the institution of grants in the theatrical act introduced quite late. Specifically introduced in 1978 and until then the state funding for the theater were in the public theaters (National Theatre, National Theatre of Northern Greece, National Opera and Arma Thespidos) (Mavromoustakou, Pl. 2000) [17]. The establishment of grants contributed significantly to the awareness of the role of the theater as a public artistic expression.

3. Research Methodology

Qualitative Research

The choice of research framework for the data collection is closely related to the objectives and the purpose of the research (Bird M. *et al* 1999; Faulkner P. *et al* 1999) [2, 14]. The appropriate research for achieving the research goal is the qualitative one because it permits for an in-depth analysis and interpretation of view and attitude and intends to make clear processes through analytical induction (Bird M. *et al.*, 1999) [2, 14].

The qualitative data are going to be presented as following:

1. Formulation of research questions.
2. Description of the research theme and instruments.
3. Description of the research sample.
4. Presentation of research process.
5. Presentation of research results.

Research Questions

The research questions that are going to be investigated concern whether this teaching method for the subject of Factors of Production:

- a) Can be implemented in the analytical program of Vocational Training Institute.
- b) Helps students to clarify basic economic terms and enhances their active participation in class.

Research Instruments

A. Convenient Sampling

Throughout this type of sampling, every member of the population has the same probability to be picked up

and every option is completely independent of the other. A main advantage of this type of sampling method is the convenience that it presents in its application. However, there are disadvantages linked with this method. Firstly, its use does not lead to the formation of representative samples, which has as a result the reduced representation of research results and the existence of a large error in assessment (Zafiroopoulos, 2005) [23]. Although, this method is mostly used in the primary stages of research, for someone getting a rough estimate of the results which is free of time and charge to collect information.

B. The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was selected as a research tool so as to collect the necessary information to assess the effectiveness of the applied teaching method at vocational training institute. To be more specific, the selected data collection method using a questionnaire because this tool is a systematic process in which the researcher is formulating the proper words questions studying various types of questions and organizes the outline of the questionnaire, according to the research main requirements (Siomkos & Mavros, 2008) [22]. Also, the main objective is the conversion of the required information to appropriate and specific questions.

C. Semi-structured Interviews based on qualitative questions

It is the most flexible way of interview because it allows the in depth analysis of facts. The structure and the order of questions can be easily change so as to permits the researchers to develop a keen understanding of the issue of interest which is important for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation). It is used mostly in pilot research.

Research Sample

The research sample consists of 20 students of the 1st year of Vocational Training Institute (aged between 20 and 30 years old). It was undertaken in the first semester of the academic year 2015-2016 (September - March). The School is located in an urban area of Attica. The research lasted one week and was executed during the analytical program offering two hours of teaching.

4. Research Process

Firstly, teacher explained to the students about the teaching methodology that was about to be followed the next didactic hours. The students accepted with enthusiasm and curiosity and then the research began. The research process followed the below lesson’s design (Brinia, 2006) [4].

Course Information

Course: Principles of Economics
 Title: Factors of Production
 Grade: 1st grade of Vocational Training Institute

i) Teaching objectives

After the completion of the lesson the students must be able to:

- i. Define the concept of the production process.
- ii. Identify the factors of production.
- iii. Connect the factors of production to the Ancient Greek literature.

ii) Teaching methods

Lecture, dialogue, cooperative learning

iii) Teaching tools

Photocopies, table, chalk

iv) Brief description of teaching lesson

- Introduction
- The concept of the production process
- The factors of production
- Connection of factors of production with the ancient Greek literature
- Work in groups
- Evaluation
- Summary
- Assessment

v) Detailed description of teaching stages

• **Preparation (6 min)**

The course is an introduction, in very general terms, to the analysis of the production and the concept of productive factors. We will attempt to link the factors of production with the ancient Greek literature.

• **Presentation (20 min)**

Content	Teaching Methods	Means
Definition of production procedure	Lecture	Table
Definition of factors of production	Lecture, Discussion	Table
Link factors of production with ancient Greek literature	Lecture, Discussion	Table

• **Application/Exercise (10 min)**

Teamwork. Teacher separates students into four groups of five people. Students have to process the following issue “The educational system is a productive process. Identify in groups the product and production factors and correlate them with Ancient Greece.” Then, one representative of the team presents team’s results. Classroom discussion.

• **Evaluation (3 min)**

Evaluation sheet is distributed (1st Questionnaire).

• **Summary (1 min)**

Summary of the key points of the lesson.

• **Assessment (1min)**

Completion of the 2nd questionnaire, evaluating the whole process.

vi) Research Process Results

The results of the research process consist of the data that were produced by the questionnaires that were filled by the students.

1st questionnaire results

The questions of the first questionnaire aimed for evaluating the cognitive results. The results showed that all students answered correctly the questions which mean that they understood the whole teaching material.

2nd questionnaire results

The second questionnaire was completed after the end of the procedure. The first part of the first question was about the lesson and whether it was interesting. The second part investigated the student's views and experiences regarding the teaching methodology. Question two examined the contribution of ancient Greek literature to the understanding of the teaching material. Question three was about the evaluation of teamwork. The fourth question was linked with the improvement of the teaching process and the last one about the benefits that were obtained by the students by this process. The results are the following.

Question one: All students except two agreed that the lesson was interesting and provided them with motives for active participation in class. Same typical students' answers were the following "the course was more interesting, "the teaching procedure enhanced the discussion and collaboration", "the link with ancient Greek life was interesting".

Question two: Eighteen students responded that the ancient Greek literature facilitated in understanding the economic terms of the course, while one mentioned that its contribution was very good.

Question three: All students cited teamwork contributed to the effectiveness of the course because of the view exchange and the discussion among the members of the team.

Question four: Students suggested they should be visits in archaeological sites and more teamwork projects.

Question five: Regarding the overall benefits that students gained from the teaching methodology were knowledge, active participation, collaboration, critical thinking and the chance to "travel back to ancient Greece and ancient Greek life".

5. Discussion of results

It can be concluded from the results that this teaching methodology towards teaching Economics has been an innovative proposal for Vocational Training Institute with great appeal to students, contributing to a pleasant and interactive lesson.

All students argue that the lesson became more interesting and easier to understand especially when the students were separated into groups, worked in teams and presented their work. The link with ancient Greek literature created additional motives to students, allowing the exchange of ideas and the enrichment of knowledge. In the end of the process, students were able to form their own views about the usage of factors of production in both Modern and ancient Greece.

Teamwork aided in the creation of the right class climate which was friendlier, enhancing the freedom of expression. The theme of the course and the link with ancient Greece contributed to this by making course more interesting and promoting innovation in teaching methodology.

In conclusion, this proposing and innovative teaching methodology contributed to the enforcement of cognitive results which helped students to form their own views regarding economic issues relating to the factors of production and to develop an overall view of economic science in relation to Ancient and Modern Greek real life.

6. Conclusion - Guidelines for future research

The introduction of this teaching methodology in Vocational Training Institutes is a very promising proposal with

remarkable results. The state should ameliorate the role of Vocational Training Institutes in Greek education and provide them with the necessary supplies so that they can be able to implement such methodologies in their analytical program. A necessary prerequisite is the right exploitation of the existing knowledge and experience of adult learners (Adults Teacher Education Program) which can help students to the overall shape of their personality and facilitate the formation of critical thought. Moreover, an in depth analysis of adults' learners needs is necessary for making the course attractive ending up with the desirable results.

Last but not least, during this teaching methodology, teamwork, development of critical thought, communication and presentation skills were promoted. The challenge for the teacher is the ability to attract students' attention by selecting the appropriate teaching material to implement it in the teaching process.

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