

The Right to Choose: Political Discourses, Ideological connotations and their impact on Reforms regarding the 'entrance system' to Higher Education, in Greece

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Abstract

Changing the system allowing access to Tertiary Education is a top priority of Greek governments; it often has a fragmentary character without parallel systemic interventions. The recent (2021) enactment of the 'minimum admission base' to Tertiary Education is a renewed version of a similar reform by the same governing party back in 2005, reflecting the timelessness of the issue and the strong signifying ideological grounds. The urgency for reformation is created using prosaic excuses indicating an educational crisis, with references to a long-standing 'pathology' of symptoms and obsolete obsessions that prevent any prospects for growth in the country.

Employing the discourse – historical approach (DHA), we analyse the role of language in constructing and presenting problematics on the quality of students entering Tertiary Education, the establishment of a necessary political initiative and collateral process naturalising and legitimising solutions which superficially reinforce aspects of educational and social inequality. Reframing the argument within a contemporary context highlights their deep roots in given ideological references despite efforts to depoliticise the matter and its

consequent, political and social, implications due to the selection and allocation of the student population. We confirmed the attempt to depoliticise the matter by exploiting the rhetorical use of language, the role of texts to convince public and interested masses by constructing a narrative of qualitative upgrading of educational output as a naturalised and self-evident intervention so as to disengage it from related socio-economic aspects and consequences.

Keywords: *education policy, critical discourse analysis, tertiary education, educational and social inequality, minimum admission base*

Introduction

A perennial, central issue of Greek society (Benincasa, 1998; Psacharopoulos and Tassoulas, 2004; Kyridis *et al.*, 2012) has been that of entry to an institute of tertiary education; this focused on quantitative data and procedures (Patiniotis and Stavroulakis, 1997), thus downplaying the social aspects of selection and allocation, but also the socio-economic characteristics of candidates that determine their success or failure (Psacharopoulos and Kazamias, 1985; Tsoukalas, 1987; Sianou-Kyrgiou and Tsiplakides, 2011; Thanos, 2015). The number of students entering an institute of tertiary education has been determined by the Ministry of Education; until 1997, this offered a number of places well below the number of candidates and operated under a strict *numerus clausus* system (Kyridis, Mavrikaki and Neroutsos, 1995).

The intention to remedy long-standing problems is supported by a selective use of numerical data and comparative indicators, newspaper articles, etc. that achieve a positional advantage in political decisions, while at the same time de-

politicizing politics by redefining the boundaries between politics and objectivity. The use of evidence and data reduces them to automatic mechanisms for formulating judgements, prioritising problems and validating political strategies and aspirations (Rose, 1991). Political actors formulate a rational educational discourse determined by the needs and prospects of economic development. This discourse understands the economy as the decisive navigator of social and educational change and education as an institution with the dominant mission of meeting the needs of the economy and facilitating the transition to the labour market (Zambeta, 2002; Kalerante, 2019). In addition, an ideological framework of principles, values and beliefs is established and presented that contrasts 'excellence' with a broader inclusive conception of equality of opportunity. Excellence is a meaningful 'construction' that promotes and validates 'diversity', 'individual merit' and 'natural inclination', 'crowding out equality and need' (Mijs, 2016), by expanding competition and limiting state responsibility in controlling return on investment. Finally, discourse constitutes an ideological codification of a wider grid of representations, beliefs, values and attitudes, a programmatic model of visionary transformations (Heywood, 2012:3) in the structure of the socio-economic context that claims hegemonic dominance. Thus, the prospect of social mobility for children from underprivileged socio-economic strata through the higher levels of education is decisively undermined, maintaining and reproducing social inequalities.

We approach political discourse as a form of social construct and practice to represent and shape a new educational reality built around the terms of access to Tertiary Education; in effect, it comprises terms of authoritative enforcement and perpetuation of social inequality. This paper focuses on analysing educational discourse at two instances as it incorporates incentives, targeting, recipients, reformers, etc., while, at the same time, it explains, formulates,

shapes, transforms perceptions and views within the temporal-spatial context of events and incidents on parallel and intertwined levels (political, social, educational, cultural). Words and expressions shape and codify the political thought of their agencies, incorporated a series of nested and often imperceptible elements of analytical thought and imperatives of their multiple reference fields. The meaning the words and expressions convey makes sense within their actual environment of reference comprising a ‘situated meaning’ (Gee, 2011:23). In other words, the meaning of the discourse is related to a series of defining frameworks constructed by the agency expressing them and the contextual socio-political environment incorporating it, thus reinforcing a relationship of two-way influence and effect. Given the critical dimension of analysis, where critical ‘implies showing connections and causes that are hidden’ (Fairclough, 1992a:9), focusing on ‘the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of *power* and *dominance* in society’ (Van Dijk, 2001:353) we seek the processes by which concrete or situated meaning is embedded in its contextual framework of reference. The approach therefore aspires to go beyond a static focus on technical elements of language, but seeks to place them in their social, political and cultural contexts (Wetherell, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to highlight the dynamic correlations of the micro-level of linguistic features of concrete instances of discourse in two educational reform instances and the macro-level social analysis of the texts that impose ideological control through determining power relations. Using a balanced approach procedure based on lexical/syntactic features, discursive strategies and socio-political aspects of the contextual environment, we presented the social prospects and aspirations of these two correlated educational reforms.

Tertiary Education Entrance System - A Crucial Point of Selection

Holding a degree from a tertiary education institute has always been a means for social mobility (Bourdieu, 1996); moreover in Greece, given the expansion of the tertiary economic sector and the growth of the state as an employer, the degree also ensured favourable career prospects (Tsoukalas, 1987; Psacharopoulos and Papakonstantinou, 2005; Saiti and Mitrosili, 2005). These components determined to a large extent the unilateral choice of attending General Education with the prospect of transition to Higher Education versus the parallel Technical-Vocational direction with the professional prospects of self-employment and paid dependent work in the private sector. This created the prerequisites for a one-track system of studies at the expense of technical-vocational education which given: the anachronistic curriculum, the mismatch of the educational qualifications provided in relation to the needs of the labour market (Stavrou, 1995), the reduced or non-existent prospects of higher studies, etc., was the 'last resort' for young people (Vretakou and Rouseas, 2003:17), especially for those who failed in general education (Patiniotis and Stavroulakis, 1997). At the same time, it seems that students of technological direction appropriated rejection, adjusting their perception accordingly by attaching less importance to their social status and personal development through their profession (Dimaki, Kaminioti, Psarakis and Tsourti, 2005). As it has been shown, however, the proportion of students attending technical education is higher among the poorer students (Antoninis and Tsakloglou, 2001), substantiating the importance of social class position in the choice of educational direction as a factor in the consolidation and perpetuation of social inequality.

Dividing general and technical education legitimised the 'classification' of persons into an educational culture that integrates and normalises necessities

and exclusions; this established terms for social inequalities based on an institutionalised educational inequality. The gradual loosening or abolition of intermediary examination ‘barriers’ of access to higher educational tiers, the progressive de-coupling of access to tertiary education from secondary education performance and the free nature of education, despite the exceptionally high private cost entailed (Psacharopoulos and Papas, 1987; Kostakis, 1990; Psacharopoulos and Papakonstantinou, 2005), contributed towards higher demand for tertiary education studies, while also weakening the learning and vocational independence that secondary education used to enjoy. The Lyceum (Upper Secondary School) became a lesser educational stage, a mere step towards Tertiary Education, having no competitive advantage of learning capital or skills for the labour market.

Tertiary Education is distinguished into Technological Education Systems (Technologika Ekpedeftika Idrimata - T.E.I.) and Universities (Anotata Ekpedeftika Idrimata – A.E.I.); this, however, results in an imbalance between demand, vocational prospects and social status. The high demand for tertiary education, due to the reasons outlined above, became an issue of political negotiation and became a pretext for practising social policy. In Greece, contrary to Been and Fieldhouse’s findings of a common direction above political differences in various countries (1993), it has turned into a long-standing bone of contention in party rivalry, regardless of the pertinent social and economic implications and repercussions. Since the mid-1980s the conditions of educational expansion were met, so high demand has been tackled through a gradual, exponential increase in the numbers of candidates entering existing tertiary education institutes that haunts the political will to financially support the institutions to offer additional places and an increased number of interested groups (Aamodt, 2006:318). However, this meant that new institutes

and departments kept sprouting around the country¹ without any kind of planning (Lamprianidis, 1993), in line with Pinheiro and Antonowicz's first phase 'more is better' (2015).

Ideological-political components

The issue of the access procedure is not a formal, deideologised regulatory procedure, but a strategic choice resulting from prevailing socio-political and educational views and shaping all forms of social and political action (Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). Such a choice has a dynamic permanence and initially concerns the allocation of the participating population into two social sub-sets, (Goldthorpe, 1996) creating a clearly determined split with a manifold function, both symbolic and real. This is how two steadily opposing educational views have developed, incorporating elements of ideological differences.

The policy of banning strict examination procedures in secondary education allowed a mad rush of candidates claiming access to tertiary education and nurtured social demand for an increased number of post-secondary education places. The demand, rooted in an ideological decodification of social circumstances that recognised the dominance of a ruling bourgeois class investing in reproducing itself through the educational system². Upgrading one's educational level was associated with a challenge for social change, as long as more acute social awareness and political participation were achieved. Shifting the issue from an 'equal opportunity' rationale to flattening any distinction with 'equal results' (Hussen, 1980), which would cancel existing social inequalities, became a visionary political goal expressed in terms of social ideology (Labaree, 1997). However, a significant parameter had not been considered in this analysis; it had to do with the consequences of deferring selective procedures of vertical educational mobility. Increased prospects of access to

tertiary education, given the intense competition candidates caused by the *numerus clausus* system, threw the democratic spirit of the educational system and equality of opportunity into question, since successful access closely depended on acquiring additional marketable educational services (coaching schools [*frontistiria*] and private tutoring). Furthermore, given the ‘fetishisation’ of tertiary education, the prospect of failing left no other option but attending private institutes offering quasi-higher education (Institutes of Vocational Education, Liberal Studies Centres) or becoming educational migrants, imposing additional expenses to family budgets (Psacharopoulos and Papas, 1987).

A diametrically opposing view was a liberal educational policy notion which highlighted the need of quality as opposed to quantity (Klein, 1980) and the balance necessary between the number of graduates and the needs of the market and the economy, in addition as a necessary condition of ‘social equilibrium’³. Over time, it steadily focused its rhetoric and political applications on controlling or restricting quantity as a guarantee for maintaining academic excellence, meritocracy and, ultimately, favouring quality⁴. Therefore, ‘New Democracy’ party has always recognised as a reasonable and necessary prerequisite that education has a distributory and selective role regarding the diversity of people (Hayek, 1993:87), the skills and needs of the country to avoid an unemployed professional proletariat, safeguarding, however, that the state observed the principle of equality as a starting point rather than a perennial policy of intervention (Rawls, 1993:175).

Quality introduces ideological and political reference frameworks and actions into education, conceptually incorporating terms borrowed from the economy. Structuring is realised on terms of efficiency and competition in regard to main

goals, conferring titles of additional educational, social and economic value, as a result of a continuous, valid, meritocratic and equal assessment, even though the ‘assessment of merit is distorted through the institutions that allocate reward, as well as through the influence of social class’ (Mijs, 2016). This is how a strategy of individualised competition is achieved, along with the individualisation of results exclusively on terms of capacity and nature. Reducing the result to an individual level limits the prospect of seeking contextual determining factors that frame the educational process and students, thus legitimising governing policies of limiting countervailing educational policies. Subsequently, the transfer of resources from educational equality policies catering for vulnerable social groups to ‘excellence’ islets is normalised and legitimised as a reciprocal action without ideological or political nuances.

The context of the two educational interventions

Law 3404/2005

In September 2005, 19 months after coming to power, the ‘New Democracy’ government, fixated on limiting the number of candidates entering Tertiary Education — a number that almost doubled since 1997, as a result of Law 2525/1997 — enacted Law 3404 on ‘Organisation and operation of Tertiary Education; Regulations concerning Research and other provisions’. Establishing a minimum entrance examination score (10 out of 20) was not part of the pre-election announcements of the party (New Democracy, 2004), but when presenting the programming statements, the Minister of Education explicitly worded the intention of correlating the educational output with the economy (Giannakou, 2004: 311).

The bill followed the results of Tertiary Education admission examinations and the intense dispute by the media concerning the quality of those admitted. The

fact that 39,000 candidates scored below the ‘official’ pass grade was used as an indication of a ‘pathology’ that made the interventions self-evident. However, there is another critical comparative fact, namely that in 2000 there were just 3,000 candidates who scored lower than the minimum grade out of a total number of around 120,000. Given the exclusive competence of the Minister of Education in setting up the entrance examination committee, intervention in the degree of difficulty of examination topics is quite likely. Consequently, the ease of turning the examination procedure into a tool to tackle the challenge of educational policy strategies is a realistic prospect.

The law regulates matters of academic organisation and administrative structure of T.E.I. by introducing the prerequisite condition that ‘the candidate needs to achieve an overall access grade equal to at least half the maximum possible access grade’ (Greek Parliament Gazette, 2005). Establishing a horizontal entrance baseline excluded candidates achieving an average grade below 10 (maximum 20) in the subjects examined, despite the prospect of some regional institutes closing down due to lack of students. Generally speaking, the Opposition criticised the horizontal implementation, regarding it as a social class barrier, the aim being to reorient young people to private institutes of post-secondary, quasi-tertiary education. **Table 1** reflects the significant reduction of candidates admitted due to a baseline for admission.

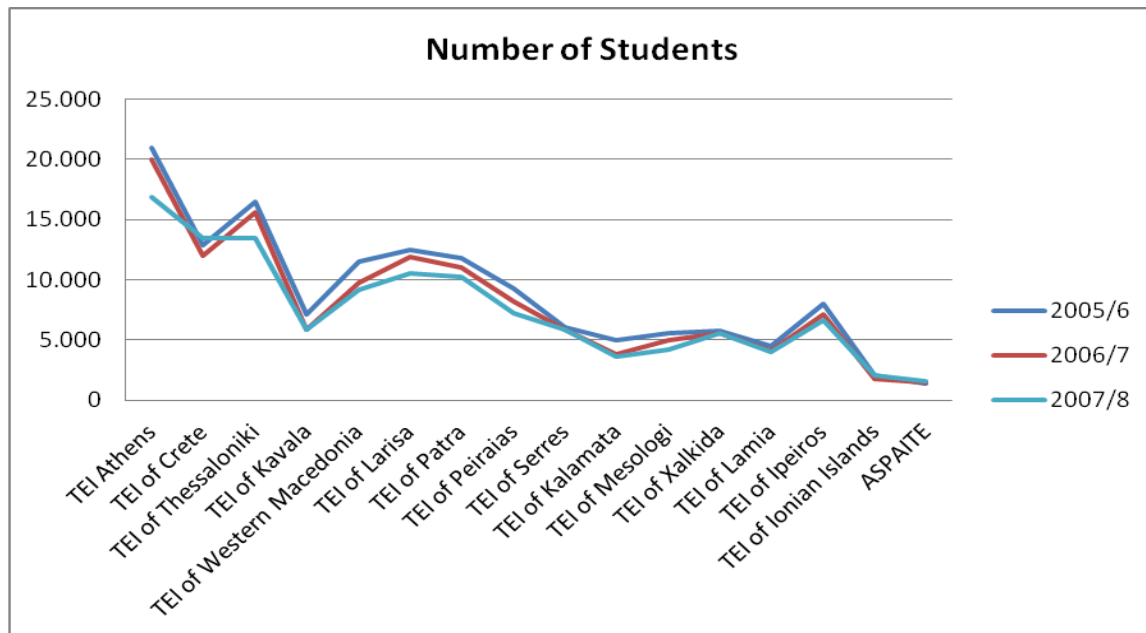


Table 1: Editing data of the Hellenic Statistical Authority by the authors

Between 2005 and 2007, the reduction in the number of students at Athens TEI was 19.32%, Thessaloniki 18.4%, Western Macedonia 20.45%, Piraeus 21.47%, Kalamata 28.83 and Mesologi 24.63%. The intensity of the reduction in absolute numerical data as the difference of students enrolled in 2005, an academic year without a baseline for admission, from those in 2007, following the implementation of the baseline for two years, confirms that the number of students was reduced by about 20,000, without taking into account the reduction resulted in the low-demand Universities, mainly located in regional areas.

The baseline for admission was banned in 2010 (Greek Parliament Gazette, 2010) by the ‘PASOK’ party government, since ‘the only result that emerged from its implementation was the exclusion of thousands of candidates from the state universities and TEI of our country, who become the easy clientele of various private post-secondary centres and foreign universities’ (Padoulas, 2010:6577)

Law 4777/2021

In 2017, ‘New Democracy’ introduced ‘excellence’ into the educational agenda dialogue, as a value imperative of the party, which attributed an ideological aspect to the political controversy. Having ‘excellence’ as a focal point, particular educational specialisations were established, mainly through specific counter-proposals opposing the educational policy of the alliance government of ‘SYRIZA’ - ‘ANEL’ parties, which ‘New Democracy’ interpreted, to reinforce its own argumentation, as ‘downward equalitarianism’, and rewarding ‘lesser effort’ (Greek Parliament, 2019:1398).

The ‘minimum admission base’ was announced prior to the national elections, as the axis of the governing policy for ‘New Democracy’ (November 2018), as well as at the 12th Party Congress (December 2018). However, no relevant reference was included in the pre-election announcement of national elections (New Democracy, 2019); it was, instead, included in the programming statements of the government.

While the COVID-19 health crisis dominated the public sphere, against measures restricting social gatherings and, therefore, any possibility of social protest, the government legislated (February 2021), *inter alia*, the baseline of tertiary education admission, introducing significant changes compared to 2005. The law mainly concerns tertiary education and establishes the following: intensification of studies (setting time limits to completing courses), correlation of institute assessment to the amount of state subsidy they are entitled, enforcement of severe disciplinary law on students and creation of a special police force on campuses to maintain order and security. Public dialogue focused on the last issue, significantly underestimating the social class barrier

and access control aspect, impacting broader social groups as a consequence of the 'minimum admission base'.

This baseline is determined by the average score achieved by candidates in the 4 courses of each scientific field aspiring to enter. This will be done by calculating the average score of each subject and then the average of the four subjects examined of each field at pan-Hellenic level. This average is multiplied by a coefficient determined by the institute admitting the candidates for its schools, departments or major study course offered (Greek Parliament Gazette, 2021), while the Ministry of Education determines the fluctuation range of the coefficient every year. Thus, based on what applies for this year, (Minister of Education and Religion, 2021) if the baseline for a field is set at 12/20, depending on candidates' scores, and the coefficient selected for the department is 0.80, then the baseline for this department becomes 9.6; alternatively, if the coefficient is set at 1.2, then the baseline becomes 14.4/20.

The opposition highlighted the artificial access barrier by estimating the creation of 24,000 vacant places, which is confirmed by the media affiliated with the government and estimating vacant places at 17,000 (Lakasas, 2021). Also, the Rectors' Synod (a non-institutionalised collective representative body for the coordination of the activity of the Universities) supported the 'minimum admission base' as a measure to establish academic admission criteria, recognizing the 'significant reduction of the total number' of admissions, while presenting a contradictory proposal to address the social dimension of exclusion, urging the 'state (...) to provide for alternative forms of high quality higher education for young people who will not be able to attend public HEIs' (Rectors' Synod, 2021). However, as we discuss below, 'alternative forms' of

Higher Education, given the Constitutional constraints, signify private institutions under a dubious institutional operating regime.

Given the experience of the implementation of Law 3404/2005, most regional institutes and, particularly, departments in low demand, chose the lowest possible figure for the coefficient defined by the Ministry of Education, i.e., 0.80, while there were cases of departments in high demand that did not comply with the legislative framework (at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the largest institute in the country, these departments were: Political Sciences, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, School of Drama, etc.; they requested either postponement of implementation, inability to determine a coefficient, or general disagreement). However, despite the emergence of competitive political action, dynamic reaction, at the departmental level, was countered by the provision of the law to determine the figure for the coefficient by the respective Senate or, in the event of a wider wave of 'disobedience', by the Ministry of Education.

Methodology

The field for analysis was delineated by the restoration of a past regulation 15 years later, under the political responsibility of the same political party, which had been banned for a decade by governments from 2010 to date. As a consequence, the relevant statutes of 2005 and 2021 became the focal point of our research interest, and in particular, their processing in the Parliament, allowing us to seek discursive strategies, similarities, and differences in the construction of social reality and correlate them with the background against which educational discourse was articulated.

The way of reconstructing social reality through linguistic codification and rendering, i.e., through texts, entails, according to Van Dijk, the dialectic

connection of a macro and a micro-level. The former refers to ‘dominant values and views’ and the latter to linguistic strategies and the very texts produced by the actors (2008:85-87; Serafis, 2018). Therefore, the fields of action (including the circumstances, institutional frameworks, and social constructs) (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010), configure and influence the discourse. In turn, discourse influences the language, as well as the non-linguistic social and political procedures and actions. ‘Discourses as linguistic social practices can be seen as constituting non-discursive and discursive social practices and, at the same time, as being constituted by them’ (Wodak, 2001:66), contributing to the formation of a social world, which includes the social identities and the social relations (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:61). ‘Dominant values and views’ are neither static in form nor do they have a stable dimension of a smooth and given steady reference point. They are mere aspects of a historically shaped and produced environment, the perception, comprehension and decodifying of which presuppose the inclusion of analytic research into their contextual environment, i.e., knowledge beyond the actual text. Therefore, critical discourse analysis draws from the elements and experiences of the past, considers current events and ponders on future prospects so as to achieve a holistic analysis of an actual event (Wodak, 2009:11). Fairclough underlines the necessary inclusion of the contextual historic-socio-political field of action so as to proceed with analysing a fragmented perception of a social issue and to highlight the multifaceted and polysemic parameters shaping an event (2001:129). In other words, the analysis focuses on semiotic elements that highlight aspects of dominance, normalise and legitimise the necessity of intervening as a given fact and render any possible resistance unfounded or irrational. Consequently, targeted critical discourse analysis refers to systematic research into often opaque deterministic relationships between ‘a) discursive practices, events and texts and b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes’ (Fairclough,

1995:132) that impose a political, social, economic or cultural context. It is an interactive analysis of linguistic features, argumentative discourse and ideological domination.

There are diffuse declarative linguistic elements of a new impersonal and a-historical reality, with explicit strategies as if they were non-modified truths that dictates self-evident political actions. Truth, as noted by M.Foucault, is linked in a circular relationship with systems of power that produce and support it, but also with the effects of power that it produces and extends (1987). Every society has its own 'regime of truth', the general politics of truth, that is, the framework that validates the legitimacy or otherwise of the expression of truth and the results it produces (Foucault, 1980:130). Through recontextualization the economic discourse colonises in education and establishes itself in politics. It is a process of transforming and imposing the 'being' of the former into the 'must' of the latter; a power relation with associated social perspectives and connotations (Fairclough, 2020: 84). This is a form of 'recontextualisation', a hybrid scheme of discourse, within which the economic realm adulterates political and educational discourse; this is represented linguistically and transforms a multi-dimensional environment of reality by blunting aspects of the domination and authority of the economic domain, while, at the same time, reformulating a new starting point and legitimising a political act and choice into 'inevitable' rationality.

Despite temporal distance, intertextuality is identifiable because the issue at hand remains, almost unadulterated, drawing interest to the same basic social actors, making references to the same imperatives and prioritisation and, ultimately, preserving identical documents and sources for drawing arguments with a common core of construction and conclusion (Bazerman, 2004:87).

Intertextuality is not perceived in a restrictive manner when it comes to immediately apparent interactive correlations of texts (Kristeva, 1986:37) but, rather when it comes to inclusion or exclusion of texts comprising orders of discourse and impacting social formation and practices in an evolutionary production and rendering of the most recent educational event (Farrelly, 2020).

Texts are incorporated in a wide socio-political background and have a strong ideological impact on their frame of reference, i.e., society through representations of the world which are structured (Stamou, 2014:172) in a manner that highlights the social and ideological contribution of language in the production, reproduction and transformation of social structures (Fairclough, 1992:211). Ideology, as noted by V. Burgin, establishes ‘a complex of propositions about the natural and social world which would be generally accepted in a given society as describing the actual, indeed necessary, nature of the world and its events’ (1982:45). Given the emphasis of semiotics, in the role that the semantic systems have in constructing and maintaining the reality, we highlight the points related to their signified, through social contracts perceived as granted, despite the conventional nature of their relations.

Stakeholders, mediate in formulating a social reality, by submitting interpretative frameworks of mediation for the educational system, for the establishment, reproduction, or subversion of power relations. These groups, through the priorities and interpretations that they submit, in relation to the importance of education in the social and financial stratification, namely, of an ideological map of intakes, understandings, and objectives, aim at ‘gaining and legitimating the social control’ (Fisher, 1972:323). This is how ideology is intermediated and reproduced through the educational system as a central social institution with linguistic and semiotic practices we are attempting to identify

while decoding their functional role in establishing power relationships (Wodak, 2015). The strategy discussed aims directly at changing given social and cultural structures, as a decisive strategy of the government, intended, through a transformation, in rearranging the social structure (La Belle and Ward, 1990; Papadakis, 2003). Delimiting what is truly happening ('social events') and describing social practices as failures, implies, without explicitly expressing it, a new social structure through the field of education (Fairclough, 2006:26).

We choose the application of Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA), given its orientation in, mainly, the historical events, which are found in a diachrony of significance, with an evolutionary trajectory of changes, proportional to the social and political reality, and especially, in the more complete inclusion of the rhetoric and analysis of the arguments (Reisigl, 2018:49).

DHA incorporates three aspects of criticism that distinguish it against the rest of the approaches: the inherent criticism of text or discourse, the sociodiagnostic criticism, and the prospect criticism. The first, refers to the evaluation and reveal of the conflicts, the contradictions, and the inconsistencies, found in text-internal or discourse-internal structures, and relates to the coherence, conditions, arguments, and rotational structures. It is based, among others, on rhetoric, as well as on theoretical norms and standards that are textual and argumentative. Given the significant importance that the DHA has in the theory of argumentation, it follows the ten 'rules' of argumentative speech, for the constructive dispute (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, & Snoeck Henkemans, 2002:182-3). Sociodiagnostic criticism aims at revealing the forms of manipulation, within and through discourse, as well as the problematic moral aspects of its practices. It is focused on discrepancies among the textual and other social practices, and acts as a form of social control. It is based on social,

historical, and political knowledge, and includes the criticism over the ideology, the morality of the social agents, as well as the political and social criticism. The third, has a practical orientation, targeting the removal or reduction of the dysfunctions in communication, and the linguistic barriers, by processing or submitting proposals and guidelines (Reisigl, 2018:51; Reisigl & Wodak, 2020:149).

The subject matter of the research justified the focus and selection of the under-analysis texts, in which the educational discourse is transformed, through multiple macro-strategies of de-ideologization and depoliticization, as a crucial government targeting to rearrange the socio-economic organization. The primary resources include the minutes of parliamentary processing of the two laws, and the minutes of the parliamentary committees, which are responsible for cases relating to education. The secondary resources include newspapers' articles, interviews on television, and publications of the broader political communication of the parties. The citation of multiple quotations of members of the parliament is based on an additional aim of the research, showcasing a homogenous and commonly adopted government narrative, which is formed by commonly adopted starting assumptions, similar forms of argumentations, and converging targets.

We employ a range of different techniques of DHA applied to primary and secondary sources in the form of texts used aiming at:

- exploring the rhetorical dimension of language
- highlighting the dynamic persuasive perspective of texts to convince;
- exploring the way different groups seek to regulate and direct social development through the use of language

- identifying the constructive elements of discourse, which are transformed among the two reform initiatives on the matter.

The governmental narrative relating to the urgency of educational intervention, with a crucial prospect to exclude the emergence of competitive discourse, is formed through the discursive strategies. Through nomination strategy, the social and political agents, events, and processes are formed, with a wide use of indicative, patterns of speech, anthroponyms, and others, which facilitate the formation of deictic centres with counterbalanced effects. Their evaluation, through stereotypical determinations, idiomatic expressions, metaphors, and rhetorical patterns (metonyms, patterns of exaggeration, hints, and invocations), is made through predication strategies. In what regards the intensification strategies, their aim is the alteration of the illocutionary force of the utterances with the use of patterns of exaggeration, questions, glorifying verbs, and others, on the basis of appropriate validity (Wodak, 2001; Reisigl & Wodak, 2020).

Our focus on analyzing argumentation strategies, as part of the discursive strategies, and especially in the fallacies (for example, through *argumentum ad verecundiam* and *argumentum ad populum*) for the support, justification, and legitimation of the reliability claims, is concerned with: i) the control of the claim of truth and the normative accuracy which are explicitly expressed or meant, and their connection with broader political choices and ideological references, ii) the main subjects of discourse, establishing a form of social meaning and practice in representing a new educational reality, iii) the linguistic characteristics that are being used.

Analysis

The ‘majority’ doctrine

The majority doctrine is a governmental pattern of argumentation establishing topos of populism leading to de-idolisation and depoliticisation of educational regulations, presenting them as a ‘self-evident’ intervention based on ‘common sense’ and ‘consensus’. This is a fallacy ‘of evading the burden of proof’ (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1987:294), avoiding any analysis of one's standpoint, implying that the view expressed needs no defence and is not subject to criticism. In 2021, the appeal made by opinion surveys into social consensus, regardless of political identification, proved to be a factor to deconstruct the counter-argument about ideological perceptions of the government through establishing social class barriers. Compatibility with and consequence of pre-election commitments are used as proof to document the legality and consistency of the government. Similarly, in 2005, the field of social consensus was shifted arbitrarily in the journalistic highlighting afforded by ‘notable’ and ‘reputable’ newspapers which were considered as representing ‘public opinion’ and reflecting social consensus, i.e., governmental obligation.

‘Surveys of opinion show impressive percentages in favor of the bill. I will not refer to the voters of New Democracy, but to society as a whole and especially to the voters of SYRIZA and KINAL (...) Base of entrance: society in favor of 63%, SYRIZA 52%, in favor’ (N.Kerameos, Minister of Education, Proceedings of Parliament, 20/2/2021)

‘This bill was a popular demand; it was a demand of the Greek society...’ (A.Patsis, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021)

‘We all agree and the Greek society agrees that the admission to the higher education with grades 1, 2, 3, etc. should stop’ (I.Kourakos, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 22/9/2005)

‘...I will refer you to the front pages of notable newspapers - of all newspapers - which, as you will recall, at the time when the baseline for admission was announced, reported very contemptuously that with a grade of one and a half (...) they were admitted to higher education’ (A.Bouras, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 22/9/2005)

‘I just remind you of the front pages of all the reputable newspapers the day the baseline for admission was announced - and the next day - this year. And we have to take these headlines as the mirror and the face of public opinion’ (V.Polydoros, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 21/9/2005)

Governmental discourse separates interventions from their background influence environments and turns them into a broadly accepted and reasonable ‘normalisation’ process, without seeking any root causes and, besides, bypassing the subsequent consequences of the regulation. Exclusion is introduced and legitimized by the restoration of ‘merit’ as the basic principle of reward distribution. Demonstrated individual value, as a result of competition and effort, is reduced to a neutral and objective criterion that legitimizes selection, naturalizes result and limits decisive socio-economic and institutional variables. Those variables are often considered a barrier for underprivileged societal groups (Mijs, 2016). Minimum admission base is placed outside any political negotiation, thus whitewashing indisputable ideological references and implications and grounding it on the ‘realm of necessity’ (Hay, 2007:86).

‘...it is common sense that there should be academic requirements for university admission. Because it is common sense that it does not benefit anyone to be introduced to the two hundredth choice of candidate’s selection form, a random choice (...) it is common sense that it is not normal to be a student for twenty or

thirty years (...) it is common sense that there is a beginning, a middle and an end to every educational process' (N.Kerameos, Minister of Education, Proceedings of Parliament, 10/2/2021)

'...A baseline for admission should be valid and there should be selection criteria. We take this for granted today, something that is true all over the world. A selection system applies in all countries' (S.Taliadouros, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 22/9/2005)

However, entrance examination for tertiary education is not a weighted assessment or evaluation of knowledge acquired, a process preceding the award of the secondary school leaving certificate (Apolyterion Lykeiou); they merely function as a way to allocate candidates to the places offered. Consequently, subjective views keep being expressed through various deontic modes, using typical expressions/forms of ethics in the 3rd person singular, which reinforces a general, vague sense of pathology; this is founded on value-type argumentation which also specifies the request for undertaking political initiatives as necessary educational changes, based on a moral obligation and mission the political actor owes society. Using comparative arguments is often common practice. Its use strengthen persuasiveness of discourse by using examples of effective practices from developed countries that facilitate transfer dynamics. (Phillips, 2000).

Building a single identity alignment

Legitimising educational reform is achieved on a premise of the need to overcome some pathology. This is a semiotic argumentation based on a macro-strategy of legitimisation and rationalisation. Controlling the truth of the premise entails a dubious acceptance and consensus achieved through a series of false or disputable certainties. Primarily, building a single identity, creating a

‘we’, the Greeks, incorporates in the most simplified manner the ‘we’, the citizens; this bridges and forges a dubious ‘parity’ of the progress and prosperity of the country with that of its citizens. A single and conclusive formulation of an imaginary identity is a fundamental strategy to transcend competitive identities as a result of opposing interests, hierarchies, values and beliefs. The linguistic strategy of shaping a ‘we’ aims at achieving the consensus of social actors concerning the government agenda, at ensuring a positive self-definition of collectivity and contrasting the ‘others’ who express an anti-reformative discourse (Couliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Serafis, 2018:86). Still, the regulation, as will be shown below, formulates in a central and emblematic manner the terms of organising competitive identities among students, as a result of a forced allocation into differentiated options made available for post-secondary education, which are decisive for one's vocational and social identity. Allocation is based on arguments of a mainly educational discourse, as a normalised and self-evident choice for success, assessed with objective and validated criteria of minimal performance. This is how the process is depoliticised and deideologised, muting the terms of a broader political strategy to reproduce socio-economic inequalities that is based on a neutral and objective educational assessment of skills and performance based on the same criteria. The repeated use of the verb ‘demand’, in the 3rd person singular, that has been selected implies, in an abstract manner, a sense of general necessity, while choosing the syntax of an unconnected emphatic scheme of deductive reasoning, with a mere list of correlated clauses, attributes a natural flow to the discourse, simplifies and makes the argument comprehensible, by arranging similar elements intended to ‘shape’ a broader political strategy:

‘The field of education, however, demands national consensus and can no longer be a field of political controversy. Society demands of us to decide for our children with a

future perspective and not to remain obsessed with the controversies of the present’ (A.Papakosta – Palioura, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

‘The decision of the Ministry (...) the limit of the base as a necessary condition for introduction is in my mind almost self-evident. It obey to the common sense that we politicians very often want to forget’ (K.Mitsotakis, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 21/9/2005).

The narrative the government uses is based on highlighting a new regulatory framework for structuring the educational system, as a prerequisite condition and a springboard of a generally formulated economic growth that concerns all Greeks, i.e., ‘us’. However, the person presenting the majority in 2021 defines the deictic centre at multiple and interconnected levels. It outlines a ‘we’/ ‘us’ of a generic and oversimplified collective that means the Greeks, without any distinction or qualification, without opposition or conflicting interests or class differences and socio-economic references. At the same time, there is a second ‘we’ emerging, comprising the government which, in a bold and decisive manner, promotes educational reform and a social consent based on opinion surveys that applauds and legitimises the initiative of the government.

This third deictic centre concerns a ‘they’/‘them’ comprising the representatives of ‘reaction’, of ‘stagnation’, of ‘obsolescence’ and ‘obsession’ and it is defined by two interconnected domains, one social and one political, with the latter creating a background providing arguments to the former. In both cases, the discourse of the government, based on a reality that defines necessity, counterpoints two opposing ideological angles that reinforce the bipolarity of the field and introduce the terms of a ‘blame game’ (Angouri and Wodak, 2014) that concerns political forces which served the degradation of studies and at this historic crucial point undertake counter-reformative action.

What is attempted is an appeal to emotions by projecting parents' anxiety about their children's future onto the collective effort required from the entire 'society'. The adversative clause below connotes that anyone opposing this effort is going against the whole, against the progress of society, as well as against the aspiration for a better future for children. Appealing to common sense is presented as self-explanatory justification for the government's choice, further strengthened by the opposition between the irrationality of past policies as opposed to the reasonable ones of the present.

'Unfortunately, however, with their stance so far, the opposition parties do not stand up to the circumstances, as clinging to ideologies and views through distorting lenses, they actually practice politicking, instrumentalizing the field of education for partisan and voting purposes' (A.Papakosta – Palioura, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

'You are inert material in reform. You hold back the locomotive of progress and not even of progress, of common sense, of the requirement of necessity. The most fertile womb, says Euripides, is the womb of necessity. It gives birth; it has power, that is, real fertility. Now we have the need not to remain apathetic to enter with a grade of one and a half and solve it' (V.Polydoros, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 21/9/2005)

The vocabulary adopted expresses shortcomings intending to prove the moral deficit typical of the Opposition. In 2005, there was a combined function through using words with an ideological and emotional charge, such as the 'locomotiva' echoing the Soviet Union, the 'inert material' of constructive engineering and the 'womb' of Euripides, so as to create a dynamic and diverse pattern of a government determined to resolve long-standing problems.

In two time periods, the same governing party, with a different Opposition (2005 ‘PASOK’, 2021 ‘SYRIZA’) attributes to the Opposition an identical role of counterbalancing action to the imperative of progress and common sense. In the former case, that of ‘PA.SO.K.’, there had been a 20-year period of governing focusing on expanding access to tertiary education, thus almost doubling the number of candidates admitted, as a culminating point of a long equalising educational policy. In the latter case, that of ‘SYRIZA’, there had been a governing term of 4.5 years, the main policy action of which concerning tertiary education was a regulatory merger of T.E.I.s, and their incorporation into existing or newly established A.E.I.s, maintaining the populist policy of an expanded number of candidates admitted.

Governmental discourse limits the ideological aspects of intervention with a clear split and the juxtaposition of opposing sides, which reflect a political and social progression shifting the new educational paradigm and an obsolete conservative attitude of counterbalancing action with strong, social references, which, however, represent a minority. This is a fallacious argument, since the Opposition argumentation incorporates the need to seek a cause-result correlation between performance, on the one hand, and structural features of the educational system and social characteristics of the students, on the other.

Governmental discourse creates a pseudo dilemma of a dual juxtaposition with its view on a base line for admission comprising the pole of political progression, rationality, public interest and upgrading of quality, while the opposing pole comprises the Opposition, which selects conservatism within a stagnant and pathogenic *status quo*, which gives it political benefits. This is a kind of ‘instrumental argumentation’, where the premises taken as a given is transferred to the conclusion, thus leading to a cause-result correlation between them (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992:97).

The new educational paradigm alienates itself from its social organic character and its economic references adulterate or silences existing class contrasts, while also validating them. The new educational environment is characterised by an interventional allocation of the student force and the linguistic means used establish change procedures without social actors. Reinforcing ‘competitiveness’ through a bidirectional prospect of a forced strengthening of technical-vocational education and the imposition of ‘conscious’ tertiary education choices is presented as an absolute truth, leaving no margin for disputing or need for further proof.

‘It needs to alleviate the mismatch of its outputs with the needs of the labor market of the phenomenon of over-education, brain drain and the gap of basic research with innovation and production’ (Ch.Staikouras, Minister of Economy, Proceedings of Parliament, 10/2/2021)

‘CEDEFOP’s study of 2018 emphasizes that Greece is twenty-third, among twenty-eight EU countries in the effectiveness of the education system, to develop skills that are relevant in the labor market. So there is this gap, this gap between what we produce as an educational process and what the labor market really needs’ (N.Kerameos, Minister of Education, Proceedings of Parliament, 10/2/2021)

‘We do not want other degrees, which are only to be framed on the walls, without meeting knowledge, without meeting the requirements of today's reality’ (A.Korka - Konsta, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 21/9/2005)

In both cases the discourse of the governing party questions the cognitive basis of the studies provided and, mainly the corresponding vocational validity. An oversimplifying argumentation invents an absolutely linear correspondence/balance between university knowledge and labour market demand. In other words, education is reoriented due to a perspective of

educational value *per se* and social provision on an instrumental contribution to the needs of the economy. A broader debate, well beyond the scope of this paper, emerges; it refers to determining the economic model for the country and the socio-economic twists caused by the 10-year economic crisis that have torn apart long-standing premises about the labour relation regime and the prospects of employment.

The narrative of upgrading studies

At the centre of structuring the dominant governmental narrative about the obligation for taking the initiatives lies in upgrading tertiary studies. The strategy of the government responds to a range of structural features of the educational system and the false social representations and premises that have always been undermining the prospects of economic growth and prosperity. The necessity of upgrading quality is supported by highlighting cases of candidates entering university with a low average score, which, in turn, means a slow pace of completing one's course of studies and a high number of 'loitering' students known as 'lifers'. Governmental discourse is structured on arguments that classify it in the deliberative and judicial type of discourse (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*:1358b).

'The first axis of the bill creates a protective grid for prospective students...'

(A.Papakosta –Palioura, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

'When a candidate is admitted with 0.8, i.e. with blank exams page, what hope does (s)he have to finish his studies? Who benefits from such a paradox? The student who loses some years of life without result? Parents, who from their backwardness can financially support their child, to end up unskilled and unemployed? (...) And the state must above all be interested in the education and progress of young people'

(M.Xarakopoulos, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

‘Isn’t it logical that these students will never succeed or will be too late to complete their studies, as a result of which they will enter the labor market with a long delay and having lost valuable and productive years?’ (D.Aktypis, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021)

‘This situation in higher education cannot continue. It is not possible to prevent the quality upgrade of education, because some children cannot attend since they do not have a minimum of basic knowledge’ (A.Bouras, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 22/9/2005)

‘We believe that preventing the admission of remaining candidates to higher education has been proven to be multiple useful, firstly, for the educational institutions themselves (...) but also for the children themselves, who will be able to find (...) other outlets.’ (A.Spiliopoulos, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 21/9/2005)

In the former type of discourse (*genus deliberativum*) there is a split-type of analysis between what is beneficial and what is harmful; these form the basic concepts of the argument and result in inhibiting the prospect of upgrading studies. The low entrance examination score is used as evidence for a low starting point, a low academic interest, procrastinating one's completion of studies, dropping out of university and delaying entry into the labour market. Therefore, the new framework of controlling access is compatible with a rationale that is ‘self-evident’ and ‘beneficial’ for all, i.e., candidates, family and state, limiting waste of resources and human potential to the benefit of all.

This is a fallacy that cannot be proven with any correlation of performance of subjects classified under a specific discipline with access to affiliated scientific fields (Hakkinen, 2004; De Winter and Dodou, 2011; Sulphey, Al-Kahtani and Syed, 2018) or with the impact of the demographic characteristics of candidates (Gropper, 2007; McIntosh and Munk, 2007); nevertheless, it is attributed

homogenised and oversimplified elements of argumentation grounded on a cumulative perception of learning which foresees academic success or failure. Furthermore, the different character of the Greek system, with scientific disciplines that offer access to a wide range of departments that are not really affiliated with the subjects examined, is not a valid predicting factor of one's future academic career. Indicatively, the 1st scientific field includes departments of humanities, legal and social sciences; this means that a candidate aiming, for instance, for Educational studies can choose to be examined, *inter alia*, in Ancient Greek, which is hardly a cognitive field of the department course of studies. Furthermore, counterbalancing interventions to remedy the deficient cognitive load of students, as an additional policy of concern, despite its positive prospects on paper (Braley and Ogden, 1997; Weissman, Silk and Bulakowski, 1997), does not comprise an educational political choice.

The strategy of nomination as a discourse strategy constructing social actors under human titles (the tax-payers) is an apparent necessity for government discourse, aiming at matching investment and result. At this point, it is important that two existing levels of funding become apparent. Public expense, as an indirect expense of taxpayers, is reflected in the control of the quality of tertiary education provided, starting with assessment/evaluation, of the potential completion of one's studies as an *ex ante* measure of the return on the expense. The intention impinges on the ideological principles of liberal educational views, imposing a horizontal regulatory framework limiting the freedom of choice, while, at the same time, it introduces an underlying issue of restoring an existing inequality caused by the flattening policies in education. In other words, the burden on the general population, regardless of their income, and the use of the educational services provided leads to inequality at the very base of the universal compulsory economic burden (taxation), which signifies social

injustice on top of the absence of any control concerning the gain of the investment. The rationale besides the argument construct becomes a prerequisite for a shift to the voucher theme, i.e., the imposition of economic competition on the educational system and the introduction of marketable acquisition of educational services, control and interchangeability.

‘We tell you that it is shameful, wasteful and eventually useless for the state to mock young people, academia and taxpayers, handing out diplomas that does not worth the paper they were printed, without facing the economy, without facing the work, but not even in education’ (X.Kefalidou, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

‘We must realize that in the free public education that we all pay for, in the education provided by the Hellenic Republic from the little the Greek people have, no one is entitled to participate if he does not meet certain basic conditions of academic competence’ (Z.Makri, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 21/9/2005)

The motif of reassessing and rationalising ‘free education’ becomes through an indirect deductive reasoning a directly related demand for a baseline control and determination of temporal restrictions of the term of studies, i.e., a matter of intensifying study courses. This way, the ‘lifer’ student becomes a ‘failed’ student who wastes resources becoming a burden to taxpayers (a scapegoat-type of sophistry against the soundness of public expenses) and degrades the quality of studies. ‘Lifers’ was use as a constant indication of a ‘pathology’ from ‘New Democracy’ party for a long period. These students, often metonymically referred to as 'leftist groups', were accused: degrading the quality of educational system due to student inflation, reinforcing the perception of 'lesser effort' and causing unrest in university life. In this context, attempts were made to intensify studies by setting a time limit for their completion since 1974. The political persuasive power of the argument lies in triggering a phobic syndrome of distorted or wasteful use of taxpayers’ economic resources, mainly oriented

towards mobilising social reflexes. This sophistry achieves a transition to the signifier political field of dialectic opposition of ideological trends, i.e., social accountability. The simplified expression of argumentation, in the form of *argumentum ad populum*, starts from the premise that a social majority perception of controlling the return on investment, given the obligatory direct or indirect funding through taxation; this, however, naturalises and renders indisputable the political ‘necessity’ and ‘rationality’ of taking additional measures to protect the social investment.

In the latter form of discourse, i.e., the judicial (*genus iudiciale*), argumentation draws from the just/unjust topos. The just topos is the base of restoring equal treatment of students at affiliated departments. In other words, it is just for students faced with wide score fluctuations when competing to enter departments offering a similar discipline and degree -the two extremes being urban centre and regional area institutes- to be admitted with a small discrepancy in their performance. The unjust topos is that candidates with low interest in studying occupy places in, mainly, regional institutes, estimating low correlation and expectation of vocational prospects, depriving other candidates, more aware of their choice of discipline, of the opportunity to study since there are no places left.

‘But we also make fun of his fellow students who have been admitted to the same department with much higher performance’. (N.Kerameos, TA NEA, 2021)

‘The interconnected effort-result-reward relationship ceases to exist. Everything is flattened, all in the same cauldron. The student who struggled, tried, got tired, studied, set goals was admitted to the same school as the one who gave blank exams paper. It is unfair from every point of view’. (M.A.Kefala, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

‘It can't, the lack of meritocracy (...) to be promoted through such a system. Education is public education. It is not possible, without academic competence, to sit at the same desk as someone else’ (I.Kallioras, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 21/9/2005)

Against the same vein, the rate of graduation is presented as an absolute figure of indisputable assertion of low interest, without presenting any comparative data concerning the reasons for such 'delay' in graduating. An additional aspect of the ‘harmful’ and ‘beneficial’ pattern concerns the international ranking of Greek universities as a result of their low graduation rate and the artificial distortion of the student-teacher ratio. ‘Lifer’ students distort a basic parameter of institute classification and, therefore, they become a burden for the educational system and shape terms for graduates’ low professional competitiveness.

‘Do we really have the right to remain blind and to be defamed around the world when the graduation rate per year (...) is it allowed to be lower than Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Croatia and even neighboring Turkey?’ (A.Papakosta - Palioura, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

Selecting an intensification strategy based on deontic prestige entails a hyperbole, which becomes an international defamation for the country, due to the low graduation rate and a predication strategy founded on a subjective and arbitrary assessment of Balkan countries, which Greece is supposedly expected to lead. Selecting Balkan countries is based on a deontic modality that indicative of the obligation to proceed with necessary action towards restoring a deeply rooted view that Greece, is a generic and undefined pioneer, which incorporates and consolidates stereotypical views because of the communistic traditions in Balkan countries. On the contrary, reference to Turkey implies an absolute national need to compare with the ‘enemy’ based

on a diffusely invested social representation in degraded educational and cultural capital.

Furthermore, evoking the international classification of Greek universities is a fallacy of *argumentum ad verecundiam*, which is reduced to an absolutely true and indisputable argument that validates the necessity to control access to tertiary education and tackle the issue of ‘lifer’ students. Institute classification is translated using a declarative linguistic act into an indisputable rule for drawing the conclusion that the possibility of access to those with a low entrance exam score has to be limited to achieve quality upgrading. The declarative statement uses the Cybermetrics (CCHS) data of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), according to which the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens ranks 185th, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki ranks 205th and the rest of the Greek universities follow, out of 12,000 universities internationally (Webometrics, 2021). However, the classification criteria -which are reduced to an indisputable reality and make up the basis for supporting a vague ‘pathology’- do not include the number of students admitted or the rate of graduation. In other words, the rule defined by the government has nothing to do with a lineal reasoning articulation of moving from the argument (of international classification) to the claim of truth (the necessity of imposing a strict regulatory framework to achieve quality). Additionally, in an classification table of equal credibility and validity, namely the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), better known as ‘Shanghai ranking’, Greek university departments ranked very high, reflecting islets of excellence (Consultancy, 2020). An oversimplified generalisation of an arbitrary inference that admission on a low score distorts or is to blame for the low international ranking of Greek universities and, therefore, it is related to the

overall output of Greek education becomes a diffuse social representation, which favours the dominant narrative the government ‘resolves’.

Redirection of allocation as social inequality

The minimum admission base will exclude a large number of candidates from Tertiary Education, a prospect underpinned by the facts of prior application, which is, in any case, what the intervention intends to achieve. The social characteristics of those excluded, despite the limited number of pertinent research papers (Mavros, 1998), reflect the exclusion of social features, a premise the government recognises, given the reverse research data, i.e., that children born to higher social class families enter university schools of higher prestige (Iliou, 1990; Kyridis, 2011) .

‘And in the unprecedented argument for supporting poor children with low school grades, the reality, unfortunately, proves that it is not being tackled, but unemployment, state mockery and the scientific and professional decommissioning of the children themselves is being postponed’. (Z.Makri, MP, Proceedings of Parliament, 9/2/2021).

The prospect of social mobility for ‘poor children’ through higher education tiers is disputed through the use of an arbitrary claim entailing elements of a creeping social determinism that validates the topos of vanity. Additionally, according to the latest data of Hellenic Statistical Authority (HELSTAT) for the year 2019, the percentage of the population over 16 years of age at risk of poverty per educational tier is relatively favourable for graduates of the first and second tier of tertiary education (7.7%), as compared to the graduates of Lyceum (senior secondary school and post-secondary education (18.0%) (2020:5).

After being excluded from Tertiary education the prospects open to the young are limited to: post-secondary education public and private ‘Vocational Training Institutes’ (*Instituto Epagelmatikis Katartisis - IEK*), that provide vocational education and training qualifications entitled to limited vocational rights, studies abroad or studying at private Tertiary Education Institutes. Deputy Minister of Education, Z.Makri, advocates for the first option: 'graduating from an I.E.K. can be a lucrative carrier while building a valid professional reputation' (Kriti TV, 2021). The second option has been a significant prospect for Greek society in the last thirty years, despite the limited vocational rights such graduates are entitled to, mainly concerning employment in the public sector, because of the Greek Constitution (Article 16), which stipulates an exclusively public regime of operation.

Another cleavage distinguishing the educational discourse of political parties in Greece and entails strong ideological and political aspects has to do with maintaining the public character of Tertiary education, i.e., having a state monopoly in education. The governing political party has been promoting the need to change the operation regime and to permit private initiative to enter the Tertiary Education field of activity. The argument is underpinned using the challenge of quality upgrading of public institutes to remain competitive with private ones. Given the high political polarisation entailed in the matter since the beginning of the 1990s, the government has not proceeded with a direct institutional recognition, which would lead to wide social and political clash, but put forward the recognition of equal vocational rights to graduates of private institutes (Colleges awarding tertiary education titles through synergies with international tertiary institutes) a few months earlier (Greek Parliament Gazette, 2020). The restoration of a ‘grey’ landscape concerning the private tertiary education legal status amidst the COVID-19 pandemic was a way of avoiding

any ideologically charged confrontation, while, at the same time, using a methodology or segmentally tackling the issue, an overall educational planning was completed. We support that two independent educational legislative regulations constitute the terms of a single central political strategy. This means that, given the programmatic adoption of an apparently liberal educational and economic view that considers competition a necessary condition for qualitative upgrading, the government managed to shift political interest from an ideological juxtaposition of principles to a pragmatic, rational economic field of competition among equals and of assessment through market forces, simply by recognising common vocational rights. Having concluded this consolidation of rights, the government now proceeds with a ‘self-evident’ regulation of the number of candidates being admitted at a low performance score, providing them, at the same time, with the option of a parallel and equivalent network of private tertiary education with recognised vocational rights, where admission is exclusively based on paying tutorial fees.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to highlight the dynamic correlations of the micro-level of linguistic features of concrete instances of discourse in two educational reform instances and the macro-level social analysis of the texts that impose ideological control through determining power relations. We argued that the prospect of social mobility for children from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds through the higher levels of education is decisively undermined by the ‘minimum admission base’ maintaining and reproducing social inequalities.

We identified the attempt to depoliticise the matter and to present it as a naturalised and self-evident intervention so as to disengage it from related socio-economic aspects and consequences. The government initiative can be

seen as a dynamically evolving action that temporarily autonomizes education from the contextual interaction environments in order to reorder it in a new context of operation dominated by the economic sector. The quality of the educational system, a timeless, highly hierarchical field of interest was created on arbitrary social representations and oversimplifying educational definitions, assisted by Media intermediation. The consequence of reducing quality to an indisputable and rationalistic framework of political obligation shifted the debate to a level of necessity. This necessity concerns economic growth and its reinforcement by the educational system through appropriate human force with a strict selection and allocation of the student force. The model being created makes it necessary to instrumentalise the educational system to serve the needs of the economy, as these are superficially defined by governmental planning. Consequently, terms and concepts of the economy (competition, efficacy, return, investment-gain, etc.) colonise and rule the educational system, imposing social transformations in this direction.

The core of the strategy discussed remains exactly the same in the two periods analysed; however, argumentation as a process of persuasion and inclusion into its contemporary socio-political and educational context is placed in a new framework, adapted and updated. At the same time, the catalytic economic crisis between the two periods, which significantly changed the socio-economic structure of Greek society, has introduced terms of social receptivity and tolerance to ‘necessities’, ‘rescue solutions’, and ‘one-way only options’, terms which amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and its negative economic repercussions facilitate the restoration of ‘successful’ strategies as the only options.

Keeping the issue at a high political priority level by the liberal political party, despite the 2010 explicitly expressed attitude for overturning such a decision,

which is still expressed by the current Opposition (SYRIZA), highlights the strong ideological-political contributing forces of the reformation. The political-ideological approach of the educational system adopts a structural character that is fully intertwined with the economic and social structure, the reproduction of relationships of dominance and inequality, the latter being 'dressed' in the form of the objective criterion of controlling performance that determines vocational prospects and power relationships.

Notes

¹ In 1982, a total of 13,460 candidates entered T.E.I.s, compared to 21,200 in 1986 and 33,925 in 1999. Figures from 1982 to 2000, processed from statistical bulletins of ELSTAT.

² The party representing the Greek version of socialism and social democracy, with long periods of governmental power between 1974 and 2012, was the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (P.A.S.O.K.). From its foundation (1974) to its assumption of power (1981) its political analysis, under a Marxist perspective, recognizes that the 'ruling class gives its own members the education needed to secure its position in society and the members of the dominated group the education needed to remain self-interested' (Papandreou, 1974). At the same time, P.A.S.O.K. recognises that early selective processes instrumentalize the selection on the basis of class characteristics, undertaking the commitment to abolish them 'because failure in them means failure of the system, which did not prepare the child properly' (P.A.S.O.K., 1977:135). P.A.S.O.K. represents a socio-reformist conception by making education an agent of social change.

³ Under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister and President of the 'New Democracy' party, K. Karamanlis, a committee for the reform of education is formed. The priorities that were established have remained almost unchanged from 1975 to the present day in the party's educational policy proposal. Indicatively, Karamanlis expresses the view that inflation is at the expense of quality, specifying that a prosperous society 'must have proportions so that there is social balance...' implementing measures to 'reduce the number, but above all to improve the quality of studies' (Ministry of National Education and Religions, 1976:76). The achievement of 'social balance' is served by the establishment of differentiated parallel cycles of secondary education, general and technical, with priority given to the development of technical-vocational education, which is expected to absorb the largest part of the student population. Under this plan, the long-term strategy for controlling and distributing the student population is also determined in order to make the educational system 'meet the cultural, as well as the social and economic needs of our country' (Kathimerini, 1976:1).

⁴ Indicative is the wording of MP A.Taliadourou, former Minister and Deputy Minister of National Education and Religious Affairs of the New Democracy governments, in complete contrast to the educational policy of expanding the number of admissions to higher education institutions followed by the P.A.S.O.K. government: 'those who will not become useful citizens and scientists have no place in these universities. It is better to have fewer but good students than to have many

bad ones, so that student inflation will not be a challenge' (Greek Parliament Proceedings, 1983:4341)

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