

# **A pilot survey on the English language teachers' views with regard to the Environmental Education**

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## **Introduction**

It is an undeniable fact that human beings are having a significant impact on the natural environment. As the global population continues to rise, humans place more and more pressure on a finite number of resources. Human environmental impacts can largely be attributed to consumption patterns. The best way to raise awareness for environmental issues and promote environmentally responsible behaviours is through increased access to Environmental Education (**E.E.**).

The goal is to expose young people, primary and secondary students, to different environmental issues of concern with the hope that exposure will lead to interest and result in action. That's why there is a need to develop a more extensive and effective environmental education strategy to better prepare the public to understand and take action regarding current and future environmental issues through the Greek public school system.

Taking into account all the above, and moreover, realizing the fact that to achieve the above goal we have to investigate into teachers' views and attitudes towards **E.E.** since school teachers are the 'vehicles' for the implementation of **E.E.** programmes and those who can motivate children to develop a sense of respect and responsibility towards the environment, we decided to carry out this pilot survey. We have to point out that there has been no similar survey before, that is, a survey addressing to state English language teachers in relation to **E.E.** programmes.

- ***Sample***

This pilot survey covers a representative sample of both primary and secondary English language teachers (20%), working in state schools in the prefecture of Aitolokarnania and it was carried out based on the random sampling technique.

- ***What were the main aims of the survey?***

1. To investigate and record similarities or differences between primary and secondary education with reference to the English language teachers' awareness, views and attitudes towards E.E. programmes.
2. To investigate and record the incentives and anti-incentives of joining E.E. programmes.
3. To investigate and record English language teachers' opinions about the crosscurricular-interdisciplinary character of E.E.

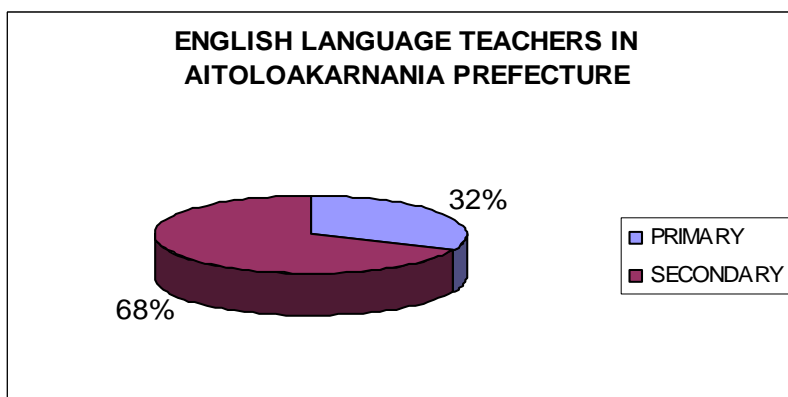
- ***Procedure***

This pilot survey was conducted last April (2-12 April 2006) using a relevant "questionnaire", constructed according to the general survey scope and the above specific aims. The questions included were primarily 'close' questions to ensure the validity and reliability of the survey's results (there were only three open questions, where needed, to let the respondents express their thoughts and ideas in a free way). The statistical analysis of the teachers' responses was based on the so called 'quantitative' method using both verbal descriptions as well as graphs, tables and charts, following, at the same time, the necessary, basic statistical and survey analysis principles.

- ***Results***

According to the final results, firstly, concerning the general official data of the respondents, 32% of the English language teachers come from primary education and 68% come from the secondary education in the prefecture of Aitolokarnania (proportional representation of both education levels).

**GRAPH 1:**



The results derived from the statistical analysis of the responses referring to E.E. issues offer very interesting data, as we conclude that there are considerable differences between the two education levels with regard to the English language teachers' views and attitude towards E.E. issues, such as relevant E.E. awareness, participation percentages, etc (see the Tables below).

**TABLE 1:** *Awareness of E.E. issues.*

Education level	<i>Are you aware of the E.E. aims and the implementation of E.E. programmes? ( closed question )</i>							
	Hardly		Little		Enough		Very	
	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
Primary	41,7	5	41,7	5	16,7	2	0	0
Secondary	11,5	3	34,6	9	38,5	10	15,3	4

Also, as it becomes obvious from the following tables, the majority of English language teachers of both primary and secondary education believe in E.E. effectiveness, reaching 63% in general terms, whereas their disbelief in E.E. effectiveness constitutes 58% which is also a high percentage that should trigger careful thought.

**TABLE 2 & 3:** *Effectiveness of E.E. programmes.*

*a. Prevention of environmental problems*

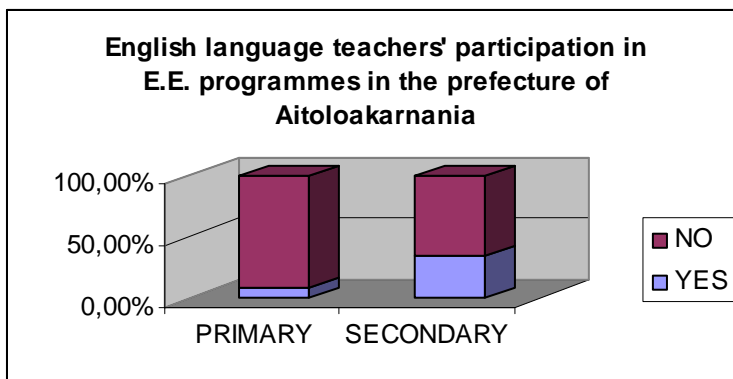
<i>Do you believe that E.E. can contribute to the prevention of the environmental problems? ( closed question )</i>					
I don't know		A little		Very much	
%	f	%	f	%	f
7,9	3	26,3	10	65,8	25

*β. Solution of environmental problems*

<i>Do you believe that E.E. can contribute to the solution of the environmental problems? ( closed question )</i>					
I don't know		A little		Very much	
%	f	%	f	%	f
7,9	3	31,6	12	60,5	23

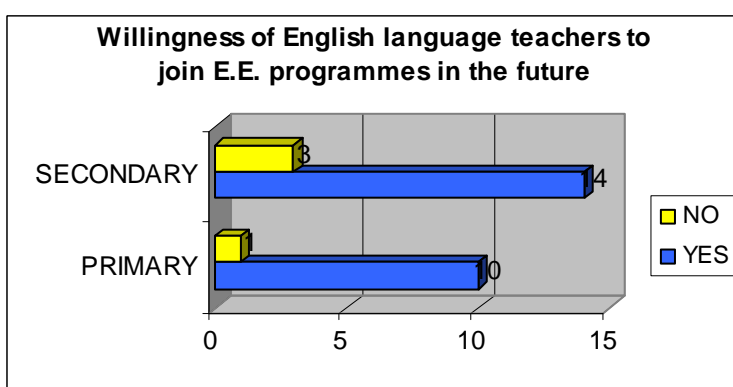
As far as English language teachers' participation in E.E is concerned, according to their answers, it follows that 91,6% coming from primary education have never joined E.E programmes before, whereas 34,6% of the secondary education have already joined E.E. once or more times:

**GRAPH 2:**



However, the vast majority of both primary and secondary English language teachers who have never joined E.E. programmes before, express their willingness to participate in the future (see the graph below).

**GRAPH 3:**



Regarding the incentives or reasons of participating in E.E. programmes, they have been categorized into four main groups (Table 4). The largest percentage 57,7% of the respondents mention that they are interested in joining E.E. mainly for environmental reasons while at the same time a considerable percentage 23% are interested in E.E for educational/learning reasons.

**TABLE 4:**

CATEGORY	PARTICIPATION REASONS IN E.E. (total No: 52)	%
<b>Environmental reasons</b> (teachers' & learners' environment awareness/sensitization, environment protection, raising of environmental awareness, prevention & solution of environmental problems)	30	<b>57,7</b>
<b>Educational / Learning reasons</b> (cross-curricularity, students' team-spirit – cooperation -socialization, school open to society, creativity, better teacher-learners' relations, educational innovation)	12	<b>23,0</b>
<b>Professional reasons</b> (working-hours, school promotion & publicity)	3	<b>5,8</b>
<b>Personal reasons</b> (interesting experience, personal/individual pleasure, speculation, creative activity)	7	<b>13,5</b>

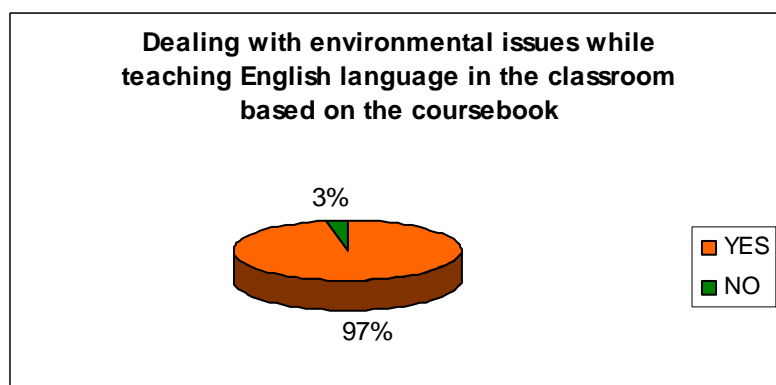
On the other hand, it is important to point out the anti-incentives or suspending factors that prevent or discourage English language teachers' participation in E.E. The majority of them mention lack of free time, as the first main negative factor, but more interesting are the references to the lack of relevant information and awareness, the defective E.E. organization, etc (see Table 5 below).

**TABLE 5:**

<b>ANTI-INCENTIVES: CATEGORIES</b>	<b>PARTICIPATION ANTI-INCENTIVES IN E.E. (total No: 55)</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Lack of time	15	<b>27,3</b>
2. Lack of information	14	<b>25,0</b>
3. Lack of resources / financial incentives	5	<b>9,0</b>
4. Lack of cooperative mood/disposition / team spirit	6	<b>10,9</b>
5. Defective/bad organization	6	<b>10,9</b>
6. Lack of means / substructure / equipment	4	<b>7,3</b>
7. Family & other duties	5	<b>9,0</b>

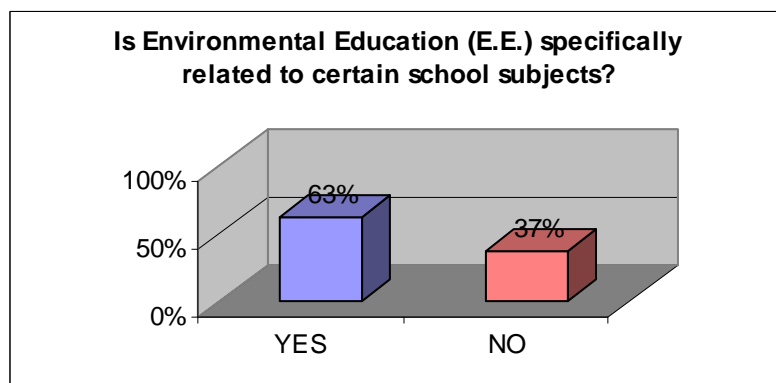
Moreover, with regard to the cross-curricular / interdisciplinary character of E.E., the following results are available and extremely interesting. To sum up, the vast majority of the respondents from both primary and secondary education mention that coursebooks used in the English language classroom include topics or activities related to environmental issues.

**GRAPH 4:**



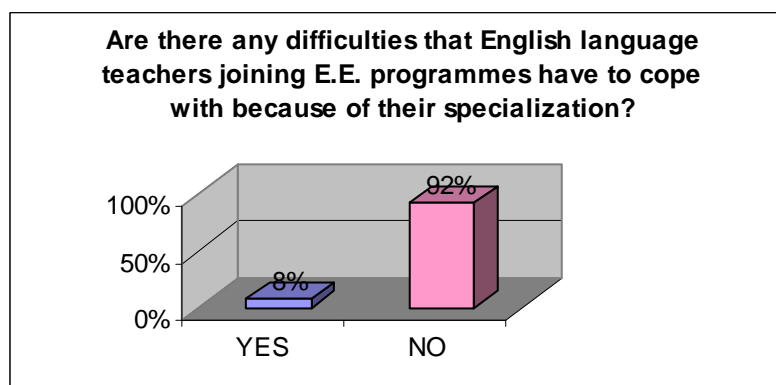
However, 63,2% consider that E.E. is more specifically related to certain school subjects (for example, science, physics and chemistry):

**GRAPH 5:**



That's why, at the same time, 92% of the respondents consider that their specialization causes difficulties, more limitations and possible unawareness of E.E. issues, that they have to cope with when joining E.E. programmes (graph 6).

**GRAPH 6:**



Another important conclusion is that 84,2% of the respondents consider that the participation in E.E. can help and reinforce English language learning through active practice, and vice versa, that is, English language learning and usage can contribute to the development and promotion of E.E. programmes:

**TABLE 6:** *English language learning through E.E. programmes.*

<i>Do you consider that learners' participation in E.E. programmes can help/reinforce English language learning? (closed)</i>					
I don't know		Yes		No	
%	f	%	f	%	f
13,1	5	84,2	32	2,6	1

**TABLE 7:** *Development of E.E. programmes through English language learning.*

<i>Do you consider that English language learning &amp; usage can contribute to the development of E.E. programmes? (closed)</i>		
I don't know	Yes	No

*ELT News*, 217, pp. 9-11 (2007).

<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>13,1</b>	5	<b>86,8</b>	33	<b>0</b>	0

Finally, 95% were the respondents to the last open question of the questionnaire, expressing their free suggestions for the exploitation of the English language as a ‘tool’ of supporting and promoting E.E. programmes at schools. The majority of them, 34,5%, suggest the extensive use of internet as a source of gathering data related to E.E. issues, 27,3% suggest the cooperation with foreign schools through European exchange programmes, etc.

**TABLE 8:** *Suggestions related to the exploitation of the English language as a ‘tool’ of supporting & promoting E.E. programmes in schools.*

<b><i>Suggestions concerning the exploitation of English language learning in E.E. as a ‘tool’ of supporting &amp; promoting E.E. programmes in schools. ( open question )</i></b>		
<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>SUGGESTIONS (total No: 55)</b>	<b>%</b>
INTERNET	19	<b>34,5</b>
PROJECTS (in English)	6	<b>10,9</b>
ENGLISH POSTERS	2	<b>3,6</b>
FOREIGN PAPERS (magazines, newspapers, books, leaflets κτλ)	8	<b>14,5</b>
EUROPEAN EXCHANGE PROGRAMMES - COOPERATION WITH SCHOOLS ABROAD	15	<b>27,3</b>
FOREIGN FILMS/VIDEOS - DOCUMENTARIES	4	<b>7,3</b>
FOREIGN EXHIBITIONS / MEETINGS	1	<b>1,8</b>

- ***Conclusions***

First of all, it is extremely important to point out that only 26,3% of the total sample have joined E.E. programmes. It is actually a very small percentage which however can be partly justified by the fact that the majority of the English language teachers (55,3%) teach only a few years in public schools (0-5 years), especially in the primary education. On the other hand, the limited participation in E.E. programmes can be explained if we take into account the factors that the respondents have mentioned as anti-incentives of joining E.E. Consequently, we consider that the so-called anti-incentives or suspending factors, such as lack of E.E. awareness, the bad or inadequate

E.E. organization, the lack of useful means and equipment, the lack of financial resources, should be seriously taken into consideration, in order to be solved or at least to be limited, so that more and more teachers become motivated to join E.E. programmes.

At the same time, we realize the big difference between the two levels of compulsory education concerning the active participation of English language teachers in E.E. So, we easily conclude the need for an organized and systematic campaign of information to all teachers of both primary and secondary education, and especially, of those teaching in primary schools.

Fortunately, we can point out a great willingness of both primary and secondary English language teachers to join E.E. programmes in the future under the appropriate conditions.

Another positive result is that all the respondents realize and understand the 'cross-curricular character' of E.E. and the 'interaction' that can be exploited between E.E. programmes and English language learning.

Furthermore, we realize that they are obviously interested in E.E. programmes but their willingness is not enough. That's why we believe that the recording of the above mentioned problems, limitations, needs and inadequacies can lead to a better organization and implementation of E.E. programmes in the near future.

Last but not least, we should never forget that the environmental problems we currently face will not solve themselves. It is becoming increasingly important to meet the needs of individuals to understand these problems and potential solutions through the spread of environmental education (E.E.). Environmental education is of great importance and benefit to all students, all teachers and all human beings in general!

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