

# Student Views on Vocational Guidance: Findings on Chronic Deficits - Suggestions to Meet Students Needs

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**ABSTRACT:** This article examines the absence of Vocational Guidance (VG) courses in the Greek educational system, as well as the reasons why these do not exist. At the same time, the need and usefulness of this subject is assessed with regard to both the educational system and the entire Greek society. Our findings show that when there are no VG in Greek schools, graduates find it difficult to choose a profession that suits both their physical and mental abilities, as well as their life aspirations. The issue is not only quantitative but also qualitative; namely, it is important to determine the most suitable manner and method for the presentation of existing professions in the classroom, which will encourage students to further explore them. Presented below, are the tables and diagrams that emerged following an extensive research among middle and high school students throughout Greece, in order to accurately prove the above deficit in this field.

**KEYWORDS:** Vocational Guidance, Education, Schools, Students, Middle School, High School, Vocational Guidance Counseling

## Introduction

Greek Education is largely technocratic (Χατζηαναστασίου 2001, 13). High Schools provide academic, technological and scientific knowledge aiming at students' gaining good enough grades in order to graduate and/or go to university. School Vocational Guidance (SEP) became known in Greece in the 1950s, which was rather late compared to other European countries. The Greek educational system did not have the conditions necessary for such an innovation to flourish, and the main reason was the lack of specialized teaching staff (Κασσωτάκης 2001, 197-213). During the past twenty years, the absence of Vocational Guidance courses in Primary and Secondary education has been evident. At the same time, those who attended Vocational Guidance courses before the latter were abolished, state that they were not satisfied with the material taught. Moreover, the vast majority note that these courses did not help them at all in choosing a specialty or profession. There is a strong correlation between the degree of student satisfaction from Vocational Guidance courses and the degree of their effectiveness in terms of making life choices.

Our entire reasoning regarding Vocational Guidance courses extends beyond the necessity of their presence in our educational system to their meaningful operation and effectiveness. The majority of teachers and students propose that there should be more than one teaching method used for courses of such content. Experiential exercises, videotaped instances, dramatization, lectures and meetings with experts, as well as visits to workplaces will constitute, in that order, their most important suggestions.

## Methodology

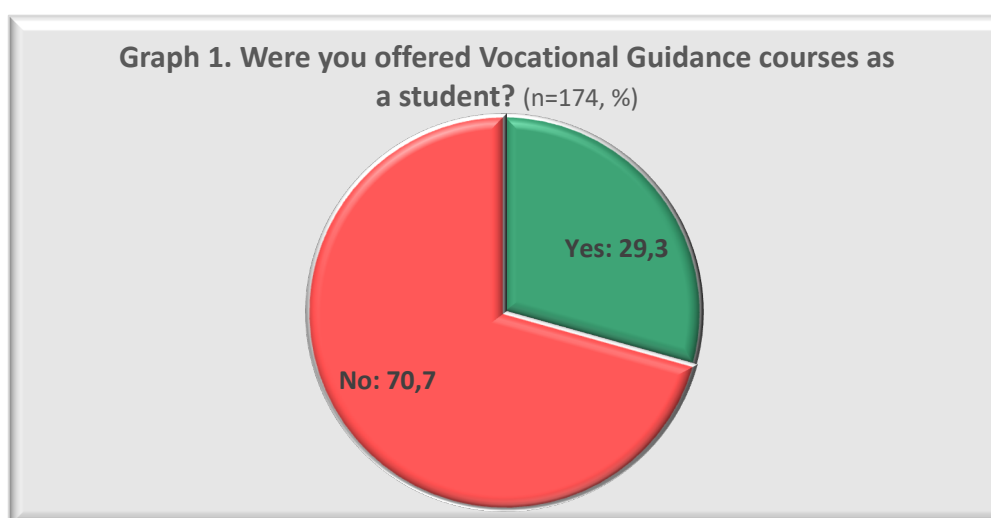
A questionnaire of 25 questions was compiled, based on descriptive research and the SPSS method. The population of the sample was formed based on the research hypotheses of the study, or working hypotheses; the "protagonists" of the educational process were selected based on their

involvement with the research object, their fastest and most effective approach and, finally, their convenience and adequacy in responding immediately and easily.

The difficulty of distributing and completing the questionnaires during the pandemic (3rd quarter of 2020) and the fact that the educational structures in Greece were closed for a long time was also taken into account. Therefore, a link to the questionnaire was sent via email, on the one hand, to prevent direct contact with the respondents for safety reasons, and on the other hand to facilitate and expedite questionnaire completion. For all the above reasons, the questionnaire was created in electronic form, with user-friendly answer completion and direct management notification upon submission.

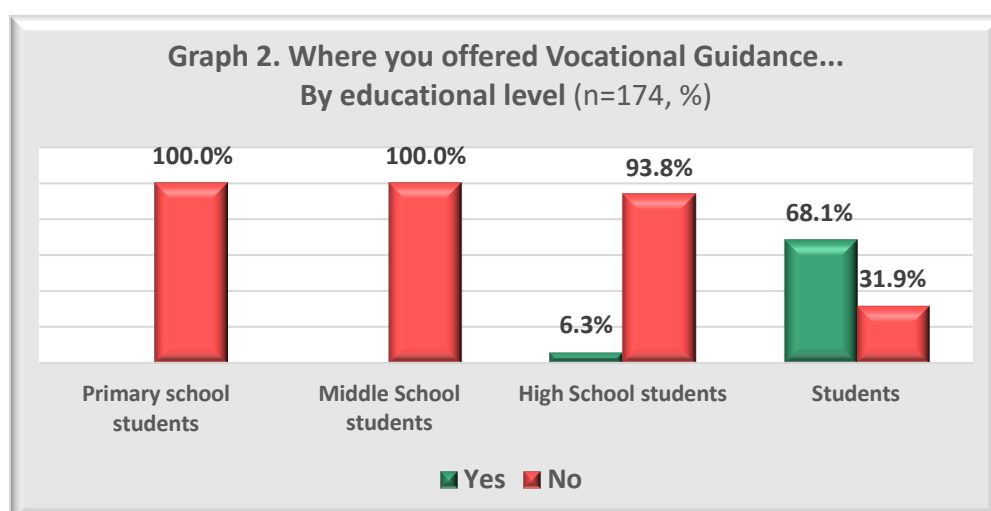
## Main Results

When asked if they had been taught Vocational Guidance as students or students, 70.7% answered negatively, while 29.3% answered affirmatively (Graph 1).



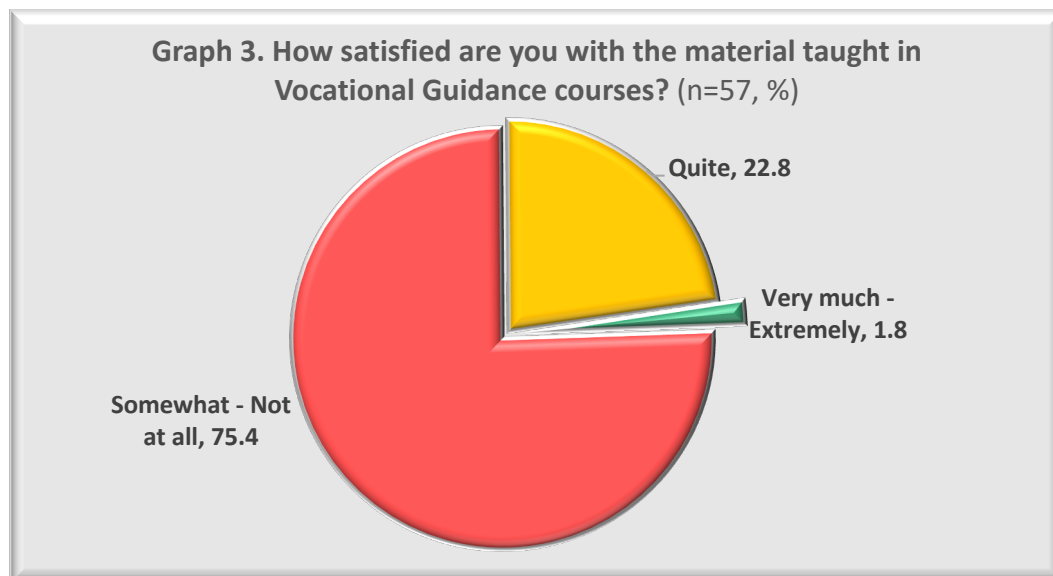
As expected, there was a statistically significant difference by age ( $p = 0.000$ ) and educational level ( $p = 0.000$ ). Thus, only 2.9% of students under the age of 18 stated that they had attended Vocational Guidance courses, compared to 70.8% of students aged 18 and above.

The analysis by educational level clarifies these results, as primary and middle school students are unaware of the existence of Vocational Guidance, since it is not part of the Curriculum and, consequently, their school timetable (Graph 2).



Thus, only 6.3% of high school students stated that they had attended Vocational Guidance courses, with the corresponding percentage for students being 68.1%. Here, it is important to note that, up to 2011, even within several high schools, there were School Vocational Guidance Offices (SVGOs), where counseling was undertaken by adequately trained teachers; counseling involved personal appointments with students -or even parents- to provide valuable information, as well as distributing updated relevant material to interested parties.

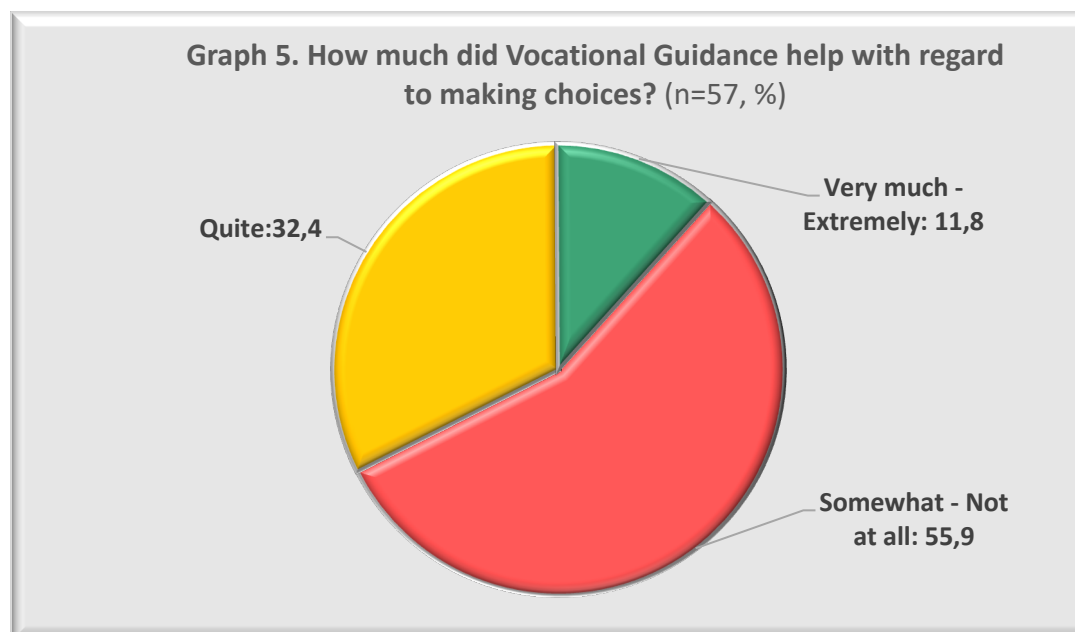
However, how satisfied are those students who attended Vocational Guidance courses? Two out of three, namely 75.4% reported little to no satisfaction; in fact, the percentage of students who reported no satisfaction at all was 42.1% (Graph 3). Only 22.8% reported that they were quite satisfied, while very few were very satisfied (1.8%). Nevertheless, males appear more dissatisfied than females, as the percentage of male respondents who reported little or no satisfaction was 83.3%, compared to 74.5% of female respondents.



As illustrated by Graph 4, when asked if the Vocational Guidance courses had helped them choose a specialty or a profession, only 11.8% answered 'yes', while 88.2% of students answered 'no' (Tsiaka 2021, 234).



In fact, while there is no statistically significant gender difference, this question -in conjunction with the previous one- offers an interpretation for male respondents' dissatisfaction, as only 5.7% of them claim that VG helped them choose a specialty or profession, compared to 13.9% of female respondents.

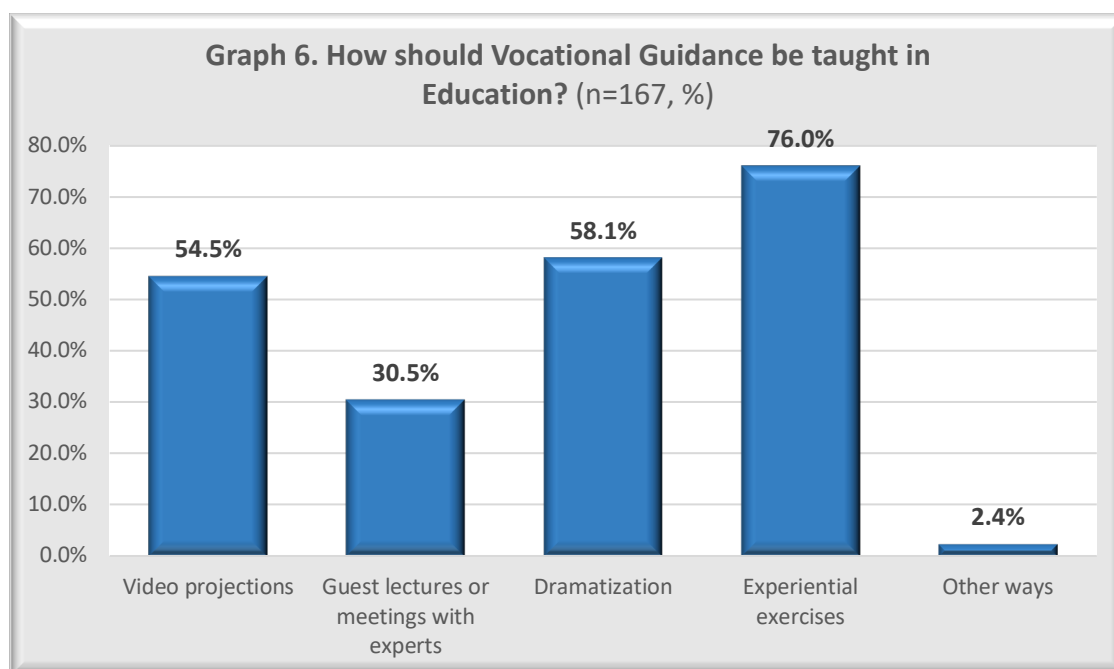


The above assessment is also confirmed in terms of intensity (Graph 5), as the majority of students (55.9%) who attended Vocational Guidance courses stated that they were 'somewhat' to 'not at all' helped by the latter in making choices. Vocational Guidance was 'quite' helpful with regard to-making choices for 32.4% and 'very' helpful for just 11.8% of respondents. Therefore, students also make assessments based on results, namely, whether attending Vocational Guidance courses provided them with solutions and alternative options in their lives (Tsiaka 2021, 237). Thus, our research must extend beyond the absence of Vocational Guidance courses at School or University, to examine whether -in the instances and settings it does exist- VG satisfies the existing needs.

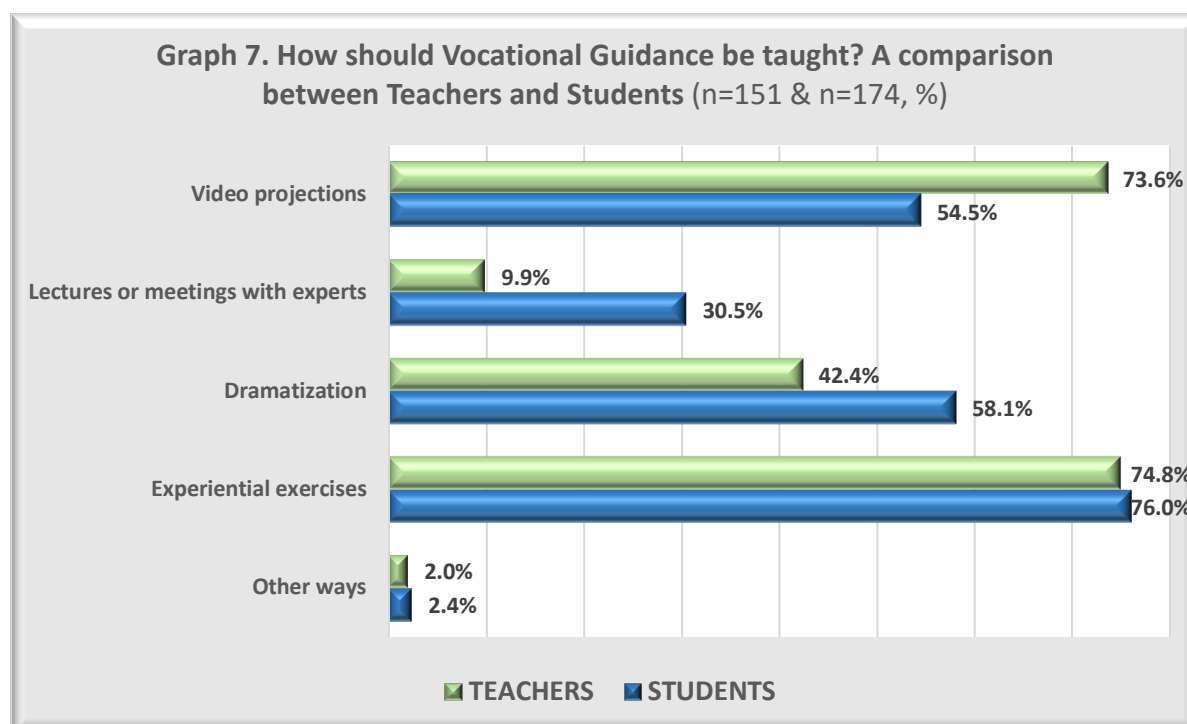
In our analysis, we correlated the reported degree of satisfaction with Vocational Guidance courses with the degree of their effectiveness regarding making life choices, and found a strong correlation ( $r \leq 0.796$ ). Therefore, our research also had to address the application methods of Vocational Guidance courses, in order to make VG useful and beneficial for students and society as a whole.

### **Suggestions of Middle and High-School Students**

So, how should Vocational Guidance be taught within the Greek educational system? In a multiple-choice question regarding teaching methods, students selected the following answers: experiential exercises (76%), dramatization (58.1%), video projection (54.5%), guest lectures and meetings with experts (30.5%), and other methods (2.4%) (Graph 6). Other methods include visits – guided tours of workplaces and on-site research in the form of interviews with field professionals. The majority of students (82%) selected more than one teaching method; in fact, 25% selected the combination "experiential exercises - dramatization - video projections".



When teachers were asked the same question, the most popular answer was ‘experiential exercises’, selected by 74.8%, namely, approximately the same percentage as that of students (76%). Dramatization was selected at a comparatively higher percentage by students (58.1%), as compared to teachers (42.4%). A significant difference in method preference was observed with regard to guest lectures and meetings with experts, with 30.5% of students selecting this method, compared to 9.9% of teachers. The projection of videotaped instances was strongly preferred by both students (54.5%) and teachers (73.5%) (Graph 7).



The majority of teachers stated that they were significantly affected by the absence or insufficient presence of Vocational Guidance in the field of education (Tsiaka 2021, 238). This study reveals the absence of vocational guidance courses in primary and secondary education.

Here, it should be noted that, during the last year of middle school, students have to decide which type of high school they wish to attend (General, Vocational, Arts, etc.); moreover, during the second year of high school, students in General and Vocational schools must choose an orientation (Humanities, Science or Technology) and a specific field, respectively.

Unfortunately, many parents and guardians try to meet their child's need for vocational guidance only occasionally and usually at the last minute. At the very end of high school, just before national exams and university applications, they eagerly seek Vocational Guidance Counseling Centres.

However, even the respondents who attended Vocational Guidance courses (mainly university students) were not satisfied, while, in their vast majority, they noted that these courses did not help them at all in choosing a specialty or profession. There was a strong correlation between the degree of student satisfaction from Vocational Guidance courses with the degree of these courses' effectiveness in terms of making life choices.

## Conclusions

The necessity of Vocational Guidance at all educational levels becomes evident, especially in social conditions, where students are required to have the necessary information and knowledge and to make decisions for their personal course. Their adaptation to the modern conditions of a society of knowledge, information and technology presupposes the necessary flexibility, but also the existence of alternative solutions-options adapted to their respective particularities.

Therefore, our search and reflection on Vocational Guidance should be extended beyond the need for its presence in our education system to the field of its essential operation and effectiveness. The majority of teachers and students suggest more than one method of teaching vocational guidance courses. Experiential exercises, videotaped instances, dramatization, lectures and meetings with experts, as well as visits to workplaces constitute, in that order, their most important suggestions. Our findings agree with what Kassotakis wrote in 2017, arguing for "the radical reorganization of the guidance system, the increase of the number of qualified staff along with the diversification of their role, improvement of the infrastructure, and the familiarisation of the counselors with new guidance models..." (Kassotakis 2017, 316-17). In our post-covid era, now more than ever, there is an urgent necessity for new models of vocational guidance, that will pave new paths for students of all ages.

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