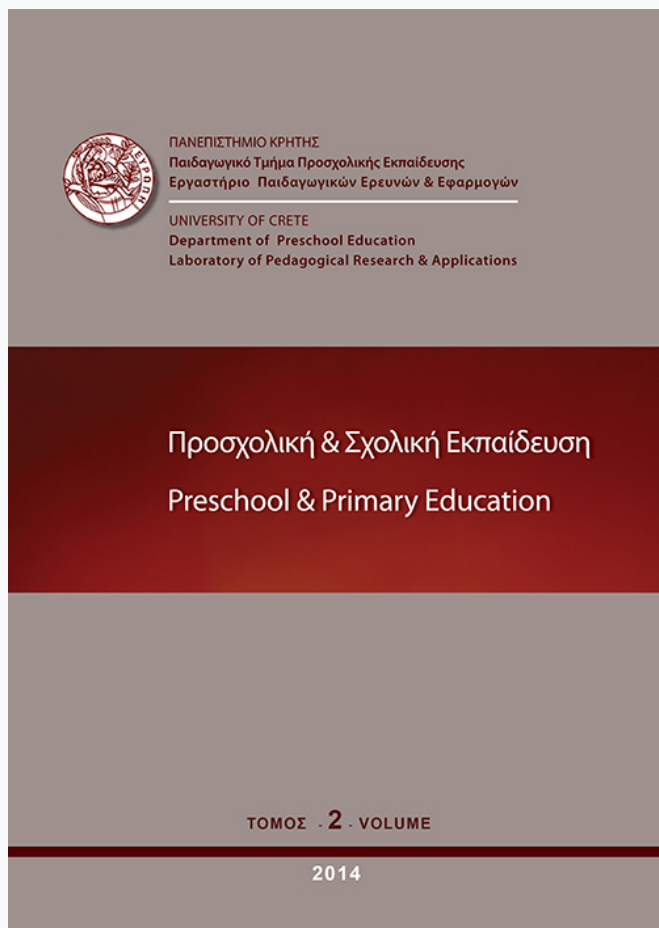


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### Designing and Administering a Needs Analysis Survey to Primary School Learners about EFL learning: a Case Study

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# Designing and administering a needs analysis survey to primary school learners about EFL learning: A case study

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**Summary.** Needs analysis is a distinct and necessary phase in planning educational programs and curriculum development. It is used to collect information about learners' needs, focusing on the study of learners' perceived and present needs, as well as their potential and unrecognized needs. The purpose of this study was to develop, design and administer a needs analysis survey to a group of primary school learners in order to investigate their attitudes towards EFL learning, their actual foreign language needs and their learning preferences regarding activities, topics and modes of work in the EFL classroom. According to the survey findings derived from the questionnaire used as a research tool, learners' actual EFL needs, learning styles and strategies are not satisfactorily consistent or compatible with the current teaching situation. As a result, implications which focus on: a more learner-centered teaching methodology and materials, a 'process-based' curriculum development and action research in the Greek school context, as well as teacher's further training education and professional development will be discussed.

**Keywords:** needs analysis, objective/subjective needs, product-oriented, process-oriented, decision-making, curriculum

## Introduction

*Needs analysis* (NA) has a vital role in the process of designing and carrying out any language course. According to Iwai et al. (1999), the term NA generally refers to the activities that are involved in collecting information which will serve as the basis for developing a curriculum that will meet the needs of a particular group of learners (Ls). The teacher is only one of a long list of stakeholders interested in NA, and is usually involved in small-scale NA of their class of Ls to explore their needs (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004).

The purpose of NA is to enable the teacher to translate the Ls' needs into linguistic and pedagogical terms in order to teach an effective course (Mackey, 1978). Evaluating and adapting or supplementing existing materials to suit the needs of the Ls in a particular teaching situation is of paramount importance in order to help Ls maximize their learning potential (McDonough and Shaw, 1993).

Several researchers (Richards 2012; Seedhouse 1995; Tarone & Yule 1989) see the importance of exploiting NA in general language classes because by using NA, Ls are involved in their learning actively. Richards (2012) points to the fact that successful teaching requires the consideration of learner factors such as knowledge, views of learning, learning

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styles and motivation. As Stern (1992) suggests, NA enables the language course to meet the needs of groups of Ls at different levels of proficiency and with a variety of objectives in mind.

Furthermore, obtaining input from the Ls about a planned or existing program through a NA is fundamental to the design, implementation, evaluation, and revision of the program (Richards, 1990; Savignon, 1997). A program that attempts to meet Ls' perceived needs will be more motivating and successful (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991). In a similar vein, the Council of Europe (2001:7) clearly states that coherence in foreign language learning (FLL) requires a harmonious relation among its components: the identification of needs, the determination of objectives, the selection and creation of materials, the teaching/learning methods employed, evaluation, testing and assessment in a way appropriate to Ls' age and interests.

Accordingly, in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), NA procedures aim to specify the Ls' language needs and follow either a 'product-oriented' approach to EFL teaching/learning which explores objective/linguistic needs or a 'process-oriented' view which investigates Ls' humanistic needs or the so-called subjective needs including Ls' motivation, personal learning preferences/styles and language needs/wants (Brindley, 1989). In particular, the 'process-oriented' NA, which was selected to cover the demands of the present case study, interprets needs in a broader perspective and has been recognized as more conducive to learning. This is because it deals with the 'how' of learning (learning process) and tries to study the influence of factors, such as individual differences, which are likely to have a serious impact on effective learning (Brindley, 1989).

In light of the above, the purpose of this survey was to focus on the 'how' of learning by investigating the needs of a specific group of 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls in a Greek state primary school. What follows is a brief literature review, a description of the current teaching context and a detailed reference to the methodology of the present NA survey by analyzing the questionnaire rationale and structure, recording the NA findings, discussing the NA results and talking about their implications for future action.

## Literature Review

NA first emerged in language teaching in the 1960s and was closely associated with English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Brindley, 1989) while in language planning, as Nunan (1988) reports, NA procedures made their appearance during the 1970s.

NA's main concern is the *specification of Ls' language needs* before and during curriculum/course implementation (Fatihi, 2003; Seedhouse, 1995; Watanabe, 2006). The term *needs* is sometimes used to refer to wants, desires, demands, expectations, motivation, lacks, constraints and requirements (Brindley, 1989), or to the language skills needed and language forms the Ls will most likely need to use in the target language to communicate effectively in a foreign language (FL) context. Other approaches to the term define *needs* as a. *what* Ls need to learn, b. *how* they feel about learning, c. *how much effort* they are likely to invest or d. *how much ability* they possess for the process of learning (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004).

More specifically, in FL learning, needs are generally categorized into *objective needs* related to what the learner needs to do with the language and *subjective needs* related to the process of learning, that is, what the learner needs to do in order to effectively acquire the FL (Cunningsworth, 1983; Fatihi, 2003). Both are important for the effective design and implementation of a FL curriculum/course (Davies, 2006; Seedhouse, 1995) and can be investigated through various techniques such as questionnaires and interviews, observation,

case studies, authentic data collection, tests, consultation of qualified informants (Tudor, 1996).

The two categories of needs – ‘subjective needs’ and ‘objective needs’ – arise from the two orientations of NA, which are the ‘product-oriented’ and the ‘process-oriented’ implementation of NA procedures (Brindley, 1989). The ‘product-oriented’ NA aims to discover the discrepancy between the current and anticipated proficiency level of Ls, whereas, in the ‘process-oriented’ analysis, Ls’ individual factors such as their motivation, expectations and learning styles are examined (Brindley, 1989).

In particular, ‘learning how to learn’ has acquired increasing attention over the last decades and the focus of EFL learning has moved beyond the narrow goal of mastering a body of knowledge and now concentrates on the learner in terms of the ‘process’ of acquiring this knowledge (Holec, 1979; Nunan, 1988). That is why, most current methods of EFL learning follow the ‘process-oriented’ view of NA, because it offers Ls the opportunity to gradually come to understand their needs and express them in a pedagogically useful manner through ‘self-discovery’ (Tudor, 1996) by dealing with the ‘how’ of the learning (process). In this regard, Ls’ subjective needs, or the so-called *humanistic-psychological* needs, emerge as very important and worth investigating before, but mainly during, the implementation of the curriculum (Richards, 2012).

## **Description of the Teaching Context**

### *Curriculum*

The current curriculum, implemented since 2003 for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of primary school Ls, emphasizes the cross-curricular or cross-thematic approach (Chryshoos, Chryshoos, & Thompson, 2002) to EFL learning, focusing on three main content guiding principles: a. *Foreign Language Literacy* related to acquiring FL form, structure, function and skills, b. *Multilingualism* related to developing awareness of the differences between different languages and c. *Multiculturalism* related to developing awareness and understanding of different cultures. It is supplemented by methods of active acquisition of knowledge and cross-thematic activities which take place during the teaching of each thematic unit, helping Ls acquire and manage knowledge and information from different subject areas.

### *Course book*

The 5<sup>th</sup> grade course book (Kolovou & Kraniotou, 2010) is based upon the principles of literacy, multilingualism and multiculturalism, as set by the Cross-thematic Curriculum Framework for Modern Foreign Languages (2003). It includes thematic units and the cross-curricular element emerges through project work and relevant cross-thematic activities. It promotes a holistic approach to knowledge and a deep understanding of fundamental cross-curricular concepts (e.g. similarity-difference, culture-civilization, time, place, etc) which are common to several subjects of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, by facilitating Ls’ multidimensional perception of the world (Kolovou & Kraniotou, 2009).

### *Constraints*

The teaching context in the Greek state schools raises serious constraints which EFL teachers have to cope with (Clarke, 2003). To start with, there is *lack of class homogeneity* due to the fact that the majority of Greek Ls learn English both at school and outside school (frontistirio) and, thus, come to school with different levels of target language knowledge/skills (FL competence). Additionally, in state primary schools there are no FL levels or any diagnostic tests to classify Ls into different proficiency levels as is the case in secondary education (junior/senior high schools). There is also *lack of updated materials, audiovisual equipment and facilities*. The textbook ‘imposed’ by the Ministry of Education is the main teaching resource which plays a pivotal role in the learning process, as there is no

available technological equipment (computer lab, overhead projector, internet, etc) or other facilities (library, lab, FL classroom) in the majority of state schools to supplement FL teaching. Consequently, it is rather difficult, if not impossible, to cater for the diverse FL needs and preferences of Ls by using only the textbook.

*Time allowance* is another serious constraint as it is extremely limited and inadequate to cover FL learning demands and all the textbook material. In the majority of state schools, English is taught only three hours per week or less, when one subtracts lost teaching hours due to several factors (holidays, excursions, etc). As a result, there is little exposure to the target language in the classroom, and therefore, Ls' ability to become linguistically and inter-culturally competent is minimized.

### ***Rationale of the Study***

The present NA survey was grounded on the assumption that *needs specification* is very important in EFL teaching as it helps specify **a.** the content of the curriculum, **b.** the strategies Ls are able to use to learn English more effectively, **c.** Ls' problems or difficulties while learning English, **d.** their motives for learning English. Moreover, it helps to mitigate any possible conflicts between Ls' and the teacher's beliefs about EFL learning and teaching (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004). In this light, there were three main research questions that the NA survey was based upon:

- a.** *What are Ls' attitudes towards English language learning?*
- b.** *What are Ls' language needs and wants?*
- c.** *What are Ls' learning preferences/styles regarding strategies, activities, topics and modes of work?*

More specifically, the current survey aims to discover 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls' motivation, language needs/wants and learning preferences without using lists with the linguistic forms required to realize the language functions at the grammatical-rhetorical level. As already mentioned above, this study focuses on the 'how' of learning and tries to investigate factors which may have a great impact on effective learning, such as Ls' realization of their own needs, desires, preferences, problems and strategies (Fatihi, 2003). Hence, there is a shift from *a product-oriented* EFL teaching/learning (*objective needs*-target language behavior/communicative needs) to a *process-oriented* view, which places more emphasis on the Ls' *subjective needs* (e.g. motivation, personal preferences/desires/needs/problems-Seedhouse, 1995) essentially related to the whole process of learning.

Nunan (1989a) points out that accommodating Ls' *needs and preferences* is vital in designing a learner-centered curriculum. Such importance given to Ls' feelings is also stressed in Barkhuizen's (1998) study, in which he reports an investigation of high school EFL Ls' perceptions of the language teaching-learning activities presented in their classes. The outcome of the investigation surprised the teachers in that the perceptions of teachers and Ls differed greatly from each other. Block (1994, 1996), in this respect, states that a harmony between Ls and teachers' aims regarding task assignment and performance must be maintained.

Regarding *learning styles*, new evidence emerges regularly to support the premise that not all children learn in the same way (Guild, 2001). Awareness of different learning styles is a significant tool to understand differences, and assist with learner development (Strong, Silver, and Perini, 2001). Models of education based on learning styles have equipped teachers with the ability to plan their lessons and their curriculum, bearing in mind how Ls learn best (Strong et al., 2001). Being able to identify a learner's learning style can assist Ls to achieve better results academically and improve their attitudes toward learning (Green, 1999). Identifying learning styles enables a teacher to capitalize on a learner's strengths and to become familiar with concepts they may find challenging (Green, 1999). Fine (2003) reported a significant gain in the test scores of Ls on special education

programs after their preferred learning style was incorporated into the instruction. Ls' performance was significantly better when they were instructed through learning style approaches rather than traditional teaching methods (Fine, 2003). Furthermore, the attitudes of these Ls toward learning improved significantly, as they felt that their individual strengths were being accommodated (Fine, 2003).

Bearing the above in mind, the present NA survey seeks to cover primary school Ls' attitudes and motivations, their interests and ego-involvement by adhering to the main humanistic principle that 'Ls will learn best what they want and need to know' in the FL. In this respect, the Ls' beliefs about language learning are crucial because there may often be a conflict between teachers and Ls as to what language learning and language teaching is. Feelings and attitudes are also acknowledged to be as important as facts, and intrinsic motives for learning are strongly emphasized (Seedhouse, 1995; Spratt, 1999; Young, 2000).

## Research Methodology

### *Procedure*

The present paper is a small-scale/class-specific NA survey conducted by a single teacher to investigate the needs that the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls of a Greek state school want to fulfill in the EFL classroom. The NA survey was conducted in the middle of the 2012-13<sup>1</sup> school year by the EFL teacher/researcher following the *non-probability* sampling method, as the participants were selected from the school population in some non-random manner (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). From a statistical point of view, it is a *convenience sample*, as the participants were selected because they were 'convenient', that is, the teacher/researcher taught English to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls who are the participants of this survey.

Pedagogically speaking, the teacher/researcher decided to conduct a NA survey about EFL learning among the 5<sup>th</sup> grade primary school Ls based on the assumption that Ls of that grade, having already experienced EFL learning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades, are able and mature enough to reflect upon their previous EFL learning experience, and express their actual FL needs, preferences and attitudes. Moreover, conducting a NA survey among the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls offers the EFL teacher the opportunity to be aware of her Ls' subjective needs so as to revise the current teaching methods, techniques and materials effectively and achieve the best learning outcomes both in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade the following year.

To gather the research data, a NA *questionnaire* was designed and administered to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls, considering that it is the most practical research tool to collect information, as it is both cost- and time-effective to design, and easy for children to fill in with the necessary instructions, especially if simple wording is used (Appendix A). Regarding data analysis, *descriptive statistics* were used to describe numbers in a meaningful way. The descriptive analysis of data allowed the author to reach conclusions through meaningful discussion and interpretation of the findings in accordance with the research questions of the study (Cohen et al., 2000).

### *Participants: Class profile*

It is a general English classroom in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade of a Greek state primary school with 18 Ls (sex ratio: 11 girls and 7 boys). They are all about 11 years old, their mother tongue is modern Greek (monolingual class) and they seem to share similar cultural conventions, expectations or even prejudices (national homogeneity), as they are all native Greek Ls living in the same provincial town in Western Greece, thus experiencing the same local customs and national traditions to a great extent. Regarding their socioeconomic characteristics, they come from middle-class families of average educational and social

status, taking into consideration their parents' professional and academic background (civil servants, private employees, workers, shop-owners, etc)<sup>2</sup>.

Academically speaking, it is a mixed-ability class involving both 'brighter' Ls and 'weaker' ones, that is Ls of the same age who vary in their intellectual, physical and emotional development (Hess, 1999; Koutselini, 2008), as well as in their FL aptitude which is related to four different abilities such as the ability to identify and memorize new sounds, understand the function of words, figure out grammatical rules from particular samples and a good memory for new vocabulary in the FL (Lightbown & Spada, 2002). According to the Common Reference Levels of the Common European Framework (CEF), 5<sup>th</sup> grade primary Ls' reference level is supposed to be the basic one called 'basic user', in between A1 'Breakthrough' and A2 'Waystage'.

### ***Research Tool: the NA questionnaire***

The NA questionnaire is titled 'About English and Me' (Appendix A) and includes an introductory note to inform the children about the purpose of the survey and provide them with the necessary guidelines (Taylor-Powell, 1998). Since the questionnaire was intended for children, there was an attempt to include only *close-ended* questions (Taylor-Powell, 1998) in a schematic (tables) and funny way (smiling faces) to make it look friendlier.

The first part of the questionnaire invites the Ls to provide information about their background (gender, years of English learning) and the second part comprises three sections which specify the research questions of the current NA survey as stated above in section 3 of this paper. More specifically, section A, which is entitled '*Learners' attitudes towards EFL learning*', invites the Ls to answer *yes* or *no* by asking questions about their beliefs and motives for learning English. It is a fact that Ls bring to the learning situation different beliefs and attitudes about the nature of language and language learning which need to be taken into consideration in the selection of content and learning experiences, because they may reveal a mismatch or discrepancy between what the Ls aim to do with English and what the teacher or the curriculum want them to attain. In fact, the Ls' answers to the questions of this section may reveal their *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation to learn English (Dörnyei, 1998). In practice, extrinsic motivation (for reasons externally administered, e.g. traveling abroad, finding a job, passing the exams, parental pressure, using the internet, communicating with foreigners) may inhibit learning in the long run and, therefore, should be minimized by fostering Ls' intrinsic motivation (learning English for its own sake, e.g. enjoying learning English, learning about England and English culture by listening to English songs, reading English texts, watching English films), as it can have far greater learning benefits both in the short and long run (Dörnyei, 1998).

Section B is about '*Learners' language needs/wants*,' and includes two questions with three possible answers: *yes*, *no*, *no answer* and investigates (a) the Ls' favorite language skills (reading, speaking, listening and writing) and (b) their difficulties or any need for further practice in certain language areas (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation).

Finally, section C, which is entitled '*Learning preferences/styles*,' comprises three sub-sections to investigate children's: (a) ways of learning (preferred language activities/tasks and modes of work), (b) learning strategies regarding vocabulary and grammar (translation, oral/written practice) and (c) favorite topics. An individual's learning style refers to his or her preferred ways of learning and can be seen as a cluster of preferred learning strategies (O'Brien, 1998) which are defined as the specific actions (cognitive, memory, social, affective, metacognitive) taken by the Ls to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, the type of learning style Ls may have or their aptitude, motivational orientation and use of

strategies all constitute Ls' subjective needs to be explored since they interfere with the processing of the input to be learnt.

Last but not least, the questionnaire was initially written in English and then translated into Greek (Appendix B) to facilitate the primary school Ls, and to eliminate any anxiety or difficulties due to their low language proficiency in English. There was also a pilot testing by a colleague who reviewed the questionnaire critically so that revisions could be made (Taylor-Powell, 1998).

### Limitations



A first limitation of this study is that a *convenience sample* was selected which is often used during preliminary research efforts to get a gross estimate of the results, without incurring the cost or time required to select a random sample (Cohen et al, 2000). This study is also limited by the small sample used in the survey (only 17 Ls/participants). Therefore, further research with larger samples is needed to reveal more findings regarding 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls' EFL needs which may verify the present ones. The survey did not follow a multiple collection method and various techniques such as interviews, observation, case studies, authentic data collection, tests, consultation of qualified informants which could give more valid results. Moreover, although most of the data gathered in this study should be reliable, it should be acknowledged that there may be instances where human error or the class teacher/researcher's involvement in the survey may affect the objectivity and validity in the interpretation of the results (Cohen et al, 2000).

## Results

### Presentation of main results

Regarding the *general background information* of the Ls/participants, there were 10 girls and 7 boys present in the classroom who answered the NA questionnaire (total: 17 respondents). Fourteen Ls are learning English both at school and outside school. Fifteen Ls have been learning English for 3 years, one of them for 4 years and one for 5 years (both at school and at a frontistirio).

**Table 1** Learners' attitudes towards English language learning




Why are you learning English?	Yes 	No 
So I can travel to other countries	8	9
So I can learn about England	7	10
So I can understand English songs	8	9
So I can understand English films	8	9
So I can understand English books/magazines/newspapers	12	5
So I can speak to foreign people/tourists	9	8
So I can use the internet better	16	1
So I can pass English exams	14	3
So I can find a job when I leave school	10	7
Because English is an important world language	14	3
Because I enjoy learning English	13	4
Because my parents want me to learn English	11	6
I don't know why I am learning English	2	15
Total number of respondents	17 Learners	



Moving on to the main body of the questionnaire, as regards the *Ls' attitudes towards English language learning* (why they are learning English- Table 1), it is really unexpected and amazing that almost all the Ls (16/17) are learning English to be able to use the internet in a better way, thus, revealing the huge impact the internet has on kids' everyday life and routine. The majority of children (14/17) are learning English for two other reasons: (a) it is an international language and (b) to pass the English exams (e.g. to get the EFL certificate), although they are too young to place emphasis on this future matter. Moreover, while a great number of the Ls (13/17) enjoy learning English as a FL, which means that there is an intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1998), at the same time, 11/17 report that they are learning English because their parents want them to.




Referring to the *Ls' language needs and wants*, their least favorite language skill is listening, while reading, speaking and writing seem to be the favorite ones (Table 2).

**Table 2** Favorite English language skills

Do you like	Yes 	No 	No answer 
Reading?	13	2	2
Speaking?	12	4	1
Listening?	9	7	1
Writing?	13	0	4
Total number of respondents	17 Learners		

This finding is confirmed by the Ls' answers about language areas which cause them difficulties and need further practice. The majority of children (13/17) stated they need more practice in listening and less in reading, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation (Table 3). In other words, listening is their least favorite skill, probably because they are indirectly admitting to facing difficulties with it and need further practice.




**Table 3** Difficulties/Need for further practice

I would like to practice more in:	Yes 	No 	No answer 
Reading?	11	4	2
Speaking?	5	8	4
Listening?	13	4	0
Writing?	3	12	2
Vocabulary?	10	6	1
Grammar?	7	8	2
Spelling?	10	5	2
Pronunciation?	10	6	1
Total number of respondents	17 Learners		

As for *learning preferences/styles* regarding the ways of learning, the overwhelming majority of children (16/17), as is to be expected, like playing games (Table 4). Other popular answers by the respondents are: using the internet/computers, oral practice, reading texts/stories, homework and written practice. Regarding the modes of work, the Ls prefer mostly working in groups (15/17) and as a whole class (12/17) to working alone or in




pairs. On the other hand, only a few of them (5/17) like doing projects or studying grammar rules (7/17), while a great number (7/17) don't actually like watching videos to learn.

**Table 4** Ways of Learning

How do you like to learn?	Yes 	No 	No answer 
Studying grammar rules	7	5	5
Doing written exercises/practice	12	4	1
Writing short passages	12	4	1
Reading texts/stories	13	4	0
Listening to CDs	11	5	1
Watching videos	9	7	1
Doing oral exercises/practice	14	3	0
Discussing in the classroom	11	6	0
Doing projects	5	7	5
Doing homework	13	2	2
Reading aloud in class	10	5	2
Working alone	7	6	4
Working in pairs	9	7	1
Working in groups	15	2	0
Working as a whole class	12	4	1
Using computers	12	2	3
Using the internet	15	1	1
Playing games	16	1	0
Total number of respondents	17 Learners		




As far as *learning strategies* are concerned, the majority of children learn vocabulary by copying (14/17) or translating (13/17) new words, and a considerable number of them (11/17) by hearing new words (Table 5) as well. No absolute categorization is thus possible, as it seems that this particular group of children can be both 'visual' and 'acoustic' learners.

**Table 5** Learning Strategies-Vocabulary Learning



How do you learn vocabulary:	Yes 	No 	No answer 
By hearing new words?	11	4	2
By seeing new words?	5	6	6
By copying new words?	14	2	1
By translating new words?	13	1	3
Total number of respondents	17 Learners		

To learn grammar, children prefer 'traditional' written practice at school or at home by studying grammar rules to oral practice (Table 6). Finally, with regard to *favorite topics* (Table 7), all Ls like music, 16/17 like topics related to environment/nature, health and sports, 15 Ls like traveling, art/painting and festivals/celebrations while 14 Ls choose food/diet/cooking and drama/cinema topics.

**Table 6** Learning Strategies- Grammar Learning

Do you learn grammar:	Yes 	No 	No answer 
By studying grammar rules?	13	2	2
By doing written exercises at school?	12	4	1
By doing written exercises at home?	12	4	1
By oral practice in class?	10	5	2
Total number of respondents	17 Learners		

**Table 7** Favorite Topics

What are your favorite topics?	Yes 	No 
Culture / Habits	10	7
Geography	8	9
Advertising / Shopping	4	13
Food / Diet / Cooking	14	3
Technology	11	6
Environment/Nature	16	1
Music	17	0
Family/Friends/People/Relationships	13	4
Free time/ Hobbies	12	5
Traveling	15	2
Jobs	13	4
Health	16	1
Famous people / Celebrities	12	5
Drama/Cinema	14	3
Entertainment	11	6
Internet	13	4
Literature/Stories	12	5
Sports	16	1
Art/Painting	15	2
Science	10	7
Festivals / Celebrations	15	2
Other topics you like?	-	
Total number of respondents	17 Learners	

## Discussion of results

Data deriving from this NA survey need to be interpreted in a way that is pertinent to its focus, that is, the three research questions about primary school Ls' EFL needs, learning styles and strategies, in order to explore how consistent or compatible the findings are with the current teaching situation (Seedhouse,1995).

Let us begin the discussion with the *Ls' attitudes towards English language learning*. Their answers to the specific question imply both *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* motivation (Dörnyei, 1998) to learn English and reveal a mismatch between what learners aim to do with English (e.g. to use the internet better, to pass the English exams, to find a job) and what the teacher or curriculum want them to attain (e.g. to communicate with foreigners, to know other cultures). In practice, extrinsic motivation (for reasons externally administered, e.g. learning English to get a certificate or find a job as 'rewards') may inhibit learning in the long run and, therefore, should be minimized by fostering *Ls' intrinsic* motivation (learning English because they like it as a FL, to gain knowledge about England and its culture, to understand English songs/films/texts). Moreover, the fact that the majority of children are learning English because their parents want them to (under parental pressure), sounds alarming and should be effectively handled. To this end, more intrinsic motivation (learning English for its own sake) is essential, as it can have far greater learning benefits both in the short and long run and the teacher should try to foster it by reviewing the current curriculum and materials used in the EFL classroom (Dörnyei, 1998).

Regarding the *Ls' answers about their language needs and wants*, the fact that listening is their least favorite skill causing them difficulties should be taken into serious consideration, as it obviously needs further practice. In other words, the position of listening in the existing curriculum and course book should be thoroughly examined and carefully assessed in order to make the necessary adjustments or improvements which will compensate for any weaknesses or failures in listening tasks and eventually help learners overcome their difficulties as effectively as possible. Similarly, more vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation building tasks (Davies, 2006) should also be included in order to satisfy the *Ls' need* for further practice in these language areas.

Discussing the *Ls' answers about their learning preferences/styles*, as regards their *ways of learning*, that is the ways that children like to learn, it is interesting to note that games, internet activities and computer technology in general are their preferred ways to learn English. This raises the question of whether, or to what extent, the current teaching situation, including the curriculum, course book, materials and teachers' methods, fulfils the children's true learning preferences. Another crucial issue that needs to be settled is the obvious contrast or even conflict between the *Ls' aversion* to doing projects and the current curriculum/course book orientation towards project work. In any case, obviously, the teacher should enrich the traditional classroom work and teaching techniques with a *multimodal approach* to EFL learning (Jewitt, 2006), focusing on computer and internet technology so as to satisfy children's learning preferences/styles, and thus increase their motivation further by re-establishing the neglected link between needs and wants (Ladousse, 1982).

Other interesting classroom practices for the teacher to reflect upon are *modes of work* and *learning strategies*. Regarding modes of work, the teacher should check whether course book tasks encourage *collaborative work* since the primary school *Ls* enjoy working in groups or as a whole class. As for the learning strategies, children seem to be both 'visual' and 'acoustic' *Ls*, since they mainly learn vocabulary by copying (visual way) and hearing (acoustic way). Last but not least, the teacher must find topics that will engage *Ls* physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually in learning English (Vincent, 1984) by enhancing the cross-thematic element of the curriculum, and by emphasizing their favorite topics mostly related to computers and the internet.

## Implications

NA findings reveal the need to reflect upon the existing curriculum structure and teaching/learning patterns. The results obtained here call for a step forward, towards a

*teacher-learner cooperation* in designing the syllabus, doing weekly course planning and classroom management. The present NA helped the teacher/researcher understand the differences in learning expectations between herself and her Ls (Birckbichler & Corl, 1993). Having understood the Ls' needs, other more appropriate methods and materials should be selected and implemented to supplement the current school textbooks and overcome the constraints of the current teaching context (e.g. lack of updated materials/audiovisual equipment/facilities, limited time allowance). There are also significant implications concerning curriculum development in the Greek educational system as a whole.

To start with, the *syllabus*, defined as specifications of content to be taught in a course and concerned with course objectives (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986; Jordan, 1997; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2012), should be revised and the teacher must be flexible and take initiatives during the teaching/learning process by taking into consideration the Ls' actual needs and learning preferences/styles as discussed above.

For instance, to increase Ls' *intrinsic motivation* for effective EFL learning, the teacher should create in-class activities in which the Ls will utilize FL skills and knowledge as tools to meet their real-life needs in meaningful ways (Nunan, 1988). To this end, according to Brinton (1991), authentic materials<sup>3</sup> can reinforce the direct relationship between the language classroom and the outside world. In other words, the teacher needs to 'contextualize' language learning by offering Ls the opportunity, on the one hand, to bring into the classroom their own samples of authentic language data from real-world contexts outside of the classroom and, on the other hand, to practice listening to and reading genuine language drawn from many different sources, including TV and radio broadcasts, taped conversations, meetings, talks, and announcements in order to satisfy the Ls' FL needs regarding both their receptive and productive skills (Gebhard, 1996).

Regarding the *teaching method*, 'task-based' learning could be used as it is an overall approach to language learning which views the tasks that Ls do as central to the learning process by placing emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the FL, the use of authentic materials, the enhancement of the Ls' own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning and on linking classroom EFL learning with language activation outside the classroom. In this way, real-life target tasks which are meaning-focused and involve Ls in comprehending, manipulating, producing and interacting in the target language can motivate them and cover their need to learn English as an international language in a communicative learning context.

Regarding the Ls' need for further *listening practice*, the teacher should use listening activities to supplement the existing course book activities by focusing the Ls' attention on developing 'real-world' listening skills (Nunan, 1989b). For instance, an activity called 'Eavesdropping', developed by Porter and Roberts (1987), teaches strategies for listening and can engage Ls in real-world settings where English is spoken. Also, simulations of real world settings like watching an English conversation on TV, taking notes on what is heard and reporting back to the class could improve Ls' pronunciation and listening skills.

As for *learning styles/preferences*, the teacher must try to create opportunities for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade Ls to enjoy their EFL experience while at school by assessing the suitability of the textbook for this particular group of Ls, ensuring quality of teaching and learning, and providing coherence within the curriculum (O' Brien, 1998). More specifically, the teacher should find means to match the curriculum to the actual needs of her Ls and plan lessons that allow for effective and meaningful instruction by choosing appropriate goals and objectives (Graves, 1996) that satisfy the Ls' learning preferences for an extended use of computers and internet technology in the classroom and extra amusing activities (e.g. playing games). As for group work, which is the Ls' most favorite mode of learning, *collaborative* learning activities, such as collaborative writing and group projects, would be the best teaching practice (Nunan, 1992).

Moreover, this NA survey calls for *differentiated instruction* in which the teacher should plan the EFL content and process by creating opportunities for diverse learning styles (Lawrence-Brown, 2004; Tomlinson, 2001). Thus, a combination of strategies has to be put into practice if the teacher wants to succeed in creating a classroom environment where all pupils have the chance to develop and achieve success in their learning, by using a varied set of activities and materials which will fit the different learning styles and increase the Ls' interest levels (Lightbown & Spada, 2002).

What is more, the present 'process-oriented' NA survey fosters the EFL teacher's *professional development* as it assists the teacher/researcher in making the maximum use of her Ls' potentialities by a. standing critically against the curriculum she is supposed to implement, b. creating coherent courses based on her Ls' needs, c. feeling more professional. In this regard, the teacher reflects critically upon her own methods to make informed decisions. However, the fact that up to the present time most FL classrooms remain in a teacher-fronted, textbook-dominant teaching, and the teacher/researcher is accustomed to teacher-fronted EFL teaching, *teacher-training* on NA procedures with regard to a more learner-centered approach to FL teaching is of paramount importance, and needs careful consideration by school-advisors and the Institute of Educational Policy authorized by the Greek Ministry of Education.

Another implication is that this case study, as well as future NA studies, should be linked to a 'process-based' and *flexible curriculum*, open to scrutiny and adjustment in real situations (Nunan, 1988; Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Smith, 1996, 2000; Stenhouse, 1975) in order to serve Ls' needs. Brown (1995) describes curriculum as a systematic process during which language teaching and language program development are a "dynamic system of interrelated elements" which include needs analysis, goals and objectives, language testing, materials development, language teaching, and program evaluation.

Additionally, the subject of NA extends to curriculum development by *action research*. Action research usually originates from a 'thematic concern' (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), which means 'learner needs' in the present situation. The concern leads to the first 'moment' (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) planning, which involves building learner needs into the first half of a curriculum. Research then proceeds to subsequent moments, such as acting, observing and reflecting. Implementing and evaluating are engaged to ascertain whether or not the curriculum meets Ls' needs. Therefore, action research is an inquiry which is carried out in order to change and improve some educational practice to the benefit of Ls (Basse, 1998).

At a more profound level, NA surveys as this one should actually be a process in *curriculum development* (Brown, 1995; Richards, 2012). In other words, this NA study can and should be extended to the EFL curriculum development for Greek primary Ls because, as Allwright (1988, p. 51) states, "what happens in the classroom still must matter. We need studies of what actually happens [inside classes]". Thus, NA research which further involves curriculum development is required.

Undoubtedly, the issue of NA about EFL learning is a fertile ground for further research. To this end, more rigorous research is required and, hence, more qualitative data such as case studies in the Greek school context are desirable. Especially nowadays, with contemporary classrooms becoming increasingly diverse, educational authorities, teachers, school advisors and administrators should resort to NA procedures in order to select teaching and learning strategies that cater for a variety of learning profiles.

## Conclusion

Knowing our Ls' needs is crucial and necessary in making informed decisions on the teaching methodology and materials to use (Davies, 2006) in order to achieve the best

learning outcomes and motivate Ls appropriately to be active participants in the EFL classroom and outside it as well. Effective language teaching and learning can only be achieved when teachers are aware of their Ls' needs, capabilities, potentials, and preferences in meeting these needs. To this end, the role of 'process-oriented' NA is fundamental as it may give rise to useful implications for curriculum development, course and materials design. In this way, curriculum implementation can also be seen as a collaborative effort between teachers and Ls who are closely involved in the decision-making process regarding its content and how it is taught (Nunan, 1988).

All in all, the present NA survey proposes a rethinking of the structure, management and content of the classroom, inviting Ls/participants within the learning context to become engaged in the process, to the benefit of all. In particular, this NA helped the teacher understand the "local needs" of a particular group of Ls and make practical decisions in pedagogy and assessment for improvement (Tarone & Yule, 1989). In other words, this NA survey created an opportunity to locate individual differences and, through a process of negotiation between the EFL teacher and Ls, the teacher was allowed to reach the 'teacher-learner negotiated learning objectives' in order to be able to satisfy the actual FL needs of individual Ls (Brindley, 1989; Finney, 2002). What is more, there were useful implications for curriculum development, course and materials design towards adopting a more *learner-centered* approach to EFL learning (Seedhouse, 1995; Spratt, 1999; Young, 2000).

Last but not least, primary school Ls' needs should be analyzed on an ongoing basis because they are likely to change over time, depending on contextual and human affective variables (Brown, 1995; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Nunan, 1988). This principle expands the attention of NA to include both curriculum development and action research in Greek state schools in general.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ls' subjective needs emerge as very important and worth investigating mainly during the implementation of the curriculum (Richards, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> At this point, it is worth noting that the researcher is well aware of the Ls/participants' profile as she had been their teacher of English for almost three years and thus, she was able to draw conclusions about their general cultural and social background based on her personal experience, everyday contact with the Ls themselves and their parents and their school official identity documents.

<sup>3</sup> Nunan (1988) defines authentic materials as spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching.

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## Appendix A

### Needs Analysis Questionnaire

#### 'About English and Me'



Dear Children,

this is questionnaire, not a test, which gives you the chance to express yourselves, your needs and wants about English language and learning. There are no correct or wrong answers. Whatever answer you give is welcome. Be careful: it is necessary for you to give true answers because your answers will help me plan our English lessons in the way you really like and need.

Please, pay attention to the following instructions:

- answer **all** the questions
- give **true** answers for you
- check you have answered **all** the questions
- **don't** write your name
- read the questions with **attention**

\*\*\*\*\*



#### Background Information

Are you learning English outside school? Yes ☐ No ☐

Years of studying English (both school and frontistirio): ..... (number)

Gender: Boy ☐ Girl ☐




#### A) Learners' attitudes towards English language learning

Why are you learning English? (Put a X in the answer that is <b>true</b> for you)	Yes 	No 
So I can travel to other countries		
So I can learn about England		
So I can understand English songs		
So I can understand English films		
So I can understand English books/magazines/newspapers		
So I can speak to foreign people/tourists		
So I can use internet better		
So I can pass English exams		

So I can find a job when I leave school		
Because English is an important world language		
Because I enjoy learning English		
Because my parents want me to learn English		
I don't know why I am learning English		




## B) Learners' language needs/wants

### B1. Favorite English language skills

Do you like (Put a X in the answer that is <b>true</b> for you)	Yes 	No 	No answer 
Reading?			
Speaking?			
Listening?			
Writing?			




\* No answer= I don't know or I don't want to answer

### B2. Difficulties/Need for further practice

I would like to practice more in: (Put a X in the answer that is <b>true</b> for you)	Yes 	No 	No answer 
Reading?			
Speaking?			
Listening?			
Writing?			
Vocabulary?			
Grammar?			
Spelling?			
Pronunciation?			

## C) Learning preferences/styles




### C1. Ways of learning

How do you like to learn? (Put a X in the answer that is <b>true</b> for you)	Yes 	No 	No answer 
Studying grammar rules			
Doing written exercises/practice			
Writing short passages			
Reading texts/stories			
Listening to CDs			
Watching videos			
Doing oral exercises/practice			
Discussing in the classroom			
Making projects			
Doing homework			




Reading aloud in class			
Working alone			
Working in pairs			
Working in groups			
Working as a whole class			
Using computers			
Using the internet			
Playing games			

## C2. Learning Strategies



### a. Vocabulary learning

How do you learn vocabulary: (Put a X in the answer that is <b>true</b> for you)	Yes 	No 	No answer 
By hearing new words?			
By seeing new words?			
By copying new words?			
By translating new words?			

### b. Grammar Learning

Do you learn grammar: (Put a X in the answer that is <b>true</b> for you)	Yes 	No 	No answer 
By studying grammar rules?			
By doing written exercises at school?			
By doing written exercises at home?			
By oral practice in class?			

## C3. Favorite topics

What are your favorite topics? (Put a X in the answer that is <b>true</b> for you)	Yes 	No 
Culture / Habits		
Geography		
Advertising / Shopping		
Food / Diet / Cooking		
Technology		
Environment/Nature		
Music		
Family/Friends/People/Relationships		
Free time/ Hobbies		
Travelling		
Jobs		
Health		
Famous people / Celebrities		
Drama/Cinema		
Entertainment		

Internet		
Literature/Stories		
Sports		
Art/Painting		
Science		
Festivals / Celebrations		
Other topics you like?		

Thank you!

## Appendix B

### Ερωτηματολόγιο Ανάλυσης Αναγκών

#### ‘About English and Me’



Αγαπητά παιδιά,  
αυτό είναι ένα ερωτηματολόγιο, δεν είναι τεστ, που σας δίνει την ευκαιρία να εκφράσετε ελεύθερα τις ανάγκες και προτιμήσεις σας για την εκμάθηση της Αγγλικής γλώσσας. Δεν υπάρχουν σωστές ή λάθος απαντήσεις. Οποιαδήποτε απάντηση δώσετε είναι ευπρόσδεκτη. Προσοχή: είναι αναγκαίο και χρήσιμο να δώσετε ειλικρινείς απαντήσεις για τον εαυτό σας γιατί οι απαντήσεις σας θα με βοηθήσουν να οργανώσω το μάθημα των Αγγλικών με τον τρόπο που εσείς πραγματικά επιθυμείτε και έχετε ανάγκη.

Παρακαλώ, διαβάστε τις παρακάτω οδηγίες:

- **μη** γράψετε το όνομά σας
- διαβάστε τις ερωτήσεις με **προσοχή**
- απαντήστε **όλες** τις ερωτήσεις
- δώστε **ειλικρινείς** απαντήσεις για τον εαυτό σας
- να ελέγξετε ότι έχετε απαντήσει **όλες** τις ερωτήσεις

\*\*\*\*\*



#### Προφίλ μαθητή

Μαθαίνεις Αγγλικά εκτός του σχολείου;    Ναι ☐    Όχι ☐

Πόσα χρόνια μαθαίνεις Αγγλικά; (σχολείο και φροντιστήριο): ..... (αριθμός)




Φύλο:    Αγόρι ☐    Κορίτσι ☐

### Α) Στάση των μαθητών για την εκμάθηση της Αγγλικής Γλώσσας

Γιατί μαθαίνεις την Αγγλική Γλώσσα; (Βάλε ένα Χ στην απάντηση που είναι αλήθεια για σένα)	Ναι 	Όχι 
Για να ταξιδέψω σε άλλες χώρες		
Για να μάθω για την Αγγλία		
Για να καταλαβαίνω τα Αγγλικά τραγούδια		
Για να καταλαβαίνω τις ξένες ταινίες		
Για να διαβάζω Αγγλικά περιοδικά/εφημερίδες/βιβλία		
Για να επικοινωνώ με ξένους/τουρίστες		
Για να χρησιμοποιώ το διαδίκτυο		
Για να πάρω το πτυχίο για την Αγγλική γλώσσα		
Για να βρω εργασία όταν μεγαλώσω		
Γιατί τα Αγγλικά είναι διεθνής/παγκόσμια γλώσσα		
Γιατί μου αρέσει η Αγγλική γλώσσα		
Γιατί οι γονείς μου θέλουν να μάθω Αγγλικά		
Δεν ξέρω γιατί μαθαίνω Αγγλικά		




### Β) Γλωσσικές ανάγκες/προτιμήσεις των μαθητών

#### Β1. Αγαπημένες γλωσσικές δεξιότητες




Μου αρέσει να (Βάλε ένα Χ στην απάντηση που είναι αλήθεια για σένα)	Ναι 	Όχι 	Δεν απαντώ 
διαβάζω αγγλικά			
μιλάω αγγλικά			
ακούω αγγλικά			
γράφω αγγλικά			

\* Δεν απαντώ= Δεν ξέρω ή Δεν θέλω να απαντήσω.




#### Β2. Δυσκολίες/Ανάγκη για περισσότερη εξάσκηση

Θα ήθελα να κάνω περισσότερη εξάσκηση στην/στο: (Βάλε ένα Χ στην απάντηση που είναι αλήθεια για σένα)	Ναι 	Όχι 	Δεν απαντώ 
Ανάγνωση Κειμένων			
Προφορικό Λόγο			
Ακουστική Κατανόηση			
Γραπτό Λόγο			
Λεξιλόγιο			
Γραμματική			
Ορθογραφία			
Προφορά			




**Γ) Μαθησιακές προτιμήσεις/στυλ****Γ1. Τρόποι μάθησης**

Πώς σου αρέσει να μαθαίνεις; (Βάλε ένα Χ στην απάντηση που είναι αλήθεια για σένα)	Ναι 	Όχι 	Δεν απαντώ 
Μελετώντας κανόνες γραμματικής			
Κάνοντας γραπτές ασκήσεις			
Γράφοντας προτάσεις/ μικρά κείμενα			
Διαβάζοντας κείμενα/ ιστορίες			
Ακούγοντας CDs			
Παρακολουθώντας βίντεο			
Κάνοντας προφορικές ασκήσεις			
Συζητώντας μέσα στην τάξη			
Κάνοντας ερευνητικές εργασίες			
Κάνοντας ασκήσεις στο σπίτι			
Διαβάζοντας 'φωναχτά' στην τάξη			
Κάνοντας δραστηριότητες ατομικά			
Κάνοντας δραστηριότητες σε ζεύγη			
Κάνοντας δραστηριότητες σε ομάδες			
Κάνοντας ασκήσεις με όλη την τάξη			
Χρησιμοποιώντας Η/Υ			
Χρησιμοποιώντας το διαδίκτυο			
Παίζοντας παιχνίδια			

**Γ2. Στρατηγικές μάθησης****α. Εκμάθηση λεξιλογίου**



Πώς μαθαίνεις καλύτερα το λεξιλόγιο; (Βάλε ένα Χ στην απάντηση που είναι αλήθεια για σένα)	Ναι 	Όχι 	Δεν απαντώ 
Ακούγοντας τις καινούριες λέξεις;			
Βλέποντας τις καινούριες λέξεις;			
Αντιγράφοντας τις καινούριες λέξεις;			
Μεταφράζοντας τις καινούριες λέξεις;			

**β. Εκμάθηση γραμματικής**

Πώς μαθαίνεις καλύτερα τη γραμματική; (Βάλε ένα Χ στην απάντηση που είναι αλήθεια για σένα)	Ναι 	Όχι 	Δεν απαντώ 
Μελετώντας τους κανόνες;			
Με γραπτές ασκήσεις στο σχολείο;			
Με γραπτές ασκήσεις στο σπίτι;			
Με προφορικές ασκήσεις στην τάξη;			



**Γ3. Αγαπημένα θέματα**

<b>Ποια είναι τα αγαπημένα σου θέματα;</b> (Βάλε ένα Χ στην απάντηση που είναι <b>αλήθεια</b> για σένα)	<b>Ναι</b> 	<b>Όχι</b> 
Πολιτισμός/Έθιμα		
Γεωγραφία		
Διαφημίσεις/Αγορές		
Φαγητό/Διατροφή/ Μαγειρική		
Τεχνολογία		
Φύση/Περιβάλλον		
Μουσική		
Οικογένεια/Φίλοι/Άνθρώπινες σχέσεις		
Ελεύθερος χρόνος/Χόμπι		
Ταξίδια		
Επαγγέλματα		
Υγεία		
Διάσημοι άνθρωποι		
Θέατρο/Κινηματογράφος		
Διασκέδαση/Ψυχαγωγία		
Διαδίκτυο		
Λογοτεχνία/Ιστορίες		
Αθλήματα		
Τέχνη/Ζωγραφική		
Επιστήμες		
Φεστιβάλ/Γιορτές		
<b>Άλλα θέματα που σου αρέσουν;</b>		

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