

**The Impact of the Economic Crisis on English Language
Teaching in Greece: a Case Study of a Language School.**

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Dissertation (21,952 words) submitted as part of:

MRes: Educational and Social Research - September 2014

University of London, Institute of Education

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all those who helped and supported me in the completion of this MRes study.

Warm thanks to my supervisor, Dr John Gray, for his continual optimism and encouragement. Many kind thanks also to all those at the Institute of Education, both staff and fellow students, who took the time to discuss various aspects of this work.

Special thanks to everyone from Greece who participated in this research project with such generosity and enthusiasm, and who must regrettably remain anonymous.

My deep thanks to my father for his constant support, and to Si and Pin for keeping me grounded.

This study is dedicated to my mother, in loving memory.

Abstract

The ongoing financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures imposed on Greece have impacted heavily on the country. While recent studies have highlighted the effect on health and other social services, the domain of education remains under-researched, especially in the field of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) provision. Due to the long-standing deficiencies in the state education system, most EFL students attend private language schools (*frontistiria*); in a time of economic crisis this presents certain challenges for the students and the *frontistiria* themselves. A case study approach was used to explore this issue. The investigation identified certain ways in which a single language school is being affected by the crisis. Non-payment of school fees can be seen to have resulted in delayed salary payments to the staff, while student exam choice has also been influenced by the current economic situation. Insights from behavioural economics and theories of decision making under uncertainty were drawn upon to help in understanding choices made by stakeholders at the school. Bourdieusian notions of linguistic capital were also utilised and behavioural economic theory applied to these conceptualisations of capital. The study suggests that with private EFL tuition still in demand, the school and its stakeholders are adapting old ways to respond to a new situation.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The Research Focus

This dissertation is an examination of how the financial crisis of 2008 and the ensuing climate of austerity have affected the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (hereafter EFL) in Greece.

1.2 Background

My interest in EFL teaching in Greece stems from my own personal experience: for over ten years, until May 2012, I was an EFL teacher in various towns and cities around mainland Greece. When I arrived in the summer of 1999, EFL appeared to be flourishing, with private language schools (*frontistiria*) to be found even in small towns. Moreover, there was little inkling of the economic crisis to come: not even economists were to foresee such a deep recession (Colandar et al. 2009; Kahneman 2011; Chrysoloras 2013).

The repercussions of the global crisis of 2008 and the enormity of its impact on Greece was not at first obvious. Over time, however, the consequences of the economic crisis gradually became apparent. The fall of the Papandreou government in November 2011 led to the caretaker administration of Lucas Papademos; there was a very real fear of a complete collapse in the country's banking system amid genuine concern that Greece would be forced to leave the Eurozone (Peston 2012; Traynor 2012). By mid-2012, it was widely rumoured that the country would run out of money (Alderman 2012).

At that time concerns were being voiced, certainly within the *frontistirio* where I was working, as to what extent EFL teaching and learning would be adversely affected by the

ongoing economic crisis. Teachers at the school had become conscious of a change in the classroom, too; there seemed to be a shift in students' attitudes to learning English. Yet most of the emerging body of work examining the crisis focused on the impact on the areas of health care and social security (e.g. Stuckler and Basu 2013). Less attention was being paid to the impact on education. Moreover, surprisingly little mention of the crisis had been made in the regular EFL updates and newsletters received from educational providers. Indeed, the annual British Council reports following that of 2008-9 all pay scant regard to the potential effect of the crisis on English Language learning in Greece¹.

My own experience of teaching EFL in *frontistiria* had however made me interested in investigating the potential impact of the unstable economic situation on EFL in Greece. Hence my decision to embark upon the current study.

1.3 Research Aims

The aim of this study is to examine the effect of the economic crisis on a private language school, here called the Angelou School, where I worked for six years between 2006 and 2012. I was interested in how the school was responding to the challenges of the crisis. I also wished to gain some idea of how the students themselves were reacting to a changing environment. From this, I felt it might be possible to draw some inferences as to how the crisis may be impacting on EFL in Greece.

From this overarching inquiry, the following two research questions were formulated:

- i) Has the Angelou School needed to undergo changes in response to the crisis; what are these changes and what has driven them?

¹ It is interesting to note that in the British Council annual reports, the European Union countries were only brought together as a discrete region from the 2010-11 report onwards. Prior to this, Greece was classed as part of South Eastern Europe, a region defined in the reports as stretching from Austria to Israel.

- ii) Has there been a shift in the attitudes of the young people studying EFL at the *frontistirio*, in regard to their approach to EFL study and the expectations they hold of the value of their learning, and in what ways?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

In this study, I draw on two fields, behavioural economics and a Bourdieusian perspective on language acquisition, in building a theoretical framework to analyse the findings of the research.

1.4.1 Behavioural Economics

Standard economic theory is based on the assumption that people's decision making is determined by absolute rationality. This has its basis in Samuelson's postulation of "economic man" who operates "in a perfect world, where all things are certain and synchronised" (Samuelson 1937: 160). Doubt was cast on this model by Simon (1955), who questioned the supposition of absolute rationality on which it was founded. He argued that people are very unlikely to possess the complete access to information, nor the "computational capacities" necessary in order to make the rational assessment that might be predicted when using mathematical models of probability (Simon 1955: 99). This notion was developed further by Kahneman and Tversky who drew on psychological studies in their work on decision making under risk to develop their "alternative model" of **prospect theory** (Kahneman and Tversky 1979: 263)². According to prospect theory, when making

² Simon himself was reluctant "to turn to the literature of psychology" in developing his arguments against the conception of "economic man"; he felt there was then too great a gap between psychological knowledge of cognitive decision making processes and the sort of knowledge required to develop economic theory. It was first necessary to have a halfway point between them so as to guide scholars from both disciplines in their understanding (Simon 1955: 99-100).

judgements, people “depart from perfect rationality” (Rabin 1998: 24): their decision making stems from “behavioural reality” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979: 13). This work formed the basis for the development of **behavioural economics**.

Unlike the standard economic model, behavioural economics presupposes that rather than “exhibit ultra-rationality” (Colandar et al. 2009: 257), individuals display “inconsistent preferences” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979: 263) in their decision making under uncertainty. In order to facilitate their decision making, people have the inbuilt tendency to simplify their assessment of risk (Tversky and Kahneman 1982; Kahneman 2011) and the choices before them. People are also prone to simplifying their evaluation of risk through the “suppression of uncertainty” (Kahneman and Tversky 1981: 8), whereby people show themselves incapable of perceiving the ambiguity of a situation or a risk and instead impose on this situation a coherence where none may actually exist. Borrowing Thaler’s definition of Econs (or *Homo economicus*, drawn from Samuelson’s “economic man”) and Humans, Kahneman (2011) remarks how the decision making of a Human contrasts sharply with the rational decision making of an Econ, grounded in absolute logic and informed by full knowledge.

In order to simplify their choices, individuals rely on heuristics or draw upon a range of cognitive biases in their decision making. Two of these biases will be drawn on this study: the social norms bias and the status quo bias. The first of these posits that an individual’s choices are guided by perceptions of social norms and of what is considered standard practice. The status quo bias may be defined as when people are seen to prefer to remain with the current, or “most familiar option” (Jabbar 2011: 448). Studies by Samuelson and Zeckerhauser suggest that “individuals disproportionately stick with the status quo” (1988: 7); for Kahneman et al., drawing on this work, that individuals choose to “remain at the status quo” may be explained in terms of loss aversion: departure from the status quo may be seen as a loss, “because the disadvantages of leaving it loom larger than advantages” (Kahneman

et al. 1991: 197-8). It is this which prevents people from electing for change even if their choice of maintaining the current situation may in fact be detrimental to their economic good. Indeed, for fear of loss, the “[d]efault option might be interpreted as the recommended option” (Jin et al. 2011: 33).

Although initially applied to financial outcomes, the tenets of prospect theory may also be applied to “more involved choices” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979: 274; Kahneman 2011). This has recently come to include education, where behavioural economics offers the “potential to advance our understanding of key educational issues” (Jabbar 2011: 446). Examples of this include recent studies in the UK which utilise principles of behavioural economics in investigating student choices at secondary and tertiary level³. In this current study, aspects of behavioural economics will be applied to choices made by the Angelou School in response to the economic crisis. Behavioural economic theory will also be drawn upon in examining student choices and perceptions regarding EFL learning and acquisition; these will be seen in Bourdieusian terms of linguistic capital. This will be outlined below.

1.4.2 Linguistic capital

For Bourdieu, the notion of capital may be understood in terms other than monetary ones (Bourdieu 1997); he makes a distinction between **economic capital**, **social capital** and **cultural capital**. The latter of these encompasses the knowledge and skills a person may obtain, including education and educational qualifications. As with financial capital, the acquisition of different types of capital may also serve to enhance a person’s status and his/her economic well-being. Bourdieu cautions that “these transformed, disguised forms of

³ See: Diamond, A. et al. (2012) *Behavioural Approaches to Understanding Student Choice*; also: Jin, W., Muriel, A., and Sibieta, L. (2011) *Subject and course choices at ages 14 and 16 amongst young people in England: insights from behavioural economics*.

economic capital [are] never entirely reducible to” the definition of economic capital (ibid: 54); nonetheless, his writings on the subject are underscored by a lexis of economic terminology suggesting that while not entirely equivalent, financial and other types of capital may be analysed in similar ways. In this study, the fundamentals of behavioural economics, rather than being applied to decisions relating to financial capital, will be applied to a particular form of cultural capital, **linguistic capital**.

As defined by Bourdieu, linguistic capital is where different languages may be “organised into a market-like structure” (Jack 2010: 9), and thence seen to have different market values (Bourdieu 1982). In Bourdieusian terms, English may be seen to have a high market value: the exponential increase in the global use of the language in the last decades (Crystal 2003) has led to English being perceived in the contemporary world as “a high-status, world-wide language” (Morrison and Lui 2000: 473). While “the question of the economic value of English” remains perhaps rather more “complex” than is often suggested (Jack 2010: 11), the acquisition of English language competency may nonetheless bring a person financial benefit or increased social standing (Morrison and Lui 2000). This is certainly the case in Greece, where English is seen as the ultimate “must-have” (Oikonomides 2003: 58).

1.4.3 Greek context

In Greece, a great deal of money is spent on the acquisition of English language competency. It was calculated in 2008 that Greek household expenditure on private foreign language teaching and certification was a total of €750 million per annum⁴. While this figure includes spending on all foreign languages, given the predominance of EFL in Greece (Sifakis 2012), it may be assumed that the vast majority of this sum was expended on acquiring English.

⁴ Cited in *The Challenge of Shadow Education* (NESSE 2011: 46).

Given the contemporary status of English as presented above, the money paid out may be seen as an investment in the acquisition of linguistic capital.

But how would the protracted economic crisis impact on this? In this study, I will argue that the decisions stakeholders at the Angelou School are making regarding EFL education and acquisition may be best understood through the lens of behavioural economics; that decision makers here are guided by heuristics and biases. I will also briefly examine the potential implications of this.

1.5 Organisation of the Dissertation

An investigation of this topic suggests there are two interlocking strands at play: the economic situation and the position of EFL in Greece. These two components will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2 of this study. The first section attempts to place Greece in its current fiscal context and to provide a brief overview of the progression of the crisis from its onset in 2008 to the summer of 2014.

The second part of the chapter aims to give some insight into the state of Greek education and to outline the importance of EFL in the country. Much of the literature examining education in Greece pertains to that provided by the state. It is however widely acknowledged that most EFL teaching in Greece has traditionally taken place in the private sector and continues to do so (Sideris 1981; Pavlidou 1991; Eckes 2005; Dendrinis et al. 2013). The relationship between state and private provision of EFL tuition will also be explored in the chapter.

The research design is described in Chapter 3; methods of data collection and analysis are also set out in this chapter. The findings of the study are reported in Chapter 4. A discussion of the findings is presented in Chapter 5, together with a brief examination of limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

Some final clarifications are needed. Firstly, given the close nature of neighbourhoods in Greece, even in larger cities, the school and individuals participating in the study may be recognisable; to minimise this the school has been anonymised and pseudonyms given to all participants. Secondly, I have elected to use the pronoun “she” when discussing English language teachers; it seemed more appropriate since the vast majority of such teachers in EFL *frontistiria* are in fact female.

Chapter 2: The Greek Situation

The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, it will present a brief examination of the sovereign debt crisis in order to establish the background to the current economic situation in Greece. Scholars and commentators have put forward slightly differing underlying reasons for the cause of the crisis in Greece: these will be briefly assessed. The second section sets out to review the literature pertaining to the educational system in Greece, and to explain how EFL fits into that system.

2.1 Economic Background

2.1.1 Analysis of the crisis

It is important at the outset to outline the two major difficulties which present themselves when an attempt is made to analyse what has been written about the recent financial crisis in Europe. Firstly, there have been many extreme reactions: articles and commentaries range from the judicious to what has been categorised as pessimistic hysteria (Featherstone 2011). Given that the Greek crisis impacts so heavily on the rest of the Eurozone, national sensibilities have tended to play a large part in determining reaction to the crisis; this has resulted in some reports betraying a certain bias as writers are seen to revert to or play on national stereotyping (Mahoney 2012; Chrysoloras 2013).

The second problem is one familiar to many researchers investigating contemporary events: the worry that whatever is written may be overtaken by events. The difficulty faced by the researcher in trying to analyse and bring coherence to what may be transitory events must be acknowledged (Malkki 1997). Since the difficulty cannot be avoided, it is necessary to set

out clearly the situation at the time of writing. In the case of Greece, the situation remains in flux. As of early July 2014, negotiations over ongoing financial aid to Greece are continuing between the Greek government and the so-called Troika – the tripartite committee of the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – tasked with overseeing Greek financial affairs. This is happening in the face of strenuous opposition within Greece to privatization reforms demanded as part of the rescue package. The threat of the fragile coalition government collapsing remains ever-present. A strong sense of uncertainty thus persists. The origins of the current situation will be assessed in the following section.

2.1.2 Background

The roots of the financial collapse in Greece can be traced back historically and politically (Chrysoloras 2013). Responsibility for the current parlous state of the country may be attributed in a large part to “inherited state failure” (Featherstone 2011). Greece did not become a modern functioning democracy until the mid-1970s. Much of the country’s modern history has been dominated by war or upheaval: the protracted war of independence against the Ottoman Empire, involvement in the 1912-13 Balkan Wars, occupation during the Second World War followed by a bitterly divisive civil war (1945-49), and later, the military dictatorship that lasted from 1967-1974. Such constant political and social turmoil has prevented a modern economic infrastructure from being established in Greece (Chrysoloras 2013).

The current crisis has shown Greece to be a country whose governance is inept. Corruption and nepotism prevail and have proved difficult to displace (Featherstone 2005). The country’s poor infrastructure is ill-suited to the demands of the globalised 21st century world.

It is “une société bloquée” (Featherstone 2005: 223): blocked by a lack of political will for reform, blocked by unions who repeatedly show themselves resistant to change (Tsarouhas 2012). Little has been done to tackle the problems of a flourishing informal economy (that is, undeclared income) and of rampant tax evasion, both of which are detrimental to the country’s economy (Danopoulos and Znidaric 2007; Matsaganis and Flevotomou 2010; Featherstone 2011).

The corruption inherent in the system has also extended to Greece’s dealings on an international scale, and in particular those related to finance. The culture of corruption has allowed for the unreliability of fiscal statistical data; this was shown to date back years prior to the 2008 crisis, as highlighted in the 2010 European Report, which purported to examine “problems related to statistical weakness and problems related to failures of the relevant Greek institutions in a broad sense” (European Commission 2010: 4).

This unreliability, mismanagement at best, at worst outright institutional deception, can be seen to be indicative of the inadequacy of the Greek system. In addition to institutional failures, there is also little doubt that Greece spent beyond its means in many ways. The 2004 Athens Olympics are often cited as the prime illustration (Gatopoulos 2010)⁵ but other examples may be given. Given the above, it can therefore be seen that Greece was never in a position to withstand a crisis. The already fragile state of the economy and endemic corruption in the country made it susceptible to any financial downturn that occurred (Tsarouhas 2012).

⁵ While it is generally acknowledged that the overspend on the 2004 Olympics contributed to the Greek problem, it is important to remember that Greece is no means unique in lavishing extravagant funds on sporting events; Russian expenditure on the Sochi Winter Olympics in February 2014 is just one example of this (see e.g. Bershidsky 2013). It therefore seems a little churlish to single Greece out in this way.

2.1.3 European responsibility

While the above suggests that Greece should be held accountable for its own crisis of fiscal governance, a widespread consensus has emerged amongst scholars and commentators that the country cannot be held solely to blame for the current financial situation (e.g. De Grauwe 2010; Featherstone 2011; Peston 2012). Rather, they maintain that Europe should also accept its share of the responsibility. Four major criticisms can be made of the European position.

First, Greek initial accession to the European Union (EU) was not unproblematic. The continued aim for “an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe” as set out in the 1957 Treaty of Rome coincided with Greece’s own aspiration to be part of the wider European community. Greek ambitions stemmed from a wish to bolster the stability of democracy in the country following the overthrow of the military dictatorship in 1974 (Ioakimidis 2000; Karamouzi 2013). This chimed with the European desire for the extension of a stable and democratic Europe in the context of the Cold War. Serious concerns were voiced about whether Greece was in fact ready to join the EU⁶; these doubts were ultimately overlooked. In 1975, Greek Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis made the formal application to join the EU; Greece was officially accepted as a member in 1981.

The second issue concerns Greek membership of the Eurozone. The single currency was part of the European vision of greater integration, as set out in the 1970 Werner Report.

However, enthusiasm for economic union implicitly allowed for oversights regarding the true state of Greek financial affairs: Greece’s admission to the Eurozone on January 1st 2001 can be seen as having been achieved by the country “disguising its true debt and deficit position” (Peston 2012: 250). Contentions were raised over Greek entry (Nolan 2011), yet continual reservations voiced even as Greece became part of the Eurozone (BBC Business News 2001)

⁶ Criticisms included that made in 1977 by François Mitterand, then part of the French opposition (ESI 2006).

were all but ignored. In fact, despite a growing awareness of the extent of irregularities apparent in the Greek fiscal statistics (European Commission 2010), successive European Commissions have appeared willing to overlook these failings in the Greek system.

The third problem relates to inherent failings in the plans for the single currency as drawn up in the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. It has been argued that the very structure of the Eurozone itself was not designed to withstand such shocks as those provoked by the recent sovereign debt crisis (Featherstone 2011; Lane 2012). While some economic commentators emphasise fault lines in the actual framework for monetary union (Lane 2012), others see the main impediment to the EU monetary union as the lack of political cohesion across Europe (De Grauwe 2010; Featherstone 2011; Peston 2012).

Finally, in the early stages of the crisis, the reaction from the ECB was characterised by indecisive stalling (Tsarouhas 2012; Pisani-Ferry 2012); when action was eventually taken, it was deeply flawed and may have been counter-productive (Pisani-Ferry 2012). The steps taken, which include stringent austerity measures imposed on the country, have been the subject of intense debate.

2.1.4 Current austerity

There has been much controversy regarding the effect of the imposition of austerity measures as dictated by the aforementioned Troika, the triumvirate of financial governing powers. These measures have been driven not just by economic thinking, but derive from a political ideology: just as the Euro may be seen as “a political project” (Stiglitz 2012: 274), so too may austerity. Austerity has been seen as a project primarily adopted by the Right, whereby government cuts in public spending are heavily favoured. This is despite warnings from

more left-leaning political figures and economists that such measures do little to boost a country's economy (Stiglitz 2012; Blyth 2013).

While on one level, an argument can be made for the fiscal necessity of imposing such rigorous measures on Greece (Pisani-Ferry 2012), the effects of such stringent measures on an economy already “horribly weak” are manifest (Peston 2012: 337). There is an increasing body of work documenting the negative impact of reduced public spending on social services and health care (Karanikolos et al. 2013; Stuckler and Basu 2013; Blyth 2013; Kentikelenis et al. 2014). There has also been a fierce reduction of state expenditure on education. Estimates as to the size of the cuts have been put at between a third and a half of pre-crisis expenditure, with more to follow (Grathwohl 2012; Educational International 2014⁷). In order to explore the potential impact of this, it is first necessary to examine the position of state education in Greece.

2.2 The Education System in Greece: a brief overview

2.2.1 State education

The problems which beset the Greek economy, including those of mismanagement and a widespread resistance to change, can also be seen in the area of education. As when attempting to evaluate Greek finance based on government fiscal records, so too is comprehensive assessment of the education department rendered difficult due to the unreliability of available data. The OECD Report (2011) on state education in Greece is peppered with references to the lack of reliable documentation. Other research shows the state sector to be riddled with “permanent deficiencies” (Sideris 1981: 59); issues of bad

⁷ The Education in Crisis website reports that: “From 2009-2013 educational spending has been decreased by 33%, and an additional 14% cut will be implemented in the years to follow until 2016.”
www.educationincrisis.net

governance and poor teaching have not been addressed and remain systemic (OECD report 2011; Koutrouba 2012). Moreover, as mentioned above, public spending on education has been cut drastically as a result of the economic crisis. It has been reported that 20,000 primary and secondary state school teachers have been lost as a result of these cuts (Dendrinis et al. 2013). Yet only recently has the effect of the crisis on education started to be discussed (Trivila 2013).

Any examination of education in Greece must acknowledge the existence of the “parallel system” of the network of extra cramming schools, or *frontistiria*, which function alongside the state school system. This type of supplementary tuition is often described as “shadow education” because of the way it “mimics the mainstream school system” (NESSE 2011: 13). While shadow education is not unique to Greece (NESSE 2011), its proliferation in Greece “gives it a distinct symbolic significance in the educational trajectory of the students” (Zambeta 2014: 75). Indeed, even children who attend private schools often also go to *frontistiria* in order to supplement their education, something which may be attributable in part to the high regard in which education is held in the Greek consciousness (Zambeta 2014), as well as to the acute competitiveness of the university entrance system (Lioudakis 2010). At the same time, the continued dominance of *frontistiria* may also be explained by the systemic failings of the state educational system (Kazamias and Zambeta 2000).

Attempts to address such failings have been described as “mixed and frustrating” (ibid: 81); the trend of “abortive reform initiatives” in Greek education is not a recent phenomenon, but one which can be traced back to the end of the nineteenth century (Persianis 1998). A major criticism of the reforms is their overtly political nature. This has been the subject of extensive examination and analysis (e.g. Persianis 1998; Grollios and Kaskaris 2003; Georgiadis 2005); a fuller exploration of this is beyond the scope of the current study. However, this continual political manoeuvring over education by all parties has been blamed

both for the failure of state schooling (NESSE 2011) and for the continued dominance of *frontistiria* (Grollios 2011). It may equally be argued that it is the frequency of ministerial interference, regardless of political party, which undermines the stability and efficacy of the state system (Liodakis 2010).

Yet despite the endless efforts at reform, little appears to have changed. Instead, “[c]hronic system pathologies, weaknesses and inefficiencies have stubbornly persisted” (Kazamias and Zambeta 2000: 81). The lack of options for professional development and career advance leave teachers frustrated and de-incentivised (Dendrinis et al. 2013). In addition, many state schools remain poorly equipped; buildings are often antiquated, with the interiors in a poor state of repair (Grathwohl 2012; Papazis and Ioannidis 2013).

As across the public sector in general, a further problem which affects the efficiency of the state school system is that of strike action: the school timetable is subject to regular interruptions due to teachers’ strikes as well as student demonstrations and lock-outs (*katalipsi*). This belongs to “a long tradition” of such protests at educational establishments (Stamou 2001: 654). Teachers’ protests relate to, amongst other things, dissatisfaction with pay and conditions (Stamou 2001). Student frustration has stemmed from grievances concerning the run-down state of school buildings to a lack of course books (Papazis and Ioannidis 2013). Such disruptions may close a school for days or even weeks, preventing students from attending classes.

It is due to the problems in the state system as cited above, in addition to the high importance assigned to education by Greek society (Koutsogiannis 2007; Zambeta 2014), that, rather than being seen as a luxury, additional private education at *frontistiria* is considered a necessity by many families. This is evidenced by the fact that parents from all socio-

economic backgrounds will strive to find the money to pay for their children to attend *frontistiria* (Mattheoudakis and Alexiou 2009; Zambeta 2014).

The difficulty passed onto students is that of the stress associated with attending what amounts to two schools daily (Triliva 2013). That is, a student will attend state school in the morning, and then follow lessons at the various *frontistiria* in the afternoon⁸. Each establishment separately places great demands on the students. Homework is set both by the morning state schools and the *frontistiria*. Teachers from each institution will expect this work to be done regardless of other classes a student may attend. The amount of work this entails creates increasing pressure on students.

Yet despite the widespread acknowledgement that much is wrong with the Greek educational system, including the excessive strain it puts on students, there seems little will to examine its deficiencies or change it (Grathwohl 2012; Triliva 2013). The long-term existence of *frontistiria* is such that they “have become a significant component of the social fabric” (NESSE 2011: 69) and it appears that neither parents nor educators can conceive of anything otherwise. In addition, the continued presence of *frontistiria* is welcomed by graduates as providing a source of employment (Liodakis 2010; Zambeta 2014).

The aforementioned poor quality of teaching found in public education (OECD 2011) is also reflected in state school language lessons. EFL teaching within the state sector is widely considered to be inadequate (Pavlidou 1991; Dendrinou et al. 2013); the deficiencies in EFL teaching within the state system will be explored in the next section.

⁸ Although students talk of “afternoon” lessons, this frequently means evening, too. All the EFL *frontistiria* at which I worked often held lessons until 9 or 10 pm. The directors were often obliged to do this in order to facilitate students who were attending *frontistiria* for other subjects earlier in the evening.

2.2.2 *The history of EFL education in Greece*

Before examining the situation of EFL teaching within state schools, it is firstly necessary to present a brief history of the importance of EFL education in Greece.

Given that Modern Greek is spoken little outside Greece (Dendrinis et al. 2013), save in Greek diaspora communities, foreign language learning is considered extremely important (Sifakis 2009). While French was at one time the most common foreign language spoken, albeit mainly amongst the higher socio-economic communities, the importance of English as a second language in Greece took on a greater significance following the Second World War as the British and Americans became further involved with the country's economic and political scene (Sideris 1981; Oikonomidis 2003). With the intensification of globalisation in the latter half of the twentieth century, so interest in English language learning increased; the past twenty-five years have witnessed an exponential rise in the demand for English language learning (Sifakis 2012). Much of this demand comes from the contemporary need for certification in English in the Greek job market (Sifakis 2009; Dendrinis et al. 2013). Most positions often now ask for a certificate of English at a minimum of B2 level⁹, while English language competency is a frequent requirement in tertiary level education (Sifakis 2012): it appears that English competency has become essential (Oikonomidis 2003). While Sifakis (2012) has coined the term "*pistopoiitikoratia*" to describe what he sees as the phenomenon of the Greek need to acquire EFL certificates for their own sake, it appears the need for EFL certification is all-pervasive (Papaefthymiou-Lytra 2012).

The state reaction to this increase in demand for EFL learning has been ambiguous. Despite the wish for greater links with Europe, exemplified by the push to join the EU in the 1970s,

⁹ The levels of English Language competency cited in this study correspond to those set out on the Common European Framework (CEFR). B2 level is defined as that of an "Independent User" at "Vantage" level; C2 level denotes a "Proficient User" at "Mastery" level (Language Policy Unit, Strasbourg 2013: 23).

language teaching policies did not reflect this; at that time there was a derisory amount of English language tuition in state schools (Sideris 1981). Once the country became an official member of the EU in 1981, Greece became subject to European directives which were followed piecemeal (Ioakimidis 2000). This incoherent approach can be seen in the government's attitude to directives on education and the teaching of modern languages. In line with European directives related to the promotion of foreign language teaching, successive governments in Greece have introduced various policies aimed at increasing the provision of English language teaching within state schools (Pavlidou 1991; Papaefthymiou-Lytra 2012; Dendrinis et al. 2013). Yet while these policies purport to improve the quality of EFL provision, government can also be seen to rely heavily on *frontistiria* to fulfil these promises. In fact, obtaining a certificate of English language competence is still only realistically possible for those students who attend private classes as there is currently no state provision for enrolment for exams in English competency, even for the *Kratiko Pistoipitiko Glwssomatheias* (KPG), the state language exam in English (Eckes et al. 2005).

The KPG is a sharp illustration of the contradictory position of government regarding EFL teaching. When the exam was introduced in 2003, it was with a dual intention. The first was in part to break the monopoly on English language exams held by Cambridge ESOL and other exam boards from America and the UK. It was also hoped that the introduction of the KPG would have a positive washback effect on EFL tuition in state schools. It appears a typically Greek irony that ultimately, it was decided that preparation and enrolment for the exam was best left to the *frontistiria* (Gheralis-Roussos 2003; Eckes et al. 2005). The hoped-for washback effect was not achieved (Eckes et al. 2005).

This failure may be seen as contributing further to the poor regard in which EFL lessons in state schools are held. Despite government rhetoric, English has suffered from frequently being regarded as a “filler” subject, designed simply to fill in the gaps between other,

implicitly more important subjects; as such, the lesson is disparaged by students and non-EFL teachers alike (Gheralis-Roussos 2003: 185; Sifakis 2009). Moreover, because the teaching material used in these lessons is frequently far below the language level of the books students have been studying in EFL *frontistiria*, the lesson appears pointless to many students, who “have grown indifferent to the FL [foreign language] work carried out in state school classrooms” (Papaefthymiou-Lytra 2012: 26). This student apathy often translates into disruption of the lesson and discipline problems, which the EFL teacher, already demotivated by the denigration of her subject, can do little to control (Gheralis-Roussos 2003).

A more recent report on language learning in Greek state schools (Dendrinou et al. 2013), undertaken as part of a wider European project on language learning, has highlighted other problems with EFL in public education. There is a lack of Information and Computer Technology (ICT) facilities, as also highlighted by Nicolaidis and Mattheoudakis (2008), while student foreign exchange programmes are deemed impossible to organise, owing to the “whole problem of bureaucracy” (Dendrinou et al. 2013: 68). Earlier studies (e.g. Sideris 1981) and current research thus help to explain the “perennial lack of trust” in the foreign language teaching provided in state schools (Dendrinou et al. 2013: 17).

Yet despite government rhetoric about reform, little has been done to assuage the problems facing Greek education in general (Koutrouba 2012; Papazis and Ioannides 2013), and given the debacle over the KPG, it seems unlikely that any fundamental changes will be made in the area of EFL in state schools. Hence the continued reliance by parents and students on private sector EFL tuition, something which is not limited to the higher socioeconomic families (Mitsikopoulou 2007; Mattheoudakis and Alexiou 2009; Dendrinou et al. 2013). As has been the case historically, it appears that the major responsibility for EFL teaching in Greece continues to remain outside the state sector (Sideris 1981; Pavlidou 1991; Eckes et al. 2005).

Despite this, however, much of the recent literature (from 2000 onwards) exploring EFL in Greece has tended to focus on the English teaching provided in state schools rather than in the private sector, with only minor specialist publications commenting on developments in the private EFL sector, such as the Athens-based *ELT News*. Similarly, although there has been some investigation into the impact of the crisis on education in Greece, this has either focused on public education or on the position of *frontistiria* in general (NESSE 2011; Zambeta 2014). There appears little examination of the effect of the ongoing financial situation on EFL in the private sector. In order to explore this, it is firstly necessary to say something about private EFL tuition in Greece.

2.2.3 Private EFL provision

Here, my preferred nomenclature should be noted. An implicit disagreement exists as to what schools offering foreign language tuition should be called. Some commentators have favoured the term “private language institutes” or “PLI” (Prodromou 1992) to describe such schools, implying that they are discrete from those cramming schools which provide additional tuition in traditional school subjects, such as Greek composition or Maths, for example. Other scholars ignore the distinction and use the transliteration of the Greek word *frontistirio* (plural: *frontistiria*) (Sideris 1981; Sifakis 2009 and others). Given that English is now an integral part of the mainstream school curriculum, it seems an unnecessary complication to use discrete terms; moreover, since the word *frontistirio* is in common parlance amongst students and teachers at such English language schools, it seems more appropriate to use this word in this study.

There are however subtle differences between those *frontistiria* which teach traditionally mainstream school subjects and those teaching foreign languages¹⁰. First, the exams for which students are coached are unavailable through the state system and are paid for privately, including the KPG. Second, the classes in EFL *frontistiria* are structured according to level of English rather than just age. They start with Junior classes (A and B Junior) for younger children, and progress with senior classes: A, B, C, D. These are followed by the exam classes where students are coached for B2 and C2 level examinations. The first of these exam classes is commonly known as the FC class¹¹, while the C2 level class is called the Proficiency class. Preparation for the C2 exams may last one or two years.

There are complications to the above structure however. For while enrolment in a certain class in a language school is supposedly based on ability, there is also an expectation that each level corresponds to a certain school age. Hence, a child who is in the final year of *gymnasio* (Junior High School), but who has a low level of English, may nonetheless expect to be placed with his school peers who have a higher level of English. Similarly, a student who has completed a certain year of English will expect to continue automatically to the next level the following year, even if he or she has not reached the level of the next class. This can be problematic for teachers who may have to deal with a range of age groups and language levels within the same class.

Moreover, not only children attend EFL *frontistiria*, but also adults often wanting a higher EFL qualification. Schools will attempt to organise adult-only classes, but student numbers and scheduling complications often makes this impractical. This can lead to school-age

¹⁰ While most language *frontistiria* specialise in EFL, they will often call themselves schools of foreign languages: such a school usually offers limited tuition in one or two other European languages.

¹¹ The FC class is also referred to as the Lower class. It is named after the Cambridge B2 level English exam, originally called the Lower. The exam was later rebranded as the First Certificate, and more recently, Cambridge First. Meanwhile, the moniker “Lower” is still often used to denote any B2 level EFL exam taken in Greece.

students studying with adults, most especially in the Proficiency classes. The challenges posed by such an arrangement is practically ignored in the literature.

Another pressure faced by EFL *frontistiria* is that of “pleasing parents” (Gass and Reed 2011: 48). Parents are conscious of the need for English in the modern world (Oikonomides 2003); they invest highly in EFL tuition and expect their child to obtain EFL certification (Mitsikopoulou 2007). In a time of economic strain, the question of investment is more pertinent still; its import will be explored in later chapters.

One consequence of the demand for certification is that EFL testing is now “a significant industry in Greece” (Gass and Reed 2011: 32). A plethora of English language exams is potentially available to students: the May 2014 exam schedule shows no fewer than seven different exams available at B2 and C2 level (Hillside Press 2014). Of these, the Cambridge and Michigan exams are the most well-known in Greece (Gass and Reed 2011). The problem is that not all the exams are found to have the same recognition when certificate holders are applying for work or for university entrance.

The issue of recognition is complicated. Within Greece, recognition of an EFL exam must first be approved by ASEP (*Anotato Symvoulío Epilogis Prosopikou* – the Higher Council for Personnel Selection), the body responsible for hiring public sector workers (Gass and Reed 2011). Elsewhere, the picture is slightly different. The Cambridge exams are accepted worldwide; the Michigan exams have a more limited international recognition, as do many of the other EFL exams currently available¹². Meanwhile, recognition of the Greek KPG is limited to EU member states (RCel 2013).

¹² Lists of those international organisations recognising the exams offered by Cambridge can be accessed via the website: www.cambridgeenglish.org. Similar lists for recognition of the Michigan exams can be found at: www.cambridgemichigan.org.

There is also a question of how long a certificate may be considered valid. Although the Greek state considers all EFL certification to “have lifelong validity” (Sifakis 2009: 231), this is not the case everywhere. For example, many UK universities will require an EFL certificate to have been obtained in the past two years in order for a student to qualify for admission to a degree course¹³.

Very little literature has been published on the varying forms of recognition or on the issue of validity; the potential implications of the apparent confusion for test takers over questions of recognition and validity will be explored further in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.3 Conclusion

Economic literature, despite much in-depth analysis of the origins of the sovereign debt crisis both within Greece and across the Eurozone, has failed to address adequately the effects of the subsequent austerity measures on the Greek education system. In the area of EFL, this lack of research is still more pronounced, with a greater focus being put on the state sector.

In the early years of the crisis, it was argued that it was too soon to assess the effects of the crisis on education (Barakat et al. 2010). The British Council itself made no reference to the Eurozone crisis prior to its 2011-12 Annual Report, in which a cursory summary of the situation was given:

Eurozone crisis - Regional director European Union led meetings to review the steps being taken to reduce the British Council’s exposure to financial instability in the eurozone [*sic*] and assess the impact of the ongoing crisis on our teaching and examinations businesses, especially in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. (British Council Annual Report 2011-12: 50)

¹³ UCL (University College London) for example, stipulates that any “acceptable English language qualification or test result [...] must have been awarded no more than two years prior to the proposed date of enrolment”. <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/prospective-students/graduate/apply/english-language>

Nonetheless, it appears that the crisis is indeed beginning to affect both state and private education in Greece, where “families and the educational system have been driven towards greater instability” (Triliva 2013: 16). Although parents are struggling to afford private tuition, the system of *frontistiria* education continues; as does the obsession with gaining EFL certification (Dendrinou et al. 2013).

In this dissertation, I therefore aim to examine the issues raised above by focusing on a single language school in an attempt to see how the experience of those within the *frontistirio* has been affected by the economic crisis in Greece. In the following section, I will outline the research design of the study.

Chapter 3: Design of the Study

This chapter firstly gives a short description of the school chosen for this study. The research design of the project is then set out, followed by the reasons why such a design was chosen. Ethical considerations of the study are also briefly described.

3.1 The Angelou School

The study focuses on an EFL *frontistirio* here named the Angelou School of Foreign Languages. It was the school at which I worked the longest (2006 – 2012) and where I was teaching in the early years of the economic crisis. The Angelou School was established over forty years ago by Cleo Angelou. In the past few years, much of the administrative and financial paperwork has been taken over by Mrs Angelou's younger daughter Artemis.

The *frontistirio* is located in a predominately middle-class suburb of a large city in northern Greece, called Voriopoli for the purposes of this study. The school is well-known within its immediate neighbourhood, where it has gained an excellent reputation both for the quality of its teachers and for the high number of students passing exams. Although enrolment numbers fluctuate annually, attendance is usually between 150 and 200 students. While the majority of these will be younger children and teenagers, there are ordinarily a small number of adult students also attending lessons. Currently, nine English Language teachers are employed on a part-time basis at the school; their exact hours of work depend on student numbers for any particular academic year¹⁴.

¹⁴ The school also employs three other teachers for German, French and ICT courses.

Two reasons guided the choice of school. First, there was the question of access. Some *frontistiria* owners are rather sensitive about discussing their school, as had become clear to me when collecting data for an earlier assignment. As regards the Angelou School, however, I had built up a good relationship with the Angelou family and with other members of the school while I had worked there; when I approached them about the research, they were extremely eager to take part. Second, the school is located in a middle-class neighbourhood. While all socio-economic groups are experiencing the effect of the crisis, the impact on the middle classes has been stark (Peston 2012; Smith 2013), to the extent that “Greece is gradually losing its middle class” (Papazis and Ioannides 2013: 30). Given this, I felt it appropriate to situate my research in a broadly middle-class neighbourhood.

3.2 A Case Study Approach

The choice of a case study approach was determined by two major factors. First, there were the dual limitations of timespan and length as imposed by the nature of an MRes dissertation. Second, challenges were presented by the topic itself, that of private EFL education in Greece. There remains a regrettable paucity of literature examining EFL in the Greek private sector; this, coupled with the lack of relevant available data (Hannam and Papathanasiou 2011)¹⁵ suggested that an investigative approach would be especially suited to this piece of research. A case study approach has been described as “exploratory”, whereby the findings of such a study may uncover certain elements which invite further inquiry (NRDC 2008; Yin 2014). Hence my decision to undertake a case study of a single EFL *frontistirio*. As a single-

¹⁵ A similar dearth of reliable data may also be found in the state sector, too. The OECD report (2011) on Greek education frequently alludes to the difficulty of acquiring educational data, a problem encountered even at Ministry level (OECD 2011: 50).

case study, the approach was holistic (Yin 2014). While the unit of analysis was the *frontistirio*, the boundary of the case – or context – was the economic crisis in Greece.

The study of the Angelou School can be seen to correspond to two types of case study.

Firstly, it is an *intrinsic* case, where interest often comes from the researcher's own connection to the case (Stake, cited in Thomas 2013). Here, my interest stemmed from my involvement with the Angelou School and a developing awareness that the economic crisis was making itself felt by both staff and students at the *frontistirio*. In my aim to investigate this further, I also had a wider interest in exploring the possible corollaries of the crisis on EFL in Greece.

In this latter sense, the research may also be considered as an *instrumental* case study. Such a study is undertaken with the aim of providing insight into a particular issue (Stake, cited in Silverman 2010). Despite the “thick description” inherent to case study research (Geertz 1973), attention is also focused “on something else” (Silverman 2010: 139). In the current study, the investigation of the Angelou School may indicate certain trends in the way that EFL *frontistiria* are tackling the challenges presented by the present economic situation in Greece.

The case study approach to research has been criticised in terms of validity and reliability (Sturman 1999; Cohen et al. 2007). This criticism has been attributed to a scarcity of methodological texts that aim to alert the researcher to ways of carrying out research when embarking upon a case study (Yin 2014). One challenge facing the case study researcher is how the approach may adequately be defined. It is possibly this absence of a sharp definition, the apparent fuzziness which surrounds the case study approach, which accounts in part for the accusation of insufficient rigour.

Criticism has also been on an epistemological level: situated in the “interpretative tradition”, the case study approach does not necessarily accord with definitions of reliability in a positivist sense (Cohen et al. 2007: 257). This highlights the need for rigour in the research methods used. To address this, a case study researcher may gather a range of complementary data so as to construct an internal validity.

In this study, data collected were triangulated. In triangulation, discrete pieces of data are analysed and set alongside each other so as to make the research process more rigorous (Robson 2011). Moreover, through triangulating data, the researcher is able to view the research from alternative angles; this enhances understanding of the data and also the legitimacy of the research (Silverman 2010).

A further criticism which continues to be aimed at case study research is that of lack of generalizability (Sturman 1999) and what wider inferences may be drawn from a single case.

The “thick description” (Geertz 1973) so integral to case study research instantly raises the issue of how the particulars of one case can be seen to have any wider relevance beyond the case being studied. As regards this current study, how far can conclusions drawn from the examination of the Angelou School be relevant to the experience of other EFL *frontistiria*?

Although the experience of this particular school may not be wholly representative of every EFL school across Greece, all such *frontistiria* are nonetheless driven by similar motives.

The major aim of an EFL *frontistirio*, whatever its location or catchment area, is to enable its students to pass exams (Gass and Reed 2011). Moreover, given the fact that a *frontistirio* is a business as much as an educational institution, it is unlikely that any given EFL school will not have been touched in some way by the austerity measures currently imposed nationwide. For implications which may be seen as pertinent to the wider context of EFL in Greece to be drawn from this study, it is necessary for the more “salient features” of the case under

investigation to be highlighted (Sturman 1999: 106) and an attempt made to identify those features of the case which might later be explored in other EFL *frontistiria*.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Design considerations

The method of data collection was informed primarily by the two research questions which the study aimed to investigate:

- i) Has the Angelou School needed to undergo changes in response to the crisis; what are these changes and what has driven them?
- ii) Has there been a shift in the attitudes of the young people studying EFL at the *frontistirio*, in regard to their approach to EFL study and the expectations they hold of the value of their learning, and in what ways?

In order to answer these questions, it was necessary to collect data from the key stakeholders in the school: in the first instance, the school director and personnel; in the second, the students themselves.

Being situated in the “interpretative tradition” (Cohen et al. 2007: 257), a case study approach to research invites qualitative data collection and analysis. Moreover, case study research is underpinned by a holistic approach (Sturman 1999; Robson 2011; Yin 2014); in order to give the fullest possible account of the situation under investigation, a case study researcher may employ a variety of methods for data collection (Mitchell 1984). Accordingly, the research undertaken used a combination of interviews and questionnaires consisting of mainly open-ended questions, along with field notes taken during ethnographic observations.

Using diverse methods also allowed for the realities of undertaking research in Greece, something which required a flexible research design. Gass and Reed have highlighted several challenges presented by “cross-cultural differences” (2011: 31) when conducting research in Greece. I was aware that while the school had expressed great enthusiasm for the project, the nature of Greek *frontistiria* and the way they operate might not always facilitate a researcher’s work. Alterations to the research design and the possible ethical dimensions of this are discussed later in this chapter.

3.3.2 Interviews

In order to investigate how the Angelou School was adapting to the challenge posed by the economic situation, this study used interviews with the management and staff of the school. Interviewing can be seen to have “special strengths” which make it an especially useful “method of enquiry in the social sciences” (Mishler 1991: 7): it is a “flexible and adaptable way of finding things out” (Robson 2011: 280). Yet this very flexibility also raises concerns about reliability (ibid). For Cohen et al., “there is no single canon of validity” (2007: 372); in this study, I have attempted to construct an internal validity through triangulation of data gathered, as set out earlier in this chapter.

i) Telephone interviews

Interviews were held with two teachers with whom I had worked at the school and who had taught there for the longest time. Many of the teachers currently working at the Angelou School have only started teaching at the school in the past few years; I felt they had spent insufficient time at the *frontistirio* to be in a position to comment on how it had changed from pre-crisis to the present. These telephone interviews were arranged for late February.

The first interview was held with Marina, a Greek Australian. She had taught at the school for almost ten years until returning to Australia in June 2012. Marina had worked with some of the younger students at the Angelou School as well as the B1 classes. She also had extensive experience of tutoring students for the B2 and C2 level exams. The second interview was with Christine, also of dual nationality (Greek-American). Christine has been the main exam teacher at the *frontistirio* for the past eighteen years, where she is also responsible for setting the syllabus for the exam classes.

Each of the interviews held with the teachers lasted approximately half an hour. They were conceived as semi-structured interviews, as befits “flexible” research designs (Robson 2011: 285). There were three parts to the interviews. The first aimed to establish a personal and professional context; the second focused on how the teachers perceived the crisis in Greece and whether they felt it had impacted on the school; the final part allowed the respondents to elucidate on anything they had said previously¹⁶. The interviews were conducted in English as both teachers, although bilingual, consider English to be their first language and the one in which they are more fluent. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed by myself. I was also able to hold further informal interviews with Christine when I visited the school. These are described in the following section.

ii) School interviews

Kvale draws attention to “the continually changing actual research process with its surprises [and] design changes” (1996: 83). In this study, the interviews held with other members of the school came from a slight revision of the research design. The original design had included a structured interview to be held with Mrs Angelou. However, this did not transpire quite as anticipated and will be described below. At the time of initially designing the

¹⁶ These interview schedules can be found in Appendix 1.

research, I was not fully aware of the extent to which Artemis, Mrs Angelou's daughter, was now responsible for the daily running of the school or of the enthusiasm she would show for the study. She was eager to participate: this led to informal interviews being held with both Artemis and Dina, the school secretary, during my visit to the school. These interviews will be described later in this section.

The interview with Mrs Angelou was held in Greek and conducted by telephone. It was not recorded; instead I chose to take notes. While some scholars strongly advocate recording interviews (Silverman 2010), others do not consider it essential in all situations (Robson 2011). One advantage of note taking is that it allows the researcher to address queries or linguistic misunderstandings as they arise (Stake 1995); this was especially beneficial when operating in a second language.

The interview was anticipated to last approximately twenty minutes, which took into account Mrs Angelou's tendency to be quite concise in her speech. The questions focused on factual information regarding the composition of the school, such as fee structure, student enrolment and number of staff. However, due either to linguistic misunderstanding, or to some confusion on Mrs Angelou's part regarding the nature of the interview, I was able to elicit only a general impression of how things were going at the *frontistirio*.

Interviews held with Artemis and Dina were also conducted in Greek. Held mostly in the reception area of the *frontistirio* during lulls in the school day, they took the form of a series of "free-flowing conversations" (Antonopoulos 2008: 75). Unstructured interviews allow for flexibility and openness (Dowling and Brown 2010); in these interviews, I drew on Kvale's notion of informal interviewing whereby the interview schedule may be a "guide" consisting of "just some rough topics to be covered" (Kvale 1996: 129). The topics I discussed with Artemis and Dina were guided by points of interest which had emerged from the interview

data elicited from Marina and Christine. These included student enrolment and payment of fees as well as the issue of delayed payment of staff salaries.

In an informal setting as described above, it may not always be possible to have a recording device; moreover, the absence of one may prove advantageous for “the actual interviewing process as well as for the breadth and quality of the data collected” (Antonopoulos 2004: 75). Artemis and Dina were anxious to talk about the crisis and its impact; given the informal nature of the interviews, a recording device might have been considered “intrusive” (Robson 2011: 300) and curtailed their willingness to talk freely. Thus, instead of recording these interviews, I made short notes throughout the conversations; these jottings were later written up as part of the research journal I kept during my visit in which interview notes and observations were noted on a daily basis¹⁷.

3.3.3 Questionnaires

To acquire data from students, questionnaires comprising mainly of open-ended questions were used. The decision to use questionnaires was guided in part by practicalities, frequently an important factor when conducting research (Silverman 2010): a main advantage of the questionnaire is that of allowing the researcher to contact respondents living far away (Oppenheim 1992).

While there is a limit on what can be obtained from using questionnaires (Dowling and Brown 2010), the use of open-ended questions may nonetheless offer “a very attractive device for smaller scale research” (Cohen et al. 2007: 329). A semi-structured questionnaire consisting of such questions allows “respondents to reply in their own terms” and may encourage them to be more candid and personal in their responses (ibid: 321). Seeing that the

¹⁷ An extract from this journal may be found in Appendix 3.

second of the research questions in the study focused on students' attitudes towards EFL learning, it seemed appropriate to use a method which would allow students to be open in expressing their opinions. Moreover, the spontaneous nature of such data can be especially valuable "as a basis for new hypotheses" (Oppenheim 1992: 113). This is particularly pertinent when collecting data in an under-researched area and chimes with the exploratory nature of the study.

One drawback of the open-ended questionnaire is that a respondent may find it difficult to answer such questions. Moreover, the unstructured nature of answers given can cause difficulties in analysis (Oppenheim 1992; Cohen et al. 2007). To attempt to overcome the first of these, a questionnaire must be clear and simple (Cohen et al. 2007). Details of how this was achieved are given below. Regarding analysis, thematic coding was used; this will be described in a later section of this chapter.

The questionnaires were distributed amongst the twenty-six students currently attending B2 and C2 exam classes at the *frontistirio*. There were three sections to the questionnaire. The first part – section A – comprised of closed questions asking for details such as age, gender, school year. Section B related to English exams taken and asked students to comment on their experience of learning English within the state sector. Section C consisted solely of open-ended questions asking for students' attitudes to learning English and how they used the language outside the classroom¹⁸.

Self-completion of questionnaires raises important concerns (Robson 2011), not least of which is the near impossibility of knowing whether the respondent is just filling in the form as a matter of polite duty rather than giving any especial thought to the question being answered. I felt that one way to try to address such issues was to ask Christine to hand out

¹⁸ The questionnaires given to the former and current students can be found in Appendix 2.

questionnaires in class. A classroom setting would provide a relatively controlled environment in which the questionnaires could be completed and would suggest at the serious nature of the project. Christine had suggested that spending class time on such a questionnaire could be justified if the questions were in English and that the time needed for completion did not outlast that of a single-period lesson, roughly forty-five minutes.

As mentioned above, there is an obvious need for clarity when compiling a questionnaire. In this instance, where the respondents were EFL learners, it was also necessary to grade the language used to the level of the students who would be completing the questionnaire.

Students were informed they could ask Christine for any necessary translation of the questions, and that they could choose to answer in Greek or English. Christine emphasised to the students that they could write anything they wanted and that she would not be reading the completed questionnaires. That all the students chose to write in English is discussed in Chapter 4 of this study.

Former students who had obtained B2 and C2 certificates at the Angelou School in the years from 2007 – 2013 at the school were approached about the possibility of participating in the research. The aim was to gather data pertaining to the *frontistirio* pre-crisis. 2007 seemed an appropriate starting point: it has been described as “a pre-crisis benchmark” (Kentikelenis et al. 2014: 749). The initial intention had been to try and contact as many former students as current ones, that is, around twenty-five. I had hoped to achieve this through snowball sampling, whereby further potential participants may be identified by those already taking part in the study (Robson 2011). Unfortunately, however, several students did not respond to initial inquiries, while others had lost contact with former classmates and were unable to contact them. Those who did respond were sent similar questionnaires to those given to current students; these questionnaires were also written in English. Many of the questions were the same, such as those asking about participants’ use of English, or their experience of

EFL lessons at state school; other questions differed slightly. These were designed to reflect the participants' age and to ask about their experiences of using English at work or during higher education. Ultimately, only six completed questionnaires were received. The six respondents were not all the same age nor had they all attended the same English class. The rapid reply of these six and the lengthy detail of their answers suggested that those who were interested enough to complete the questionnaire had not seen it as "a tedious chore to be completed in a perfunctory manner" (Robson 2011: 263) and some interesting findings emerged from the data that was gathered. However, there are implications of such a limited response: its impact on the study will be discussed in Chapter 5.

3.3.4 Fieldwork

Ethnographic observations of Christine's exam classes were undertaken over a fortnight in April 2014. These were of revision classes held during the Easter break. Observation times were negotiated on site as the timetable for these lessons were not actually confirmed until the week prior to the lessons taking place. Field notes were written up either the same afternoon or the following day in the aforementioned research journal and can be found in Appendix 3.

3.4 Connoisseurship

In addition to data gathered from members of the school, this study also draws on my own professional experience of EFL in Greece. During the twelve years I was in the country, I worked at five *frontistiria* across the Greek mainland, including six years spent at the Angelou School. An integral part of my work included maintaining regular contact with

other schools and EFL educators, as well as with representatives of EFL bodies, such as publishing companies.

The validity of professional experience leans on the concept of “connoisseurship” as defined by Eisner (1976), whereby the connoisseur is able to appreciate and comprehend what she has experienced. This idea has been applied to the classroom (Clifford et al. 2005) where professional experience can be seen to have equipped the connoisseur with a depth of understanding; this allows her to perceive a situation more acutely and to develop what has been described as a “cultivated intuition” (Fernstermacher and Richardson 2005). The notion of drawing on professional experience in order to develop measured reflections in relation to a certain setting is one on which I will draw when examining the Greek EFL context within this study.

3.5 Data Analysis

It is suggested that data be analysed as it is collected (Silverman 2010). In this study, various data were gathered between February and late April 2014; analysis took place throughout the collection process.

The interviews with Marina and Christine were held in late February; they were transcribed soon after. While a longer discussion of theories underpinning the transcription process lie beyond the scope of this study, it is necessary to outline briefly choices made in the transcription of the two recorded interviews. Transcription is no longer considered a neutral activity (Lapadat 2000), but one which informs the analysis (Riessman 1993). In this instance, my decisions regarding transcription were guided by the overarching interest of the dissertation. Since the emphasis was to be on content, rather than on a more discourse-based analysis, I felt it unnecessary to include paralingual utterances such as “erm” or “uh” in the

transcript. Hesitations and repetitions were however retained, as were non-verbal utterances such as laughter.

As regards the questionnaires, I printed out the emailed answers and put these alongside those that had been completed by hand. Roberts has highlighted the issues raised when presenting the “the communicative styles of those using English as an additional language” (Roberts 1997: 169). She argues that the interpretation of participant identity may be compromised through (mis)representation of their oral language; this may equally be applied to the written language of English learners. I therefore chose to retain any orthographical or grammatical irregularities in the students’ answers.

Field notes were taken during my visit to the school, which took place over two weeks in late April. Ethnomethodology requires details be observed and noted (Silverman 2010); accordingly, I kept a detailed daily research journal during the fortnight.

The data was coded on hard copies using a series of coloured markers. Coding has been described as “the process of developing and using classifications for the answers to each question” (Oppenheim 1992: 83). In this study, thematic coding appeared the most apposite method. There is no narrow definition of what a “theme” may be; “[i]t captures something of interest or importance in relation to your research question(s)” (Robson 2011: 474).

In this study, a combination of predetermined and inductive codes were used. Initial themes were identified by drawing on data I had collected for pilot studies related to EFL in Greece and to the current crisis, and which appeared to warrant further investigation. One code concerned money; this was broken down into sub-sections: delay in payment or non-payment of fees and of staff salary. The cut in monthly salary was another related issue, as was the worry of a drop in student enrolment. A further concern was the effect of parental influence. Themes which emerged from the current data included student attitudes to English: these

were coded as approaches to EFL learning, such as enjoyment of the language, or considering it as useful. Students' reported uses of English outside the classroom were split into codes pertaining to entertainment, communication and study or work. A system was also devised of overlapping codes, those issues which appeared to be of concern to all groups of participants, such as the cost of private EFL tuition. The aim of this was to attempt to examine whether students and educators at the school shared similar worries or whether they hold different views of how the economic situation may be affecting EFL within the *frontistirio*.

The findings which emerged from the analysis will be further explored in the following chapter.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are integral to any piece of research. This study followed the principles of the BERA (2011) guidelines which highlight the need for data collection undertaken in another country to be subject to the same considerations as research conducted in the UK. This was especially pertinent given that the study was to involve young people under the age of eighteen. *Frontistirio* teachers in Greece are obliged to have an official teaching permit (*adeia didaskalias*); this includes a police check from the teacher's home country. The permit will have been compulsory for those staff at the *frontistirio* who were involved in the research, myself included.

Participants were apprised of the research through an information sheet, and asked to sign a consent form. Adult participants were sent an email, along with an attachment to sign and return. In the case of current students, seeing that almost all of them were under eighteen, participants received a letter which they were invited to sign and a letter and consent form – written in Greek – to be given to their parents and signed.

On collecting the forms, it appeared that some of the students might have chosen to sign both their own letters and that of their parents, possibly without informing their parents of the research. I decided their data were admissible nonetheless and that ethical concerns had not been compromised. Firstly, it would have been difficult to ascertain which students had signed their parents' forms without compromising anonymity. Moreover, given that the students were not young children and that the questions being asked were not of an overly sensitive nature, I felt that in this instance the consent forms signed by Mrs Angelou and by Christine could be considered sufficient¹⁹. While classroom observations had not been explicitly mentioned in the information sheets issued to participants, I felt that verbal consent from Artemis and Christine would suffice, especially given the fact that when visiting the school, I was actually asked to help with the supervision of a Proficiency class²⁰.

As regards anonymity, the close nature of the community in which the school is situated did pose a slight issue. Several participants had excitedly explained their involvement in the project to others in the community, inadvertently compromising the concept of anonymous research. Nonetheless, to minimise the possibility of recognition by the wider community, the school name and its precise location have been anonymised. Pseudonyms have been used for all participants.

The following chapter examines the findings of the study as drawn from data collected in the aforementioned ways.

¹⁹ Here, I am drawing on the notion of a school acting in *loco parentis* (see: Matthews 1998).

²⁰ When I queried this with Christine, her response was: "Well, most of the students know you. Obviously I wouldn't ask a stranger into the classroom!" She was aware of ethical issues over access and issues of child protection from her time growing up in the United States.

Chapter 4: Findings of the Study

This chapter examines the findings of the research. It draws on interviews held with the school owners and staff, and on questionnaire data gathered from former and current students. First, in keeping with the “thick description” (Geertz 1973) inherent to case study research, an overall impression of the Angelou School will be given. This will be followed by an examination of how the school has adapted to face the challenges of the financial crisis in Greece. The final section turns to the views expressed by students regarding their perceptions of EFL learning in the current climate.

4.1 Changes within the Angelou School

4.1.1 *Inside the Angelou School*

The Angelou School is a well-established EFL *frontistirio* which retains the sense of a familial, close-knit environment while operating as a successful language school.

The suburb in which the school is situated lies about twenty minutes’ drive from the city centre. It is a friendly, safe neighbourhood; students often cluster in the small schoolyard before and after lessons. A school bookshop on the ground floor sells course material and foreign language dictionaries along with sundry stationery items. Like other *frontistiria*, the Angelou School publicises its achievements by displaying the students’ exam results in the main entrance porch to the school.

The five-storey building is brightly decorated and well-maintained. Technological facilities are adequate: there is a small computer room, with just over half of the ten classrooms equipped with interactive whiteboards, installed over the past three to four years. Most

rooms are able to seat up to fourteen teenage students; classes are usually no larger than this. The smaller, less frequently used classrooms retain their original chalk boards. All classrooms are equipped with televisions and DVD players; a collection of portable CDs players are found in the staffroom.

An amicable, approachable atmosphere permeates the school. The door to the director's office, where Artemis is usually to be found, remains permanently open. Airy and large, the room is a jumble of cluttered folders and books and miscellaneous items. The reception area on the first floor has a similar sense of friendly chaos. The desk is a confusion of papers: hand written registers held together with a large bulldog clip, miscellaneous scribbled notes and memoranda in a mixture of English and Greek script. It is an area where, in addition to parents and students asking for information, people often drop in to chat.

Within the staffroom the atmosphere remains warm and supportive. Marina described the *frontistirio* as “a really close family”. She recalled that when the crisis hit, “we could actually see and feel when, you know, one of us was upset or depressed” and that people could come in and “talk about those kind of problems” engendered by the crisis.

Thus, despite the crisis, the Angelou School gives little sense of a collapsing or run-down place in a material sense; the *frontistirio* appears as a welcoming and friendly environment. The picture is more nuanced, however; this will be presented in the following sections.

4.1.2 Financial challenges

One major challenge affecting the school is that concerning payment of student fees and payment of staff salaries. Statistical data in this area being hard to collate, findings here are mainly drawn from discussions with the school directors and staff members²¹.

²¹ As mentioned in Chapter 3, OECD report compilers have noted the difficulty in acquiring accurate statistical data from the Ministry of Education (OECD 2011); trying to collect such data on a smaller level is similarly

In regard to school fees, although Mrs Angelou and Artemis were happy to discuss difficulties in a general sense, there appeared to be an unwillingness to talk about the exact fee structure; nor are these prices given on the school website. Yet while exact prices were not quoted, both Mrs Angelou and Artemis volunteered the information that some reduction in fees has been made in response to the crisis. There is also a system of “packages”, whereby students following English courses may receive a discount on lessons in a second foreign language, or where there may be a reduction in fees for younger students if their older siblings are attending the school. Such arrangements are not always widely publicised in terms of brochures or flyers, but may be explained on direct application to the school.

While Dina also declined to give information on exact prices, she explained that, when compared with other EFL *frontistiria* in the area, the Angelou School could be generally considered to offer very good value for the Junior levels (classes A to D) although was still quite expensive for the exam classes (FC class and Proficiency). Christine also made a comparison with other schools; she feels that lowering prices is not necessarily essential to the survival of a *frontistirio*, noting that:

A lot of *frontistiria*, smaller ones, [with a] lack of experience, or ones that are trying to lower their prices and get as many students as they can, have closed.

It is difficult to ascertain the reasons behind the reluctance to discuss the exact details of fees or available discounts; one possible explanation could be that any inquiry about school income raises the awkward question of non-payment of school fees. This issue inevitably complicates any discussion of school income; as such, it warrants a brief examination, as follows.

elusive. For example, when asked for current student numbers, Dina proceeded to count up names from hand-written registers of each class, to which alterations had been pencilled in. There was no official printed list of names.

It must firstly be noted that payment of school fees at the Angelou School is made entirely in cash. Non-payment is therefore not a question of cheques not being honoured by the bank nor of unaccepted credit cards. It is also important to emphasise that the matter of non-payment is not a new problem in itself and so cannot be seen as a result of the crisis; nor is it restricted to *frontistiria*. Whether the problem of non-payment can be seen to have been exacerbated by the crisis is however a moot point. Unfortunately, it remains almost impossible to collect accurate data on the problem. Just as it is difficult to evaluate the extent of the “informal economy” which exists in Greece (Danopoulos and Znidaris 2007), so too it is the very nature of non-payment which renders assessment of the issue problematic. As described in Chapter 2, there is increasing literature on the problem of the “shadow economy and tax evasion [which] are widespread in Greece” (Matsaganis and Flevotomou 2010), but little work has been done on the prevalence of other kinds of non-payment. Given this lack of investigation, it is impossible to establish the full extent of the problem.

Nonetheless, the question remains as to why non-payment of fees is tolerated by the Angelou School at a time of economic strain and insecurity. It has been argued that people’s behaviour does not necessarily change in a time of uncertainty and that:

Models of reality that have been built over the years cannot be revised on demand for a particular occasion. (Kahneman and Tversky 1981: 8)

A reluctance to modify behaviour may be exhibited even if the result of maintaining such a mode of behaviour will go against an individual’s own economic interests. In the context of non-payment of fees at the Angelou School, if during a period of prosperity non-payment was permissible, in the current time of austerity, it becomes harder to insist on accounts being settled, especially as people may no longer actually have the money to pay such fees. Thus, even though it will be economically detrimental to the *frontistirio*, the Angelou School continues to tolerate this practice.

There is however a suspicion within the school that some people may be exploiting the economic crisis to avoid payment of fees. Christine felt that:

Some people take advantage [...] and they are delaying their payments and some people I feel are doing it on purpose.

She contrasted this with those who had genuine difficulties:

Because the people who really don't have the money [...] – I mean they do ANYthing and EVERYthing to, just to pay as well as they can, as soon as they can.

The effort made by such people is suggested by the emphasis Christine puts on the first syllables of “anything” and “everything”, as shown by capitals in the transcription. Dina, part of whose job involves attempting to collect delayed payments, also felt that some people were simply using the crisis as an excuse not to pay fees. Yet the school does not openly confront people about unpaid fees: in the context of the “particular occasion” of the economic crisis, the model of non-payment is perpetuated. This may be understood in terms of the status quo bias where any change from the status quo, or current practice, is seen as a loss (Kahneman et al. 1991): rather than risk upheaval, individuals prefer to leave the existent state of affairs unchallenged. Indeed, Mrs Angelou fears that by vehemently insisting on full payment, the *frontistirio* may gain a reputation as being “stingy” and this may dissuade students from attending the school. The economic loss currently stemming from the non-payment of fees is offset against the possibility of future loss. Maintaining the status quo thus appears the safest option.

However, the problem of non-payment of fees has started to have a serious impact on staff monthly salaries. As of November 2011, salaries have no longer been paid on time. Staff reaction to this is mixed.

Marina notes: “we always felt the crisis in our pay!” But she was well aware of the underlying reason for the erratic pay. She explains:

Payment was coming really late, because, you know, people weren't paying the fees so therefore we weren't being paid on time.

Christine details the problems she has faced. In 2012, she had to wait until October of that year to receive the whole of the salary she was owed for May. She explained that this was because the *frontistirio* was owed more than €10,000 in unpaid fees. These fees were outstanding not just from that past academic year (2011-12), but were an accumulation of monies left unpaid. Since then, any salary Christine has received has come in dribs and drabs. She is unable to keep track of how much is actually being paid into the bank and to which month's salary each deposit actually relates. At the time of our informal conversations in April 2014, Christine admitted that while she had just received her Easter bonus, she had yet to receive March's salary; nor had she yet been paid in full for February.

Nor are the secretarial staff being paid on time. Dina spoke of the difficulty of trying to organise her own budget when salary payments were so irregular. While Christine maintained, “I know at some point we'll be paid”, Dina was not as optimistic: she felt there would be little chance of being fully paid in the foreseeable future.

Christine's attitude may be seen to reflect what has been termed “the suppression of uncertainty” (Kahneman and Tversky 1981: 8), whereby an individual will attempt to impose coherence on a situation where none may exist. This is most clearly evident in studies demonstrating the brain's reaction to ambiguous visual stimuli; the implications of such studies may however equally be applied to other types of perception (ibid). Despite the fact that salary payments have been erratic and incomplete for the past three years, Christine nonetheless assumes it probable that she will be paid “at some point”. In making this assumption, Christine imposes on the situation a coherence which draws on her previous

experience of being paid regularly and in full. This enables her to suppress the uncertainty of the present situation and allows her to make the choice to stay at the *frontistirio*. This can be seen as a form of simplification of risk assessment, as posited by behavioural economics: rather than acknowledge the complexity of the situation, it is easier to simplify it and so reduce the element of uncertainty.

This may also possibly explain why, in spite of the payment difficulties, most of the staff at the Angelou School have chosen to remain at the *frontistirio*. While it is necessary to acknowledge that only a limited number of school personnel were interviewed, that staff are choosing to stay at the school is indicated by the fact that aside from the two teachers who left in June 2012²², no other members of staff have left the school; a new exam teacher has also recently joined. Dina and Christine both admitted to having considered leaving in the winter of 2012, but had decided to stay.

A number of reasons complementary to that posited above may also help to understand why staff have decided not to leave the *frontistirio*. Firstly, despite the belated nature of being paid, the actual salary is supposedly better at the Angelou School than in other EFL *frontistiria*. Wages have been cut drastically across both the public and private sector in Greece since the beginning of the crisis (Peston 2012; Zambeta 2014); at the Angelou School salaries have been cut by 10%. According to Christine, this reduction compares well with the situation in other EFL *frontistiria*: in some institutions, teachers are now working for only €3 an hour. While it was hard to elicit exact figures regarding the hourly rate paid to teachers at the Angelou School, Christine made it clear that no-one at the *frontistirio* earned that low a salary. Christine laughed as she explained what she perceived as the irony: in keeping

²² The two teachers who chose to return to their countries of birth were myself and Marina, to the UK and Australia, respectively. In both cases, wider economic factors beyond that of delayed salary payments influenced the decision to leave Greece.

salaries higher than in other schools, Mrs Angelou is demonstrating the regard she has for her staff, even if it means she cannot actually afford to pay them on time.

Christine thus appears to further justify her decision to stay at the Angelou School by comparing herself with teachers who are working in other *frontistiria*, and whom she perceives as being in a worse situation. Citing Helson (1964), Rabin notes how:

[H]umans are often more sensitive to how their current situation differs from some reference level than to the absolute characteristics of the situation (Rabin 1998: 13)

Here, the reference point is the teachers in other *frontistiria* with whom Christie compares those at the Angelou School. Such a tendency has been termed the “comparison effect” (Eggers et al. 2006: 1), which posits that when people see their peers struggling in a time of economic difficulty, they “lower their standards of what is good enough” (ibid: 1). In turn, these new standards become the new social norm. The decision of staff to stay at the Angelou School may thus be understood in terms of the social norms bias, according to which people’s decision making is based on how social norms are perceived (Jin et al. 2011). In Greece, the current social norm is that salaries often remain unpaid: there have been reported to be over a million people who work unpaid (Lowen 2013). In their decision to stay at the *frontistirio*, staff may therefore be seen to be following the social norms bias: adhering to the social situation in Greece of accepting work where salary payment may be delayed often indefinitely.

Staff at the Angelou School may also have decided to stay given the current impossibility of finding employment in Greece (Chrysoloras 2013)²³. Studies emphasise “the value attached to [...] having a job” in terms of a person’s sense of well-being (Vansteenkiste et al. 2005: 273). Indeed, both Dina and Christine cited the importance of a sense of having a job, even if

²³ The most recent figures shows unemployment to be at almost 27% (ELSTAT 2014).

paid erratically, as a further reason for staying at the *frontistirio*. This mirrors sentiments reported in other professional sectors in Greece where it is supposed that workers would prefer to have a job, albeit unpaid, as opposed to having no job at all (Lowen 2013). As noted in regards to the issue of non-payment of fees, according to behavioural economics, departing from the current option may be regarded as a loss. Here that loss may be interpreted as forfeiting the sense of self-worth connected with having a job, even if that job is unpaid. This may further explain why staff at the Angelou School are choosing to stay with the current option and not give up their jobs.

In the interviews held with Mrs Angelou and Artemis, neither spoke in detail about the difficulties of paying staff, although Mrs Angelou did allude to the awkwardness she felt at her apparent inability to pay the staff on time. This would imply that she does respect them, as suggested by Christine. It is interesting to examine the choice Mrs Angelou has made: rather than reduce staff salaries to a possibly more affordable rate which might allow them to be paid on time, she has decided to maintain a higher rate of salary, even if it means payment will be delayed. Seen in terms of risk, the gamble Mrs Angelou is making is on the continuing goodwill of her staff, whom she hopes will appreciate her position. That staff continue to work at the *frontistirio* suggests the risk has been worth taking. Moreover, that delayed salary payment is now common in many firms (Kretsos 2012) suggests that such a practice is currently perceived as part of the social norm; as such, this reduces the element of risk in Mrs Angelou's behaviour.

Yet the decisions made by Mrs Angelou also constitute a gamble being taken on the likelihood of a continuing need for EFL certification, and of students electing to come to her school rather than go elsewhere. Her decision to take this risk can be seen as underpinned by the status quo bias: an accepted belief that the demand for EFL certification will persist, as

will the conviction that adequate foreign language teaching can only be provided by the *frontistiria* (Dendrinou et al. 2013).

The gamble taken by Mrs Angelou has been severely tested. Artemis articulated clearly the immense difficulties experienced by the *frontistirio* in the academic year 2012-13; Dina further elucidated on this account. In addition to the problem of payment of fees, the academic year 2012-13 saw a significant drop in the number of students enrolling for English lessons. Around thirty students who had attended the Angelou School in the academic year 2011-12 chose not to return to the *frontistirio* in September 2012 – excluding those who had completed their exam courses – and few new students had joined the school.

In the past academic year 2013-14, however, it seems that the situation in the Angelou School has improved slightly. First, student numbers have risen from approximately 150 students in 2012-13 to about 200 hundred students in 2013-14; new students have enrolled at the *frontistirio* and only two or three students have left. Second is the fact that over the last academic year (2013-14), the problem of collecting payment of school fees has lessened slightly. It was noted by Dina and Artemis that more people have again started to pay in regular instalments, even if they do not always pay the full amount owing. Dina felt this resulted partly from the recent reduction in fees; she also thought that people had come to accept the wider economic situation in general and were learning to manage their affairs better on tighter budgets. This improvement in payment is however relative: while an increase in comparison to the previous year (2012-13), it seems that the amount collected is still not sufficient to pay staff on time. There also remains a backlog of unpaid fees, much of which will never be recouped. Nor is there any certainty as to whether this slight upturn will be maintained in be in the forthcoming academic year 2014-15.

In light of this, the choices made by Mrs Angelou appear to carry greater risk. Nonetheless, those interviewed consider it probable the school will remain open, including Artemis, who remains cautiously optimistic. Christine reiterates that: “a lot of *frontistiria* are closing [...] I hear many *frontistiria* closed”, but she does not feel that EFL *frontistiria* will “completely close”, believing that those schools which “keep the quality” will survive the current situation. Dina thinks likewise and suspects it is the long-standing reputation of the Angelou School that encourages parents to send their children there. This confidence in the continued survival of the Angelou School may be understood in terms of the status quo bias: the conviction that things will not change regarding the overall demand for EFL tuition and certification.

The issues and assumptions surrounding EFL tuition and certification will be further examined in the following section.

4.1.3 EFL certification and examination choices

As described in Chapter 2, Greece is dominated by what has been termed a “certificate culture”, where EFL certification is seen as essential (Gass and Reed 2011; Sifakis 2012), and *frontistiria* are expected to enable their students to succeed in EFL exams (Papaefthymiou-Lytra 2012). The Angelou School is proud of its exam success; the economic crisis has however impinged on decisions over exams currently taken. In addition to interview data elicited, this section draws on ethnographic observations of classes as well as experience in liaising with Greek students and their parents.

It is firstly important to point out that while it is usually parents who pay for the tuition and enrolment, exam choices made are typically the result of joint consultation involving the *frontistirio*, parents and students, or self-funding adult students. Although the argument can

be made that student choice and parent choice are not necessarily always the same, in this dissertation, given the extensive collaboration amongst stakeholders, “student choice” is understood to incorporate all those involved in the discussion making process. The limitations of this will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Traditionally, even though the Angelou School will offer tuition for any of the English language exams currently available, the *frontistirio* has focused on the B2 and C2 level exams offered by the two most familiar exam providers in Greece (Gass and Reed 2011). These are Cambridge English, which offers Cambridge First (FCE) and Cambridge Proficiency (CPE), and the University of Michigan, which offers the Examination for the Certificate of Competency in English (ECCE) and the Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE)²⁴. While a handful of students at the school have in the past elected to sit the state KPG exam, the last being in 2011, it is the Cambridge and Michigan which have remained prominent.

Whereas prior to the crisis, many students at the Angelou School were encouraged to sit for both Cambridge and Michigan exams, in the present climate, people are understandably reluctant to pay for two exams, each of which cost €150 on average. Students are therefore increasingly being urged to take only the exam it is felt they are more likely to pass: in most cases, this is the Michigan. This choice is influenced by the way in which the exams are viewed. Although the Cambridge and Michigan exams are equivalent at each level on the CEFR scale, the perception among students remains that the Cambridge exams are harder than the Michigan²⁵. This is because, unlike the Cambridge, the Michigan exams consist solely of multiple choice questions, save in the essay paper. Exams based on multiple choice

²⁴ This division has become more blurred recently since the fusion of Cambridge and Michigan into CaMLA which is responsible for the ECCE and ECPE exams, while the FCE and CPE exams remain under the auspices of Cambridge Assessment. However, a clear distinction still exists between the two sets of exams.

²⁵ Indeed, one student wrote on her questionnaire: “I would like to give FCE, but when I saw that it was so difficult I preferred [*sic*] to take ECCE.”

questions may often be perceived as easier due to “the allowance for much uninformed guessing” when answering this type of question (Yi’an 1998: 38).

The preference for the Michigan is especially pronounced at Proficiency level, where the number of students opting for the Cambridge CPE has dramatically reduced: in the exam session of May 2014, only one student out of a class of nine has chosen to enrol for the Cambridge exam. A sharp contrast can be noted with pre-crisis, where around half the number of students in a Proficiency class would have been enrolled for the CPE.

The decision is closely related to the cost of the C2 preparation course, which pre-crisis customarily lasted two years. Concern was voiced by both Marina and Christine that even able students would not continue to Proficiency level because “the generation now” are unable to afford tuition. In the academic year 2011-12, the Angelou School piloted a one-year Proficiency course with a group of students taking the ECPE, with the general agreement amongst staff and directors being that Cambridge CPE preparation would require longer than a year. Out of the six students in the trial group, only one failed the exam. Henceforth, the Michigan ECPE preparation class at the Angelou School has lasted a year; a two-year CPE preparation course is also still offered, although few students take this up. Yet while the one-year course allows students to obtain C2 level EFL certification at a lower cost, there are implications for the value of the linguistic capital obtained due to the different recognition each exam is afforded.

According to Bourdieu’s theory of “forms of capital” (1997: 46), possessing linguistic capital may provide an individual with “access to better life chances”, enhancing that person’s social position and economic prospects (Morrison and Lui 2000: 473). As set out in Chapter 2, not all EFL certificates are afforded the same status and while the Michigan exams are widely accepted in Greece, they do not have the same global recognition as the Cambridge exams,

either by universities or places of work. In terms of allowing an individual greater access to higher education and thence possibly leading to improved career opportunities, the holder of a Michigan certificate may be seen as having a reduced amount of linguistic capital in comparison with the holder of an apparently equivalent exam from Cambridge. If the linguistic capital obtained is thus considered as being of a lesser value, then investment in the ECPE exam, although cheaper, may be seen as false economy. Transposed into economic terms, if the linguistic capital gained through paying for a less recognised EFL certification is of limited value, this can be seen to diminish the return on the original investment. Even though that investment is cheaper than before, its returns may be seen as considerably fewer. Moreover, as noted in Chapter 2, exam choice is further complicated by the fact that whichever certificate a student acquires, Cambridge or Michigan, the problem of duration of validity remains. That is, by the time a teenage student applies for university admission, or for a job position, it may transpire that the EFL certificate that student holds is deemed to have been taken too long ago to be considered adequate certification of the holder's knowledge of English.

The question is thus raised of why the factors of recognition and validity are not taken into account when decisions are made as to what exams students will take. The confusion which surrounds these issues may partly account for this. Christine herself admits to being slightly unsure about which certificates are still accepted:

[E]xams like the Lancashire, which turned into the B2, or the Edexcel, which turned into B something, now they're thinking of not recognising it again [...]. I heard one person saying they're not recognising it [the KPG] as well any more, but I don't know if that's true. I think [...] it is recognised, but not in Europe, and a lot of people want something that will be recognised when they go out. Because of the future, they don't know if they'll still be here, so they want something that is recognised even in Europe.

The irony here is that although Christine is aware that many students want EFL certification to help them in the case that they leave Greece because of the crisis, she does not appear to acknowledge the difficulty which may face them: that the Michigan exams which many of the students are insisting on taking, have limited recognition outside Greece. Nor does Christine make any reference to the question of how long a certificate may be considered valid.

The question of exam choice may be understood through the perspective of behavioural economics which posits that an individual may either have too much or not have enough information in order to make a rational decision about whether to invest in something. Instead, the individual relies on heuristics to simplify the choice to be made (Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Here, it appears that the choice of what EFL exams to take becomes simplified: that is, the issues of recognition and validity are naïvely overlooked. Rather than become over-muddled by the potential value of certain forms of certification, it is easier for stakeholders at the Angelou School to take the most convenient option, in this case, the Michigan exams, which students may be felt more likely to pass and for which tuition may be cheaper, and not take into consideration any complicating factors.

4.1.4 Overview

It can therefore be seen that despite constraints imposed by the altered economic circumstances, the Angelou School is able to operate mainly as before. Being dependent on students electing to follow exam tuition courses there as opposed to elsewhere, the school has however reduced fees and modified its C2 level courses. The issue of staff payment constitutes an ongoing concern; nonetheless, staff are continuing to work as before. Student

numbers have shown an increase; the continuing demand for EFL certification suggests that the future of the Angelou School is not under immediate threat from the crisis.

The question of how students themselves feel about the value of their EFL learning will be explored in the next section.

4.2 Student Perceptions

The second of the two research questions focused on student attitudes to EFL in the light of the crisis.

4.2.1 Completion of the questionnaire

Seventeen students in the FC class completed the questionnaire; responses came from nine girls and eight boys, all aged between thirteen and fifteen years old. The students were in the last two years of *gymnasio* (Junior High School) and the first year of *lykeio* (Senior High School). On average, they had been learning English for six or seven years; this corresponds with research showing that the majority of children begin EFL learning at around seven or eight years old, and most obtain their B2 level exam before the age of fifteen (Oikonomides 2003).

In the Proficiency class, eight of the nine students completed the questionnaire. The children – five girls and two boys – were aged between fourteen and sixteen; there was also a 41-year-old man, Miltos, who had returned to his English studies 26 years after passing his Cambridge FCE exam²⁶.

²⁶ As noted earlier, it is not uncommon in Greek EFL *frontistiria* to find an adult student attending classes alongside teenagers.

Completed questionnaires were received from six former students. The two male respondents, Stavros and Petros, aged 18 and 22 respectively, are both university students. Four females responded. Anna, 18 years old, has just finished her last year at High School. Theodora, also 18, is a contemporary of Stavros; she is also at university. Mina and Georgia are in their mid-twenties; both are postgraduate students who attended English Proficiency classes at the Angelou School while at university.

It is interesting to note that all the current students chose to respond in English, even though they had been told they could use Greek if they wanted. Except for Mina, the former students also all completed the questionnaire in English²⁷. In citing the students' answers, I have chosen to retain their original spelling and grammatical usage. Very few answers were unclear and where ambiguity remains, I have attempted to interpret this.

4.2.2 Use and perceived value of English

The questionnaire aimed to elicit responses related to how students used English; it also asked participants to reflect on their own perception of the value of EFL learning. Most of the current EFL students were quite enthusiastic regarding their EFL learning. While some of them thought that it was “difficult”, many positive adjectives were also used: English was “enjoyable”, “useful” and “helpful”. Several students viewed English as a global language, necessary for today's world: the English language is “the most famous in the world”, which “most of people learn [*sic*]”. Seen through a Bourdieusian perspective, it may be seen that through their EFL learning, students perceive themselves as acquiring an asset which will be of value to them.

²⁷ I was surprised by Mina's choice, as all our email correspondence had been in English. Given the brevity of her answers, however, I felt her choice to write in Greek may have stemmed from a time constraint rather than a linguistic one.

Students seemed quite clear in where they felt English would be necessary. The first was as “a very useful tool in the job market”. The demand for EFL certification as a prerequisite for job applications within Greece is well-documented (Sifakis 2012; Dendrinos et al. 2013); the students show themselves well aware of this tendency: indeed, eighteen-year-old former student Stavros jokes ironically that it has “come to the point” that Cambridge Proficiency should be required for someone to be a fast food delivery person in Greece now.

Certification apart, the extent to which English may actually be used in the workplace is difficult to gauge since few of the respondents in this current study have experience of work. However, for those students who have worked, the language is certainly seen as useful. Anna (aged 18) sees English necessary for speaking to “foreign people” at work and because “Greece is a well-known tourist destination”. Georgia (aged 27) remarked: “working at my father’s store I have helped him sometimes with his emails to answer in English when it was necessary”.

Many respondents also saw English as necessary for work opportunities outside Greece; a number cited their own plans to go abroad. The underlying reason for this was explicitly articulated by sixteen-year-old Proficiency student Thalia who foresaw that she “might have to travel abroad because of the crisis”, while former student Theodora (aged 18) thought that, “as I have studied English Language I could look for a job abroad.” This would imply that students are aware of the current situation in their own country. Indeed, it appeared a given that there were more job opportunities “outside” of Greece and that English would be necessary to obtain such positions. However, no mention was made by respondents of anything related to issues of recognition or validity of the certificates they had gained or hoped to obtain. This would support the supposition that decisions about exams are taken with little consideration of the ambiguity surrounding the potential value of EFL certification.

In terms of educational opportunities, English is also seen by several respondents as being of benefit to their studies, both at secondary and tertiary level within Greece. While Georgia notes that EFL certification “was an important requirement for applying for my master programme”, 22-year-old Petros, currently completing his degree in Film Studies, noted that “some of the lessons taught at my university are only in English”. Other former students now at university cite using English either to research topics on the Internet, or to consult a “foreign bibliography”. School students also find English to be helpful: Dimitris (aged 15) mentions being able to “use English jargon at Greek subjects”; while for Anna, an eighteen-year-old school leaver, the language had been a valuable aid, “especially on projects as I could research in English and be able to receive more information”. The experience described by these students corresponds with the literature which charts the rise of English within the academic environment (e.g. Crystal 2003), something also highly pertinent to Greece (Oikonomides 2003). This would suggest that in terms of value, it is both certification in English and knowledge of the language gained by students through working for EFL exams which have facilitated their studies elsewhere. Linguistic capital may therefore be understood here not only in terms of benefit gained as a result of EFL certification but in language acquisition enabling students to do well in their school and university studies. In this sense, whatever exam they have taken, the students may be seen to have profited from their investment (or that of their parents) in EFL learning. This perhaps tempers the amount of risk taken by investing in EFL tuition at *frontistirio*: that certification is only part of the profit gained.

Participants were also asked about their use of English outside their studies or the workplace; their responses suggested two main uses: to facilitate interaction with non-Greek speakers and maintain social relations, and to access various forms of entertainment. While linguistic capital is generally considered in the Bourdieusian sense to contribute to a person’s cultural

capital, it can here also be seen to be of value in an individual's acquisition of social capital. Social capital may be understood as the various benefits an individual may derive from belonging to a certain group (Bourdieu 1997). Here, the acquisition of English in itself, irrespective of certification, is allowing these Greek students access to a wider community; it is facilitating the building of networks which may potentially be of future profit to the students, thus enhancing their social capital.

Many respondents mention using English for communicating with those from "outside Greece", or non-Greek speakers within the country; this chimes with literature emphasising the traditional need for Greeks to have knowledge of a second language due to the limited number of Greek speakers, especially outside the country (Sifakis 2009; Dendrinou et al. 2013). Several students mentioned using English as a means of corresponding with friends or family living abroad, or for staying in touch with "friends, who come from different countries so our common language is English." This supports fifteen-year-old Despoina's description of English as "the universal language". English is considered useful for when respondents themselves might travel abroad and want "to speak with an unknown person". Meanwhile, Vaso, a fifteen-year-old in the FC class, wrote of her encounter with a woman in a local shopping mall:

[A] woman told me if I could help her. The communication was in English.
I felt so good because I use English.

This corresponds with Sifakis (2012), who suggests that English may be used as a *lingua franca* within Greece; examples of this are given by several other respondents. It may therefore be argued that for many of the respondents in this study, acquisition of the language has a salience beyond that of the certification required for job or study applications.

Knowledge of English allows them participation in a far wider social network; the linguistic

capital acquired through EFL tuition in itself has a value discrete from that gained through certification.

Respondents also use English for entertainment purposes: listening to music and watching “movies without subtitles”. There is a great deal of exposure to English on Greek television: the vast majority of English language movies and serials shown are subtitled (Oikonomides 2003; Dendrinis et al. 2013); knowledge of English allows students to access this world. Use of English on the internet was also widespread amongst participants, whether for playing online games, surfing the internet or chatting online. The language thus appears to be part of students’ “everyday practices” (Mitsikopoulou 2007: 234), and of relevance to them.

Indeed, it seems that students currently at the Angelou School and those former students who participated in the study attach great significance to EFL learning, with most seeing it as an integral part of their lives. The investment in their EFL tuition can be seen to garner profit in terms of social capital in that it enables them to participate in a wider sphere, which may in turn offer them future opportunities. Here, it is in knowledge of the language itself rather than in merely the certificates students have obtained that the value of their EFL tuition may be seen to lie. Nonetheless, the question of cost and initial investment in EFL learning, especially in a time of economic crisis, still remains; this was a point raised by several respondents and will be examined in the next section.

4.2.3 State EFL education versus frontistirio

For those in Greece wanting to acquire EFL competency, it has long been assumed that the private sector is superior to the public system of education (e.g. Sideris 1981; Sifakis 2009; Dendrinis et al. 2013). Yet in a time of financial difficulty, given the cost of private tuition (NESSE 2011), such a belief may be tested. This leads to the question of whether the

economic crisis has impacted on how students perceive the respective value of their state and private EFL education.

Studies suggest that EFL lessons given in state schools have often been held in low regard, by both teachers and students (Gheralis-Roussos 2003; Papaefthymiou-Lytra 2012). Data elicited for this current study echoed this: former and present school students were largely critical of the EFL education they receive or have received at state school. Although a few students from the FC and the Proficiency class consider public EFL tuition to be adequate – “My school is good and it learns [*sic*] me many things”; the lessons “are ok and students can learn something” – such comments are in the minority. The criticisms made were wide-ranging. The EFL course books used in class “aren’t very good”: “neither helpful nor appealing for students”, they “don’t have the important stuff we need”. Teachers are accused of “indifference”: they “don’t pay much attention”; some “don’t know the language that good [*sic*]” and “make many mistakes”. 41-year-old Proficiency student Miltos has similar memories of his state school EFL lessons: “the lessons were horrible and it was certainly the teacher to blame”. The apparent disinterest shown by the teachers is mirrored by that of the students: a number of children confess that they “don’t take English lessons seriously” and “don’t pay so much attention in class”. It appears that the general perception remains that voiced by thirteen-year-old FC student Nikoletta, who believes: “we don’t have the opportunity to learn English well, if we don’t go to a *frontistirio*”.

However, some respondents also chose to note the uncomfortable relationship between state and private sector. Georgia, now 27, recalls the situation from when she was at school:

[D]uring the lessons nobody paid attention. Even the teacher wasn’t interested in [the lessons] because she relied on the fact that everyone was attending a *frontistirio* English class. So there was a kind of silent agreement among the teacher and the students that the English lesson at school is not so important.

Georgia's comments indicate a vicious circle that has also been identified by Gheralis-Roussos (2003): because the school lessons are poor, the students attend *frontistiria*. Yet because the state school teacher knows that the children are attending private classes and has little need of her lessons, she feels no real incentive to improve them. Hence the tacit "agreement" that the lesson at school is of little value.

However, the current economic crisis makes this matter more pertinent: the issue of having to pay for EFL acquisition was raised by several students. The questions asked in the questionnaires deliberately made no allusion to financial matters. I had been worried it may be too sensitive an issue for some; I was also interested to see whether respondents might choose to mention it of their own accord. In the FC class, thirteen-year-old Anastasia pointed out that English was useful for those "people who can afford it"; fifteen-year-old Dimitris was more emphatic: "I can't understand why I must pay to learn English". From the Proficiency class, the opinion that "learning English in Greece is too expensive" was expressed by Christos and Antigone (both aged 14). Voula, also aged fourteen, was particularly clear on the issue:

English is expensive to learn and people who want to learn English, often don't have the financial ability to do so.

It is sixteen-year-old Katerina who articulates most clearly the direct link between the financial problem and the inability of the state sector to provide adequate EFL tuition:

It's a shame that people have to pay so much money in order to learn English. I wish public schools were better organised.

In her wish for a more coherent state school system, Katerina touches on the crux of the debate: the question of why the system of shadow EFL education is permitted to perpetuate given the financial difficulties experienced by many Greek families. While this question might be applied to almost any subject taught in Greek schools, it is especially relevant to

EFL tuition given the vast amount spent on private language tuition by Greek households (NESSE 2011).

While respondents in this study might therefore be seen to question the current system and to be aware of its limitations, at the same time they perceive the value of tuition undertaken at their EFL *frontistirio* to be higher than that available at state school. Although a wider debate on the persistent reliance on shadow education in Greece at a time of crisis is perhaps beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is nonetheless worth briefly exploring the apparent reluctance to challenge the system of education and its relevance to EFL provision.

The ongoing attachment to *frontistiria* has been highlighted by Trivila, whose public suggestion that people should withdraw students from *frontistiria* and put pressure on the Ministry of Education to reduce “the inefficiency of schools” was met with strong derision (2013: 16). That people appear loath to act against the current education system, despite the financial strain it imposes upon them, may be understood through applying the status quo bias, whereby people choose to remain with the current, or default option.

The attraction of the default option has been explained in the following way:

Many decisions have a default option even if we do not explicitly realise it, and our tendency is to go with this pre-selected option if we do not make an active choice. Opting for defaults is a way of limiting our choice set and is another response to complexity. (Diamond et al. 2012: 23)

The complexity of the economic crisis, together with the uncertainty it engenders, have left individuals unable to deal with rapidly changing circumstances which they may struggle to comprehend fully. Even though it may appear non-rational to spend money on something which could be provided by the state, seeing that EFL lessons are part of the state school curriculum, the longevity of the *frontistirio* system (NESSE 2011) makes it the automatic default option. In a time of crisis, individuals look for simplicity; they follow the tendency to

continue with the “pre-selected option”. In this case, EFL tuition at a *frontistirio* is that option. The tendency to maintain the status quo, to retain the current option, may thus help to explain why a greater challenge to the present system of shadow EFL education is not being made, even when students themselves may be seen to acknowledge the contrary nature of the situation.

4.2.4 Overview

Overall, both former and current EFL students have a positive attitude towards English and show themselves to be quite conscient of various needs for the language. Students are aware that EFL certification is considered necessary for their future, either for study or for work; they also understand that the difficult situation in Greece engendered by the economic crisis may force them to seek work in another country, where English will be indispensable.

Nonetheless, they seem unaware of the limitations of EFL certification, which can be seen as restricting their acquisition of cultural capital. Yet English can also be seen to be part of students’ everyday world: knowledge of the language allows students to access entertainment and social media, as well as to maintain relationships with people abroad. This may be regarded as helping students to improve their social capital. Former and current students are largely disappointed by the EFL tuition provided by the state sector and seem to both accept and appreciate the need for *frontistirio* and its sustained existence.

4.3 Summary

Findings of the study suggest that the crisis has impacted on the Angelou School in several important ways. The *frontistirio* has had to confront problems of reduced student enrolment; it is also facing ongoing difficulties regarding non-payment of school fees. As a result of

this, there is a persistent delay in paying monthly salaries. Despite this, staff are choosing to remain at the school. Indefinite deferral of salary payment has become commonplace in Greece nowadays (Kretsos 2011; Lowen 2013); the choices made by both owners and staff at the Angelou School in relation to payment issues over fees and salaries can be understood in terms of the social norms bias, whereby people are influenced by those social practices and trends which surround them (Jin et al. 2011).

Choices made by students regarding their exams may be understood through the individual's tendency to rely on heuristics when making decisions. Confused by the complications surrounding exam choice and lacking detailed information, students simplify their decision making. This leads them to select EFL exams which may not ultimately provide them with the cultural capital that is often derived from educational qualifications. However, the data elicited from former and current EFL students show English to have a complementary use outside of their studies; the language constitutes an integral part of the students' lives away from study or work. This adds nuance to the value of the linguistic capital acquired by students. For even if the EFL certification students obtain later proves to be of lesser value in the sense that it may be considered invalid and thus cannot of itself be translated into future financial benefits, the knowledge of English acquired by the students in preparing for the exams can be seen to enhance their social capital in that it enables them to access a wider community.

That said, whether this justifies the individual investment made in EFL tuition in a time of economic difficulty, given that there is state provision for EFL tuition, may be debated.

Respondents resent having to pay for EFL tuition, yet they do not believe in the state provision. In the light of this, despite the ongoing payment difficulties experienced by the Angelou School, it appears that the conviction voiced by members of the *frontistirio* that the school will survive may be well-founded.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This study focused on the Angelou School, an EFL *frontistirio* in northern Greece, in order to explore the effects of the ongoing economic crisis on EFL teaching there. A case study approach was used; data was elicited from the school owners and staff, as well as from former and current EFL students at the *frontistirio*. Some interesting findings have emerged from this investigation; these will be summarised in this chapter. Limitations of this study will also be briefly examined, together with reflections on possibilities for future research.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The aims of the study were twofold: to examine any changes which the Angelou School had undergone in the light of the economic crisis; and the students' perspective on the value of learning English. Findings of the study were analysed drawing on tenets of behavioural economics and using a Bourdieusian concept of linguistic capital.

Behavioural economics allows for the “behavioural reality” (Kahneman and Tversky 1979: 13) of individuals in decision making. Rather than act as economic beings endowed with absolute rationality and having complete information related to the decision they are making, individuals often rely on biases and heuristics to make choices (Tversky and Kahneman 1982). In this study, the social norms and status quo biases were applied, together with the notion of the individual's tendency to revert to the default option in times of uncertainty.

5.1.1 Effect on the Angelou School

As may be expected when examining the impact of an economic crisis, the main impact on the Angelou School has been financial. Problems with non-payment of school fees has led to major delays in paying staff salaries. Despite this, few teachers have left and the staff seem to be accepting the situation. This can be seen as individuals relying on the social norms bias in their decision making: non-payment of salaries have become commonplace in the current economic climate in Greece (Lowen 2013). Staff at the Angelou School may be described as “going with the flow” (Diamond et al. 2012: 50), showing a preference for the default option of remaining in their current position.

The decision of the school owners not to insist on payment of fees by students and parents can also be understood in terms of the social norms bias. That non-payment is tolerated may be seen to stem from the culture of non-payment of fees which was already in existence pre-crisis. Encouragingly, an improvement in student enrolment numbers has been noted in the past academic year (2013-14) and fees are being paid on a more regular basis. However, these improvements can only be noted in comparison with the situation in the previous year (2012-13), not with the pre-crisis condition. Nor is there any guarantee that higher student numbers will be maintained at the school for the academic year 2014-15. The same applies to payment of fees: even if payment has become more regular recently, it remains uncertain whether this will be sustained as the economic crisis persists in Greece. If school fees are not paid, it is perhaps questionable how much longer any *frontistirio* can survive under such financial constraints.

On the other hand, given the continued desire for EFL learning and the fact that the state sector still appears not to be able to fulfil this demand, the need for EFL *frontistiria* remains apparent. This would suggest that that the existence of the Angelou School is not

immediately threatened in terms of being irrelevant. Yet the slight improvement in payment and student numbers has not had a knock-on effect on staff payment. However tolerant of their situation the staff may currently appear to be, the question remains of how long protracted delays in payment can be considered economically tenable for staff.

5.1.2 Exam choices and linguistic capital

The recent increase in student enrolment at the Angelou School indicates that, despite the current financial crisis, people are still prepared to find some money to pay for English lessons in order to obtain EFL certification. This would suggest that the high value attached to EFL learning and the importance of EFL certification has not diminished: the “certificate culture” (Gass and Reed 2011) remains prevalent in Greece.

However, limited financial means have impacted on the type of exam students are opting to sit at B2 and C2 level, many students preferring to sit only the Michigan ECCE and ECPE rather than the exams offered by Cambridge. Moreover, student and parental concern over the cost of exam tuition and enrolment has led to the Angelou School introducing the one-year Proficiency course for students taking the Michigan ECPE exam. The preference for the Michigan exams is being made in spite of the fact that the certification obtained has limited recognition. This rather confounds the idea of students acquiring linguistic capital in terms of a holder being able to acquire greater opportunities to improve their lives through acquisition of and certification in a prestigious language, such as English (Morrison and Lui 2000).

Students from the Angelou School express a wish to work or study abroad, for which EFL certification is often necessary, and yet many students are enrolling for an exam which may not be considered valid outside Greece. Their choice may be understood through behavioural economic theory which presupposes that individuals who lack information may well make “decisions that may not be in their best interests” (Diamond et al. 2012: 38). In the Greek

context of EFL certification, stakeholders are often without the appropriate information pertaining to recognition and validity of certificates. They are consequently unable to make fully rational decisions and so base their decision making on what they know and on familiar practice.

Yet most students see another value in their EFL learning: they use English on a daily basis for entertainment and to conduct and maintain relationships with people abroad. In this sense, English acquisition also confers linguistic capital in terms of the students' social world. A certain knowledge of English is an essential part of this world (Oikonomides 2003). It appears that students perceive English, "the universal language", to be an integral part of their lives.

Although current student attitudes were clear, the question of whether former students' attitudes have altered regarding their EFL learning was difficult to ascertain since so few former EFL students responded to the questionnaire. Further constraints on the study will be discussed in the next section.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

One limitation in assessing the impact on the Angelou School itself was the difficulty of obtaining more specific figures regarding fees charged and the full extent of non-payment at the *frontistirio*. While it became apparent from interviews with owners and staff that non-payment was an issue of considerable concern, it would have been easier to form a clearer understanding of the scope of the problem had precise figures been made available. The vagueness of exact details reflects the laxity of record keeping prevalent in Greece (Featherstone 2011; OECD 2011).

Another major limitation of the study was, as mentioned above, the small sample of former EFL students from whom data could be gathered. The original intention behind eliciting data from past students was to compare their answers with those of current students and thereby explore the question of whether student perceptions of EFL learning had been affected by the economic crisis. The limited response of former EFL students made this difficult to assess.

Furthermore, it is not only students who are stakeholders in EFL learning at *frontistiria*, but very often also their parents, who are usually those responsible for paying for the lessons.

The role of parental pressure on *frontistiria* has been documented in the literature (e.g. Gass and Reed 2011); eliciting data from parents might therefore have enhanced the study and given it greater depth. It would also have allowed for a more nuanced examination of the concept of student choice.

Ethically, two issues arose in the course of this study: the matter of parental consent and that of assuring confidentiality. As discussed in Chapter 3, I did not feel this compromised the research. Issues of consent and confidentiality might however be something of which to be aware in future studies on the economic crisis which may focus on more personal, potentially more sensitive, reactions to the current economic situation.

5.3 Future Research

While the aim of case study research is not generalizability, findings from such research may be used to identify certain areas of interest (Yin 2014). This study raises certain issues which may warrant further investigation.

Firstly, it would be interesting to explore whether the challenges currently faced by the Angelou School have also been experienced by EFL *frontistiria* in other regions of the

country, especially in different socio-economic areas. It may be of benefit to investigate what further issues have arisen in such schools, and how such problems are being tackled.

The continued impact of the ongoing economic difficulties in Greece may also warrant further examination. Given that the situation in Greece is unlikely to show a marked improvement for a number of years (Peston 2012; Chrysoloras 2013), it may be worthwhile conducting further research into how EFL *frontistiria* are tackling the ongoing challenges.

Moreover, given the ongoing confusion over recognition and validity of EFL certificates, it may be of value to see whether the obsession with certification (Sifakis 2012; Dendrinou et al. 2013) continues, and whether greater clarity regarding recognition and validity of certificates is achieved. There is also the ongoing question of why there is so little reaction to the continued parlous state of EFL education in the state sector and why the public system precludes students from obtaining any EFL certification through state schools. Several students chose to raise the issue of the cost of English lessons; it seems inexplicable that in a time of straitened circumstances, parents and students must continue to pay for the acquisition of EFL certification. This problem has been highlighted in studies, but has yet to be fully addressed.

5.4 Conclusion

At the outset of this study, I had expected to find a decline in the number of students taking English lessons at the Angelou School, and the school struggling to sustain itself. I had also anticipated a possible drop in student interest in EFL acquisition. These suppositions appear largely not to have transpired. Nonetheless, maintaining student numbers is a recurrent concern for the school, which has been obliged to respond to the crisis in various ways.

Principles of behavioural economics help to explain the choices made by the school and students as regards EFL tuition and acquisition of certification. That the school continues to operate as it does, with non-payment of fees being tolerated and with staff accepting erratic payment of their salary, may be understood as an adherence to the social norms bias: following the social norm now prevalent in Greece, where payment for services provided, including EFL tuition, is no longer always guaranteed.

Student choices regarding EFL exams taken may be seen as a reliance on heuristics, whereby for want of adequate information, an individual simplifies the choice to be made. Here, the complexity surrounding the validity of certificates a student may obtain is all but ignored. Stakeholders also do not seem to appreciate the diminution of linguistic capital which may result from such a choice. Despite the benefit gained from undertaking EFL tuition, the financial investment in EFL certification may, to some extent, even be regarded as a form of negative equity, whereby the value of the asset in which investment has been made may ultimately prove to be of far less potential worth than what was paid for it.

The future economic situation in Greece remains unclear. It has been noted that “the aggressive uncuriosity shown in the past toward behavioral research continues to diminish” (Rabin 1998: 41). The failure of standard economic theory to foresee the immensity of the financial crash (Colander et al. 2009) has led to a greater interest in “the use of sociological and psychological concepts in economics research” (Jabbar 2011: 446); it may therefore be considered more apposite to apply theories of behavioural economics, themselves drawn from psychology, when attempting to assess the effects of the crisis as this study has aimed to do.

In the context of the current study, it is perhaps too early to evaluate the full impact of the choices made by the Angelou School and its members. While it appears that the status quo regarding EFL tuition and certification is holding thus far, and that the *frontistirio* is

surviving, how long this can be maintained in light of the ongoing economic uncertainty remains another question.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedules

1.1 Interview Schedule with Present Teacher (Christine).

General structure of questions to be followed, adhering to a sense of chronology, but exact wording of question may be changed given the semi-structured nature of the interview. Additional questions may be asked or substituted for purposes of eliciting clarification or further elucidation.

Although aware of the general nature of the research, the teacher will not have seen the question schedule prior to the interview.

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to interview you. I'd just like to remind you that this interview is being recorded and will be transcribed. Is that okay with you?

I'm conducting this interview as part of my research into the impact of the economic crisis on English language teaching in Greece. The aim of this particular interview is to learn about your time and experience in Greece working as an English language teacher in the *frontistirio* system and how the economic crisis has affected you in your professional capacity.

- A. *Background: establish context of the teacher and of the nature of her work.*
- i) Firstly, I'd just like to know something about your personal situation and how you come to be living in Greece.
 - ii) Can you explain the type of work expected of an EFL teacher in Greece?
 - iii) How long have you been working at the *frontistirio*?
 - iv) How long have you been giving private lessons?
 - v) What do you think about the role of *frontistiria* and of the Greek system?
- B. *Period of crisis to the recent present.*
- vi) As somebody living and working in Greece, how did you become aware of the crisis and its severity? (Prompt: how did the general strikes of 2008 affect you?)
 - vii) Did you notice any immediate effect on the *frontistirio*? (This may refer to the ownership, other members of staff or the students themselves.)
- C. *Current situation / future.*
- viii) Thinking about the present, have you noticed any difference within the classroom and with the students these days? (Probes as appropriate: age of students, exams they're choosing to take...)
 - ix) How do you perceive student motivation these days?
 - x) Could you tell me anything about staff morale?
 - xi) How do you see the future of EFL in Greece?
- D. *Chance to clarify or elucidate.*
- xii) Is there anything else you'd like to mention thinking about the crisis and its effects?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and thanks again for your time.

1.2 Interview Schedule with Former Teacher (Marina).

General structure of questions to be followed, adhering to a sense of chronology, but exact wording of question may be changed given the semi-structured nature of the interview. Additional questions may be asked or substituted for purposes of eliciting clarification or further elucidation.

Although aware of the general nature of the research, the teacher will not have seen the question schedule prior to the interview.

Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to interview you. I'd just like to remind you that this interview is being recorded and will be transcribed. Is that okay with you?

I'm conducting this interview as part of my research into the impact of the economic crisis on English language teaching in Greece. The aim of this particular interview is to learn about your time and experience in Greece working as an English language teacher in the *frontistirio* system and what effect the economic crisis has had on you.

- A. *Background: establish context of the teacher and of the nature of her work.*
- xiii) Firstly, I'd just like to know something about your personal situation and how you came to be living in Greece.
 - xiv) Can you explain the type of work expected of an EFL teacher in Greece?
 - xv) How long did you work at the *frontistirio*?
 - xvi) Had you worked at other *frontistiria*?
 - xvii) What do you think about the role of *frontistiria* and of the Greek education system?
- B. *Period of crisis to the recent present.*
- C. As somebody living and working in Greece, how did you become aware of the crisis and its severity? (Prompt: how did the general strikes of 2008 affect you?)
 - D. Did you notice any immediate effect on the *frontistirio*? (This may refer to the ownership, other members of staff or the students themselves.)
 - E. Did you notice a change in student motivation?
 - F. Can you tell me anything about staff morale in your last couple of years at the *frontistirio*?
 - G. How do you see the future of EFL in Greece?
- C. *Chance to clarify or elucidate.*
- D. Is there anything else you'd like to mention thinking about the crisis and its effects?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research and thanks again for your time.

Appendix 2: Questionnaires

2.1 Questionnaire for Current Students.

Hallo! Thank you for agreeing to take place in this research ☺. This is **anonymous**, so please **don't** write your name.

This is **not** a test, but please don't copy answers. Please give honest answers: I am interested in your **opinion**. You may answer in Greek if you don't know the word in English.

Please use a pen and write clearly. Write on the back of the paper if you want to write more.

Thank you!!

SECTION A:

1. How old are you?
2. Are you male or female?
3. Are you at school or university?
4. What year are you in at school / university?
5. What class are you in at this *frontistirio* (FC or Proficiency)?

SECTION B:

6. Have you taken any English exams?
7. Which one(s) and what level? (e.g. Cambridge FCE, Kratiko B2...)
8. How long have you been learning English?
9. Tell me something about your English lessons at school (not *frontistirio*).

SECTION C:

10. Outside school, what do you use English for?
11. Do you think learning English will help you in the future?
12. In **your** opinion, why are you learning English?
13. Is there anything additional you'd like to tell me about learning English (positive or negative!)?

Thank you very much for your time! Good luck with your English lessons & exams ☺

2.2 Questionnaire for Former Students.

Hallo! Thank you for agreeing to take place in this research ☺.

If you don't know some words in English, you can answer in Greek. If you've got any questions, please let me know. The questionnaire will take about 30-45 minutes to complete.

Please can you send the questionnaire back to me by the end of February? Thank you!!

SECTION A:

1. How old are you?
2. Are you male or female?
3. Are you a student at school or university?
4. What year are you in at school / university?
5. If you've finished studying, do you have a job? What is it?

SECTION B:

6. Which English exams have you taken and at what level? (e.g. Michigan Proficiency, *Kratiko...*)
7. Tell me something about the English lessons you did at school (not *frontistirio*).
8. Did you study English at a *frontistirio* or have private lessons? Why did you decide to do this?

SECTION C:

9. In your opinion, has learning English helped you in your studies or job?
10. Apart from your studies or job, do you use English now? What for?
11. Do you think it's important for students today to learn English? Why / why not?
12. How do you feel about your future?

Thank you very much for your time! Good luck with your future plans ☺.

Appendix 3: Field Notes

The following is an edited extract from research journal kept during my visit to the Angelou School in April 2014.

Tuesday 15th April

School: still there! Like nothing's changed. Staffroom still in chaos – old files, scraps of paper everywhere; Easter decorations up – almost like: what crisis?

Talking to Dina – how are things?

Dina: Things slightly better this year – not so many homeless on the streets; last year, lots! It was shocking! People have things more under control; but – many years, more than ten maybe, for life to return to how things should be, not how they were before, but simply how they should be.

Payment – haha! Better than before, but they plead no money.

Artemis (comes from downstairs – didn't realise she'd be here over Easter): *Did the students fill in the forms ok? Do you want them to write more? What other help do you need?*

(She's so enthusiastic!)

Talking to Artemis – how are things going at the *frontistirio*? In Greece in general?

Artemis: *People have slowly got used to things; they think things are better – but everyone is leaving! The young people can leave. Here, well, you know... (drifts in and out of conversation – goes back downstairs)*

Dina (wants to let rip about the crisis?): *Things seem better, but not sure whether it's actually better, or people have just got used to it. But, prices in the shops have dropped – like here, with the fees – so people try and pay. Before, last year, shops still kept old prices, but it was too much! Now, people can buy everyday things more, they can organise their money. Maybe things have stabilised, but still worry that it will continue to get worse. For me, personally, not as bad as last year. Still not great – it's never going to be again, not like before, but not as bad as last year.*

Wednesday 16th April

Still disorganised – kids don't know when the lessons will be next week due to (state) school timetable. There's only one student (12-13 year-old?) who's arrived for the practice test.

Christine frantic: *Can you just look after the Proficiency kids? They're doing a listening test.*

The room has an IWB – that's new (in the past two years). Four students, all of whom I remember & who remember me: three girls & student in his twenties who's just come in for the mock test – don't think he does regular lessons here anymore (so don't think he completed the questionnaire). Quite stressed: their exam is in two weeks... It's important to them. They continued the test as though I wasn't there and I came and went and yet they continued. There was a seriousness and determination about them which I remembered from similar classes in previous years.

We smiled and spoke a little after the test about what I was doing & their exams.

Arrange with Christine to go out for coffee one evening & we'll talk more. Lots to say, I think.

Artemis: really enthusiastic about research. I feel quite welcome to ask questions about crisis & how things are – it's perhaps more of an open topic now? Or maybe because they know me?

Dina: *Are you coming in next week, too? We'll talk more...*