

Educational needs of principals in secondary education

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Abstract

This research investigates the views of school principals and vice principals of secondary education in Greece regarding their educational needs. The research was conducted during the academic year 2014-15. The final sample of the research consists of 60 school Principals and Assistant Principals. A questionnaire was used and the statistical analysis of data was conducted with the use of SPSS program. Management as an object of a training program is of great interest to most teachers of the sample. However they all believe that educational training on management would significantly help them deal with educational reality more effectively and mainly help them deal with problems associated with human resources. Thus educational needs are related to issues regarding the necessity of educational training, the content, methodology and frequency of educational programs as well as the requirements for effective educational training.

Keywords: School Principal educational training, Secondary education, school management, professional development, educational programs

Introduction

According to the Greek educational legislation, the principal of the school unit is the person who has the main responsibility of the school, in a competitive and demanding environment. The principal must promote the state policies in education and must ensure the conditions for a school which is open to the community and the society. These new roles require training in a wide range of approaches (Commission of the ER, 2007). In order to succeed in this crucial role and to promote innovation, the principal should have administrative knowledge and skills. Modern times require the need for training of principals and vice principals in educational issues. Training is associated with the stochastic-critical professional model (Matsagouras, 2005) aiming to highlight the complexity of educational circumstances and to reveal the power relations in the training field. All modern training programs for teachers in the context of lifelong learning, are invited to promote active participation in educational developments. At the same time, as aptly pointed out by Ifantis & Vozaitis (2011) [8], any training program should involve research, analysis and assessment of needs and should combine the collective and the individual expectations of teachers, in order for the program to be effective and have a positive impact on the career path of the trainees.

Theoretical Part

Parameters for effective training of principals

The reason for the training of teachers in recent years revived, as it is associated with the effectiveness of the education system. At the same time, the major developments in the era of globalization, technology, pedagogy and administration make the training imperative for all employees. Moreover, any reform effort in the organization and operation of the educational units must be accompanied by a corresponding trained and informed staff, which will have to implement the announced amendments (Vozaitis & Ifantis, 2007). There are many studies (Fullan, 1991, 1993; Hall & Hord, 1987; Little,

1989) which present a general feeling of dissatisfaction concerning the ineffectiveness of the training programs. In Greece, the evaluation of training programs in shows that only few of them are effective (Mavrogiorgos, 1996; Mpouzakis, 2000).

Requirements for Effective Training

Nikolakaki (2008) emphasizes that the training effectiveness issues cannot be addressed without reference to the training's objectives and content. Furthermore, there are two areas of interest (Nikolakaki, 2008):

- Types of training and teaching methods.
- Organizational issues.

Types of training

Educational programs, especially those which focus on school principals, are characterized by a diversity, due to the fact that there is neither a single perception of the character and content, nor a single educational standard. There are several classifications depending on the type, quality or content of these programs.

Mavrogiorgos (1999) [16], divides the training in mandatory and optional. Mandatory training includes programs which by their design, their planning and their implementation are defined as mandatory and they are subsidized. The Greek educational system operates as a control mechanism for the compulsory training programs in terms of content, duration, material, selection of trainers and implementation of the formal educational policy. Compulsory education includes the periodic training that, according to Mavrogiorgos (1999) [16], focuses on the introduction of educational changes and innovations. Teachers participate in training programs every 4-5 years, according to the planning of the state.

Optional training part is offered by various bodies, such as the Ministry of Education, universities and various cultural organizations. Teachers choose programs depending on the

subject, the trainers, the training material, the location and timing of trainings and the provided certifications.

From an organizational perspective, teacher training programs are divided into:

- Training Centers (Seminar type): Teachers are transformed into students to broaden and enrich their existing knowledge. The autonomy and innovation is limited.
- In-school Training: This type of training is a professional right for teachers, but it is also a great opportunity for professional development. The in-school training provides more opportunities for the connection of theory and practice as it takes into account the actual conditions and the specific characteristics of each school unit.
- Higher Education: Higher institutions offer specialized trainings through European programs, undergraduate studies or postgraduate studies.
- Self-training: Each teacher expands his/her knowledge seeking new information or exploiting sources of information which is provided by third parties (Ministry of Education, universities, research programs, etc.).
- Distance learning: Distance learning is widely used abroad to provide equal education opportunities but has also contributed to the improvement of other training methods (e-learning). It removes the barriers of distance and the obstacles on the disparity in the level of the learners.
- Blended learning: It is the most modern form of training programs, as it combines the best features of the face to face, distance, online, synchronous and asynchronous types of training.

Teaching methods

Regarding the teaching methods, Joyce & Showers (1980) argued that training programs are more effective when they include:

- Development of skills
- Training in the classroom
- Feedback
- Practical implementation

In an effort to connect Adult Learning with teacher training, it is essential to relate the content of the programs with the problems of the educational units and the teachers' experiences and existing knowledge. Regarding the organizational structure, issues such as the duration and the frequency of the programs concern many researchers (Sparks, 1983; Wade, 1985).

The Greek educational policy is characterized by centralization and bureaucracy. The teachers are not involved in the design or in decision making. However, in order for the training to be effective, active participation of all teachers in decision making and in the creation of school policies is essential (Vergidis, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994; Ifanti, 2003). Vozaiti & Ifanti (2007) presented the view of teachers at a rate of 81.4% that the in-school training programs should be organized by universities. The state organizes many programs but in order for them to be effective, the business needs of Greek teachers and the effectiveness of relative programs which are implemented in other countries should be taken into account (Hatzipanagiotou, 2001). According to Papakonstantinou (1993), a stable, consensual educational policy with long-term strategy, can act as a critical intervention in the educational reality.

Therefore, it is necessary to organize a network of lifelong learning, which will make use of all available resources of knowledge. A network, which recognizes the needs of learners and provide them with the opportunity to work together and to seek alternative means of access to new knowledge.

Literature review

The research on the effectiveness of the school environment has increased. Research aims to identify the ways in which schools can improve and respond to the changing economic conditions. The focus lies both in ineffective schools, which should redefine the way they operate, and in effective schools, which need to be upgraded. One of the factors that can contribute decisively to the improvement of the effectiveness is the school management.

Andreou & Papakonstantinou (1994) ^[2]. Approach the Greek administration of the educational system, through the analysis of the parameters that contribute to achieving the objectives of the school. They stress that promoting innovation and the introducing new subjects need to be addressed by the school leadership. Brinia (2008) ^[3]. Focuses on management with a pedagogical orientation. In particular, it aims to help education officials to apply the principles of management. Additionally, Brinia (2010) addresses the real problems that arise from daily operation of the school through the data analysis of case studies. Saitis (2007) ^[28] highlights the usefulness of the vice principal and emphasized that the proper distribution of power between the principal and the vice principal, ensures the replenishment of leadership without problems. Saiti & Saitis (2012) ^[29] present a theoretical and practical approach in the field of educational administration. They analyze and investigate various problematic situations through examples and case studies.

In surveys conducted in Cyprus on the needs of school principals, the main needs which emerged were school improvement, professional advancement and education and development programs for interpersonal relations (Pasiardis, 1994, 2004) ^[26, 27]. The personnel management, better communication and initiatives for school improvement (Georgiou et al. 2005).

Papanaoum (1995) records the multifaceted role of the principal. Specifically notes that "the position of the principal is a rather weak link in the hierarchical arrangement of the levels of government, between the training manager and the teachers association". In the same survey, the majority of the principals wanted enhancement of their role, reduction in bureaucracy and more training.

The investigation of Kavouri (1998) ^[9], strongly emphasizes the weaknesses of the leading role of principals in the Greek educational system. They are more interested in the smooth operation of the school rather than taking initiatives and applying changes. The education system itself is breeding these weaknesses as it prefers principals without training and autonomy.

Xochelis & Hopf (2003) ^[32], present the main findings, which resulted from a research program of twenty years (1981-2001), during which they studied two cycles of secondary education and they noted that the principals of less than four years, do not contribute to effective administration.

According to a survey of Stravakou (2003) ^[31], the principals presented a positive attitude to cooperation with all stakeholders as they correlate it with the school effectiveness.

Sahney, Banwet & Karunes (2004) mention that the educational system gives emphasis on quality not only in developed but also in developing countries. The educational system has internal and external customers, who must be pleased according to the Total Quality Management.

Grauwe (2005) [38], defines the School Based Management in his study on improving the quality of education. He notes that it includes the transfer of decision making and power in administrative matters at school level and he respectively considers the advantages and disadvantages.

Angus (2006) [35], argues that the administration in local schools begins to sound like a euphemism. The logic of the market has become the dominant figure in education. The principal must spend more time in discussions about the school budget than on educational matters. The pressure on education systems to assimilate in market mechanisms is strong.

Papaioannou Giavrimis, Valkanos & Katsafouros (2012) [23], highlight the interdependence that exists between the commands in the postmodern era and the high-quality educational resources. Acquiring managerial skills for principals requires not only the existence of educational programs to address the education officials but also to take into account their educational needs.

Lemonis & Kolezakis (2013) [12], highlight the multifaceted role of the director in the current educational units. This role and the absence of principals' training in "Educational Management" makes it necessary to educate them.

Maletskos & Mastrogiannis (2013) [13], record the perceptions and opinions of teachers regarding training. They state that training is of strategic importance, and that it is a part of a continuous professional and personal growth and development of teachers.

Anastasiou, Valkanos, Frangoulis & Androutsou (2015) [1], show the importance of professional development for school leaders-managers and emphasize the contribution of mentorship.

Panagiotidou & Zisi (2015) [20], present the basic principles of adult education that should be considered and applied when designing a training program for educators.

Papaoikonomou (2015) [25], presents the researching of information on the professional development of teachers of primary and secondary education.

Research Part

Methodology

The survey was conducted through quantitative approach using anonymous questionnaires and was carried out from April 9 to 15 May 2015. The questionnaire was constructed using Google Forms and it was sent via email to the email addresses of schools in secondary education in a Greek suburb. The population sample were principals and vice principals of these schools. A total of 105 questionnaires were distributed and 60 principals returned them fully completed (28% of the total population).

The data was analyzed by SPSS in order to statistically process it. All statistical analysis was performed with SPSS version 21 program (IBM® SPSS® Statistics Version 21, IBM, Armonk, NY, USA).

The purpose of this research is to explore the opinions and attitudes of principals on training in the management of educational units.

Findings - Discussion

Regarding the necessity for specific educational programs for principals, 68.3% responded that the principals should come from special education personnel programs, while 31.7% of respondents did not consider it necessary to have special training programs in management for principals. When participants were asked whether the principals should come from special management training programs of education, a high percentage answered negatively. Perhaps, because in Greece the professional training is not part of a broader human resource upgrading plan, but instead it aims more at satisfying short-term needs and it addresses current problems and the principals know it (Anastasiou *et al.* 2015) [1].

Regarding the desired duration of training programs, 41.5% opted a training program of a year, 34.1% of a semester while 17.0% preferred a program of one month. For the desired duration of these programs, it is noteworthy to emphasize that unlike other studies (Oepek, 2008) [19], most principals deem it necessary to have annual and half-year programs, while only a very small percentage prefer shorter programs of one month. The same need for attending educational programs is proposed by the principals in the research of Papadatou (2013) [22], as well as in the research of Giannikopoulou (2011) and a preference to increase the duration is evident. Differentiating with counter fast-track courses was recorded in the survey of Papaioannou *et al.* (2012) [23]. This indicates the need for training, but perhaps principals face training as an opportunity to avoid school work, since they know that they get the degree of training without active participation (Sakkas, 1986) [30].

The participants were asked whether they would like to attend a leadership and management training program. The percentage of people who would like to attend a special training program stood at 76.7%.

They were further asked to report the scientific fields that would interest them to study in the training program. Human resources management (20.0%) and the development of creative relationships with teachers, parents, students (15.0%) are the most common options. There were also leadership issues (13.5%), administration (13.0%), information on organizational issues (11.4%) and the educational legislation (11.4%). The "human resource management" and "development of creative relationships with teachers, parents, and students" occupy the first two positions in their preferences. A differentiation is observed in the investigation of Papaioannou *et al.* (2012) [23], where we find in the first place the "introduction of educational innovations". Consistency of views is observed in the research of Maletskou & Mastrogianni (2013) [13], and Papadatou (2013) [22], which present the improvement in "communication skills." This persistence and stability to the scientific training fields, should not go unnoticed, but it should be used appropriately by those who design the training programs.

Regarding the knowledge and skills which are considered as important for an effective principal, the communicative skills were selected as the most important (28.4%). Followed in descending order there are professional capacity (administrative experience and training) (25.7%), emotional intelligence (25.1%) and specialization in management of the educational units (20.2%). The lead in this question was the communication skills and closely the professional ability and emotional intelligence. It concluded that principals are aware of the importance of skills, such as communication for

harmonious relations between the subsystems in the school unit. Therefore, when designing training programs teachers should be given great emphasis on applying the principles of adult education, strengthening interaction and experiential education, which utilizes the experiences that exist or emerge during the current educational process. It is important for participants to learn what they need and to link their education to the problems they face in their daily work environment (Kokkos, 1999) ^[11]. Furthermore, principals seem to know specific terms of psychology, such as empathy.

In regards to the incentives that must be given to the principals to participate in training programs, the connection of theory and practice was the most common response (30.5%). The acquisition of points for professional development was also considered important (21.9%) directly combined with the certification of training (17.2%) and an increase in the income (16.4%).

Regarding the appropriate type of training for principals the most frequent choice (40.8%) was that of a mixed type that includes fast-paced seminars and distance training using both new technologies and conventional means. The need for a training tailored to the needs of the school unit was obvious (34.7%). Distance education by conventional means (printed material) was not chosen by any participant in the survey, while distance learning was selected by 16.7%. 23.3% of the participants seemed to favor the short-term training programs or workshops.

Conclusions

Training combines the three dimensions of time: the present focuses on the area where the problem lies; the past indicates the history of the problem, the reasons, the efforts to resolve it and the results. The future marks the brainstorming effort, eventually, with some solutions which can be found elsewhere in similar circumstances, in order to initiate the change for the better (Valkanos, 2002) ^[33].

Each teacher selects the training based on personal experience, which affects the attitude to the training itself and his/her expectations. To the extent that the opinion of the principals is positive, it means that the educational program is not necessary rejected. Hence, educational policies should focus on proposals for improvement and not radical change. However, if their opinion is negative, then there should be a change in course (Oepek, 2008) ^[19].

The purpose of the research was to identify and highlight the necessity for planning the training of principals in the thematic area of management of educational units. The conclusions of this research cannot be generalized. However, the same findings show clear trends, which can be used as discussion topics. The recording and interpretation of the training needs of principals may be a tool for professional development, since it constitutes a process of self-awareness, empowerment and inclusivity (Danti, 2005).

Managers seem to have a clear understanding of all dimensions of their role and the conditions for the effective treatment of everyday school problems. This fact is encouraging and shows that there is relative degree of autonomy even in centralized systems, such as the Greek one. If it is assumed that the improvement of the educational process is endless (Katsoulou, 2015) ^[10], then school leaders who take the risk of change, demonstrate that things can become better. Such kind of

principals are needed in education to move with vision towards the future.

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