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**TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT EFFECTIVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION. HOW DO THEY CORRELATE WITH THE LEVEL OF TEACHER EDUCATION?**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Over the last decades, scientific research has focused on the effective school leaders, their action and their role, as effective school leadership seems to influence decisively strategic planning, learning outcomes, school environment changes, school climate and culture. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the perceptions of 105 primary education teachers of the region of Leheia (Ileia Prefecture) on effective school administration in order to establish the correlation of a particular demographic factor, namely the level of education, with effective school administration. The survey conducted is quantitative, while the research tool used was the questionnaire, consisting of 9 axes (school climate, school leadership and direction, program development, personnel management, administration and financial management, student care, professional development and training, relationships with parents and the community, problem solving and decision making), which, according to the international literature, constitute effective school administration. A significant number of statistical findings were recorded.*

**KEYWORDS:** Effective School Leadership, Principals, Level of Education, Teachers.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The physiognomy of an organization is determined to a large extent by the organization and the way of administration, which can move either to the rational model or to the emergence of the human factor. The theory of social systems, which has shaped the modern administrative science and its application in education systems, focuses both on the institution-organizational element of the organization (legislative dimension) and on the personality element, ie the people working in it and their roles (Getzels & Guba, 1957, 1968). According to the above considerations, the operation of the management is of fundamental importance to an organization and makes the work of a manager vital. It also determines the quality and effectiveness of school units with an emphasis on teaching and on characteristics that affect the climate and school culture (Pashiardis, 2000). This present work is an attempt to explore the concepts of primary education teachers for effective school administration through the association of the demographic factor with nine axes that reflect knowledge, attitudes, skills and leadership abilities according to international literature.

The research tool used is a questionnaire of 53 statements, made by the Professor of Educational Leadership at the Open University of Cyprus, Petros Pashiardis. Effective school leadership is the subject of a broad and systematic study in a number of countries worldwide, as research has demonstrated not only the great importance and relevance of educational leadership with the improvement of learning outcomes (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011; Kythreotis, Pashiardis & Kyriakidis, 2010; Pashiardis, 2014), but also the strong relationship

between leadership and school success and improvement (achievement of all pedagogical goals) (Pashiardis, 2014; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001) and the degree of influence of school leadership on the culture and ethics of schools (Gold & Evans, 1998; Pashiardis, 2000).

## **THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

### **Effective school leadership and management**

The concept of effectiveness relates to the ability of one to produce the expected results and it is closely linked to the school organizations, since it refers to the evaluation of the educational work provided and the achievement of the objectives pursued. A number of school effectiveness surveys focus on school improvement and the influence of leadership on school results (Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1998a) and on the quality of teaching through the motivation of teachers (Hargreaves, 1994; Day et al., 2003). According to Pashiardis (2001), factors influencing school efficiency are many, such as the development of interpersonal relations in the school unit, school teaching, educational leadership with an emphasis on the quality of the education provided and cooperation with teachers through communication with colleagues and the transmission of the vision of the school. All the aforementioned factors of the school leadership aim at consolidating conditions for school improvement (Pashiardis, 2000). Effective school leadership is primarily determined by the content of leadership behavior, ie the roles, actions and functions of the leader through specific activities aiming at staff development, team building, personal development, strategic development of the organization, and the implementation of the project. On a second level it is also determined by the character of the leadership and the choice of the appropriate leadership style (authoritarian, participatory, democratic). The leadership style is closely related to the partners' maturity, work and environment, leader's personality, namely sensitivity, integrity, rigor, beliefs and values (Bouradas, 2005).

Studying essays like this, researchers have led to several practical suggestions regarding leadership behavior, since they focus their attention on specific visible aspects each time, depending on the approach used. Bennis, Professor of Leadership at Harvard University of the United States of America, highlights the above reality, stressing that the phenomenon of leadership is the most visible everyday phenomenon on earth that has been barely understood, while according to Katsaros (2008) the overall vision for leadership arises only if its investigating aspects are complementary. In an attempt to codify leadership in the text National Specifications for School Managers (DFES, 2004), six axes of leadership are presented according to contemporary theoretical approaches: the empowering leader, the administrative leader, the transformational leader, the responsible leader, and finally the educational leader. Each axis of leadership emphasizes the key factors of the school function, which are determined by the structural features of educational and administrative function (Mintzberg, 1973, 1979, 1983). It also highlights key leadership capabilities that can be distinguished in two categories. The first one is role-playing skills for leadership behavior, defined by the components of leadership behavior for effective administration, such as the ability of the leader to know what he/she can do and how to do it (Bouradas, 2005). The second category of leadership competencies relates to the "meta-capacities" of the school leader which constitute a building block for the development of other competences: systemic thinking, creative decision-making, problem solving, communication ability and emotional intelligence (Bouradas, 2005).

Many theoreticians of science regard the development of the ability to cooperate and the perceptual ability as fundamental elements of leadership (Saitis, 2000). Robert Katz (1974) focuses on technical skills through knowledge and experience, human skills related to interpersonal relationships and co-operation, and mentalities, which are highlighted by the ability to solve problems. In the field of leadership skills, the study of Goleman and his collaborators Boyatzis & McKee (2002) on emotional intelligence and related skills was crucial. An effective leader should have personal skills (self-awareness, self-confidence, self-management, self-control, adaptability, transparency, initiative, achievement and optimism), social skills (empathy, organizational awareness, development of others, ability to cooperate) (Panagiotopoulos & Karanikola, 2017). It is therefore obvious that emotional intelligence is a fundamental ability since leading means directing to a better future by persuading people voluntarily and willingly to follow a leader. It is also a prerequisite for the development of other leadership abilities related to leadership (communication, team development, staff motivation, personal development, negotiation skills) (Bouradas, 2005: 263).

According to Andrews and Soder (1987), effective managers are those who are visible everywhere in school, and at the same time, according to the US Department of Education (1987), they can closely monitor pupils' progress, the time devoted to learning and suitability of learning requirements for pupils. On the contrary, the Cleveland (1986) survey on the characteristics of political and government leaders has recorded qualities that fit educational leaders and refer to personal attitudes towards managerial function (interest in people and what is happening in the school, taking risks in critical situations), but also personal skills (optimism, assuming responsibilities, crisis and conflict management). Therefore, the school leader should have a high level of emotional intelligence skills as well as technical and cognitive skills inherent in the purpose he/she serves (Katsaros, 2008). He/she should also have the ability to take leadership roles to achieve results both in the short and long term to the benefit of the school unit (Bouradas, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research objective – research question –research sample**

The aim of this paper is to investigate the perceptions of primary schools teachers in the prefecture of Ileia regarding the effective school administration and the capacities, attitudes and skills of primary school directors by correlating the influence of education level on the formation of their perceptions. Particularly, to what extent does the education level factor relate to the nine axes of school climate, leadership - school management, program development, personnel management, administration and financial management, student care, professional development and training, parent and community relationships, problem solving and decision making?

The sample of this survey was made up of 105 teachers of all the specialties and the survey was conducted from May 12, 2018 to May 31, 2018 at the schools of prefecture of ILeia. 126 questionnaires were distributed, while 105 were returned (response rate 83.3%). The answered questionnaires derived mainly from the Leheina region.

## Structure of the questionnaire

The research tool used is a questionnaire with 53 statements, designed by the Professor of Educational Leadership at the Open University of Cyprus, (Duke, 1982; Duttweiler & Hord 1987; Hoy & Miskel, 1996; Pashiardis, 1998; Pashiardis, 1999, 2001; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). The questionnaire is reliable because in repeated measurements on the same sample and at different times it shows consistently the same results, statistically estimated by the correlation coefficient  $r > 0.9$ . It is also valid because it has been repeatedly tested successfully in Cyprus (1999), Portugal (2005) and Greece (2007), in a population target (teachers) for which it has been constructed. The questionnaire consists of two sections.

### First Section

The first section includes five closed-ended questions referring to general information on the individual, demographic and professional characteristics of Primary Education Teachers of the Levena Region. It also includes an open-ended question, where teachers are asked to record whatever they think is important for the overall assessment of a principal.

### Second section

The second section includes 53 statements organized in nine areas, which are considered to correspond to the main functions of school leadership and management, as follows:

- School climate: This area includes eight closed-ended questions (1-8) relating to the capabilities and skills of a school principal in order to establish a good school climate for the organization. A decisive factor in creating the appropriate pedagogical climate with working axes, teamwork, trust and responsibility in decision making is the school head (Pashiardis, 1996).
- Leadership and school management: The area also includes eight closed-ended questions (9-16) that refer to leadership roles and skills of the principal in exercising his/her leadership and administrative duties. Surveys on quality management of schools focus on the manager's ability to create a vision in the school unit where he/she serves, as well as on the ability to clarify the expectations expressed by staff (Kimbrough & Burkett, 1990; Pashiardis, 2014).
- Program development: Program development area includes four closed-ended questions (17-20), which refer to the ways and means used by a manager to develop training actions in the school unit. According to Cleveland (1986), the effective leader has intellectual curiosity of all vitality and interest in what is happening around him/her and at the same time knows how to help teachers plan, apply appropriate strategies to help their students learn and respond to their learning needs (NAESP, 1986).
- Personnel management: The area includes two closed-ended questions (21-22) that refer to the leadership skills required to manage the staff. Southworth (2002) refers to three effective strategies of educational leadership: (a) providing incentives for continuing professional development; (b) monitoring teaching practice and (c) exchanging views on professional issues.
- Administration and Financial Management: The Administration and Financial Management area includes five closed-ended questions (23-27) which refer to the

administrative functions of a school principal regarding his administrative functions and financial management. According to Katsaros (2008), the director, as a manager of the organization, should have a day-to-day management capacity, as well as a capacity to delegate administrative tasks. It should also monitor the completion of the work, through the appropriate planning and organization.

- Treatment of students: In the "student treatment" area, nine closed-ended questions (28-36) refer to the leading actions for fair treatment and development of school pupils. For many researchers, the effectiveness of a school unit stems from the coexistence of the quality of education provided and equal opportunities for all (Lezotte 1989; Pashiardis & Pashiardi, 2000).
- Professional development and training: There are four closed-ended questions (37-40) in the professional development and training area, which refer to the administrative and educational functions for the personal development of a school principal. Bouradas (2005) reports that several theoretical models of leadership distinguish two main poles: human-oriented behavior and system-oriented behavior: strategy, plans, methods and processes.
- Relationships with parents and the community: In the eighth area of the questionnaire, six closed-ended questions (41-46) refer to the leadership functions of a leader to strengthen and develop relationships between the school community and external environment actors such as parents and the wider society. School, as an open social system, is in constant interdependence with the wider environment in which it operates (Katsaros, 2008).
- Approach to problem solving and decision making: The ninth and final area of the questionnaire includes six closed-ended questions (48-53) on how to solve problems in a school and the decision-making processes that determine the leadership style. Participatory decision-making has shown that worker participation in the decision-making process increases productivity (Coch & French, 1948, a.c. Pashiardis, 2014).

Regarding the way of answering, a Likert scale was used, with intervals from 1 to 4. The scale shows that the manager behaves in the manner described in each statement as follows: 1 = never, 2 = once, 3 = very often, 4 = always. Thus, participants were asked to capture their perception of the school head where they served by selecting a number from 1 to 4 on the scale. They also had the opportunity to record their personal opinion about their school principal, in an open-ended question. In order to avoid mistakes, weaknesses and problems when completing the questionnaire, the pilot research technique was conducted in a limited number of teachers (12) who were taken by the target population (Bird et al., 1999). In the final stage of the survey, the people who participated in the pilot research were excluded from the process.

### **Data Analysis**

The survey data was encoded and recorded, while their processing and analysis was done with the SPSS 23 for Windows statistical package. In order to check whether the level of study of the participants is related to the answers to the statements of the aforementioned nine axes, the titles were initially re-codified so that there are two categories of diplomas: a) "Basic degree" and b) "Postgraduate studies, PhD, other and then non-parametric control Mann - Whitney

correlation test was performed with a statistical significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$  (5%). Regarding the Axis 2 statements (leadership and school address), Mann-Whitney's performance demonstrates statistically significant differences in degrees with the following 2 queries - statements:

1) "He/she supports a culture where experiments and innovations are encouraged" (Question 13) (U (70.35) = 955.000,  $p = 0.039 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher level of education agree to a higher degree (mean rank=60.71) than those with a basic degree (mean rank=49.14). 2) "His/her power is manifested more through his/her knowledge and ability than through the power that his position gives him/her" (Question 14) (U (70.34) = 838.000,  $p = 0.005 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher level of education agree more with this statement (mean rank = 62.85) than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 47.47). Regarding the Axis 6 (pupil treatment) statements, Mann-Whitney's test demonstrates statistically significant differences in the level of studies with the following three questions - statements: 1) "He/she tries to apply such methods that help to develop" higher "forms of thought and creativity" (Question 32) (U (70.35) = 886.000,  $p = 0.009 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher degrees (mean rank = 62.69) agree more with this statement than those with a basic degree (mean rank= 48.16). 2) "He/she promotes such practices that help in the application and use of knowledge in a variety of issues" (Question 33) (U (70.35) = 905.000,  $p = 0.015 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher degrees agree more (mean rank = 62.14) than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 48.43). 3) "He/she promotes the interconnection of learning experiences within the school with practices applied outside" (Question 34) (U (70.35) = 955.500,  $p = 0.042 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher degrees (mean rank = 60.70) agree to a higher degree with this statement than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 49.15). Regarding the statements of Axis 7 (professional development and training), the Mann - Whitney test performs statistically significant differences in qualifications with all (4) queries - axle statements:

1) "He/she uses information from inspections and other staff evaluations to improve the teacher's offer" (Question 37) (U (69.35) = 883.000,  $p = 0.012 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher titles (mean rank = 61.77) agree more than those with a basic degree (mean rank=47.80). 2) "He/she tries to improve his / her leadership skills through various professional actions undertaken on his own initiative" (Question 38) (U (68.35) = 925.000,  $p = 0.037 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher degrees (mean rank = 59.57) agree to a higher degree than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 48.10). 3) "He/she uses information and knowledge gained through training seminars for self-improvement" (Question 39) (U (66.35) = 893.000,  $p = 0.034 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher degrees agree more (mean rank = 58.49) than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 47.03).

4) "He/she distributes informative material and presents new ideas to other colleagues to address the common problems of the profession" (Question 40) (U (70.35) = 915.500,  $p = 0.021 < 0.05$ ) where those with higher degrees agree to a greater extent (mean rank = 61.84) than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 48.58). Regarding the statements of Axis 8 (Relationships with Parents and the Community), the Mann-Whitney test performs statistically significant differences in degrees with the following statement: He/she demonstrates knowledge of the needs of the community and takes initiatives to satisfy them" (Question 44) (U (69.35) = 866.500,  $p = 0.009 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher degrees of education agree more = 62.24) than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 7.56) with this statement. Regarding the statements of Axis 9 (Approach to Problem Solving and Decision Making), Mann-Whitney's performance demonstrates statistically significant differences in qualifications with

the following statement: He/she presents discussion and search as commonly accepted practices at school" (Question 48) ( $U(70.35) = 864.500$ ,  $p = 0.005 < 0.05$ ), where those with higher degrees of education agree to a greater extent (mean rank = 63.30) than those with a basic degree (mean rank = 47.85).

The axes with the most significant findings are: a) professional development and training b) student care and c) school leadership and management, where it is noted that all the statements of the career development and training axis are related to the qualifications. Though, there are no statistically significant findings in four axes: a) school climate, b) program development, c) personnel management and d) administration and financial management.

## DISCUSSION ON THE RESULTS

The statistically significant findings related to the level of study are as follows: "He/she supports a culture where experiments and innovations are encouraged" (Question 13 - Axis 2: Leadership and School Address). "His/her power is manifested more through his/her knowledge and ability than through the power given to him/her by his/her position" (Question 14 - Axis 2: Leadership and School Address). "He/she tries to apply such methods that help to develop" higher "forms of thought and creativity" (Question 32 - Axis 6: Student Treatment). "He/she promotes such practices that help in the application and use of knowledge in a variety of applications" (Question 33 - Axis 6: Student Treatment). "He promotes the interconnection of learning experiences within the school with practices applied outside it" (Question 34 - Axis 6: Treatment of students). "He/she uses information derived from inspection, counseling and other staff assessments to improve the teacher's offer" (Question 37 - Axis 7: Professional Development and Training). "He/she seeks to improve his/her leadership skills through various professional actions undertaken on his/her own initiative" (Question 38 - Axis 7: Professional Development and Training). "He/she uses information and knowledge gained through training seminars for self-improvement" (Question 39 - Axis 7: Professional Development and Training). "He/she distributes informative material and presents new ideas to other colleagues to address the common problems of the profession" (Question 40 - Axis 7: Professional Development and Training). "He/she demonstrates the needs of the community and takes initiatives to satisfy them" (Question 44 - Axis 8: Relations with parents and the community). "He/she presents discussion and search as commonly accepted practices at school" (Question 48 - Axis 9: Approach to problem solving and decision making).

In all cases, teachers with senior degrees (Postgraduate / Doctoral / Other) appear to have statistically significantly more positive statements than those with only the basic degree. The recording of the results for the qualification factor in relation to effective school administration has revealed significant findings in five axes, with most of them being recorded on the "professional development and training" axis where all statements are significantly positive. The study of the results demonstrates that teachers with more than one degree focus on Axis 2 "Leadership and School Address in Features Specific to a Transformational Leader" who has a vision for the school unit but also the ability to promote experimentation and innovations. At the same time, the school leader can use his/her influence on teachers not because of his/her responsible position but because of his/her knowledge.

With regard to axis 6 "Treatment of pupils", the results showed statistically significant positive statements (32, 33, 34), demonstrating skills of educational leader, empowerment leader, but

also an administrative leader, who through his/her action directs the teachers to achieve high learning outcomes, sets high goals while at the same time being well aware of the environment in which he/she works, develops relationships with the local community and promotes cooperation with external actors. On the other hand, he/she can promote practices that focus on the future, since as a leader he/she empowers the use of new knowledge and techniques. Regarding axis 7 "Professional development and training", all statements are significantly positive for the factor of highest degree. Teachers consider that it is very important for the school leader to act as an administrative leader who takes care of improving the school's teachers by disseminating information and material, as well as new ideas that help to address the problems of the school unit. He/she can also act as an educational leader, focusing on personal improvement, cultivating his/her leadership skills through knowledge and lasting personal progress.

On axis 8 "Relations with parents and the community", Declaration 44 collected the majority of the most important findings, demonstrating teacher perceptions of the leadership capabilities of an efficient leader, developing strategies, alliances, and relationships with external networks such as local government, aiming at the realization of the school mission and the creative use of external networks (Pasiardis, 2012). Finally, Axis 9 "Approach to Problem Solving and Decision Making", statement 48, which gathered the majority of the most important findings, demonstrates teachers' perception of how the participatory leader operates in the school unit. Teachers recognize the leader's ability to play a positive role, implement participatory leadership style, organize the administrative activities of the organization with the participation of teachers, focusing on the dialogue and the dynamics of the teams.

At a second reading level, teachers with more than one degree have recorded as important positive statements in five specific axes (2, 6, 7, 8, 9), which refer to personal and social skills, which should be the leader in the exercise of his/her leading role. They highlight key features of the leader's personality, which determine to a great extent the character of leadership behavior (Bouradas, 2005). Focusing on the personal and social skills that a leader needs to have (Goleman, Boyatzis, McCee, 2002), according to the registered positive statements of the teachers, on a personal level, a leader should be confident (statement 14, axis 2), initiative (statement 44, axis 8), self-assessment capacity (statements 38, 39, axis 7). At the level of social skills a leader should have the development capabilities for others (statements 34, axis 6 and 37, axis 7), to act for change (statements 32, 33, axis 6), inspirational capacities for others (statement 13, axis 2) and the ability to manage relationships (statement 48, axis 9). The above important findings are also justified by the fact that there are no significant positive statements on the axes "school climate", "program development", "personnel management", "administration and financial management", because international research has demonstrated that key factors for the creation of a positive school climate is communication, collaboration, organization, administration and pupils (Pashiardi, 2001). On the other hand, if a principal, acts as an administrative leader, he/she has clearly delineated rules, regulations and roles, specific procedures and routines in order to ensure order and discipline. These factors are associated with improving learning outcomes (Pashiardis, 2014). Within such a school environment, the administrative leader can create a vision and inspire teachers to consolidate school culture through the perspectives created in the organization (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998), in order to encourage independence, professionalism and autonomy, factors that strengthen the stability of the system, provide the desired levels of behavior factors and favor program development and school improvement (Pashiardis, 2014). In Greece, there are no other independent research papers investigating the association of specific factors such as the level of studies with effective administration.



In the international literature, surveys also deal with research data of school leaders' leadership capabilities and factors that determine leadership behavior. The findings of the above sections are consistent with the findings of the ISSPP research program, which showed that successful leaders follow the following practice models in combination with specific leadership features: a democratic and human leadership approach, a vision and a system of values, a school climate and a culture of collaboration with internal actors, cooperation networks and communication with external factors (Pashiardis, 2012; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2001; Kythreotis & Pashiardis, 2006; Day et al., 2003). In similar surveys it has been shown that constructive relationships are related to successful leadership in the school unit, while the high goals set by school leaders with the effective enrichment of teachers and pupils make them reference standards and lead to high levels of schools (Gold et al., 2003; Day et al., 2003).

## CONCLUSIONS

The new data on educational leadership, as documented in international organizations (UNESCO, OECD), demonstrates the great importance for each school unit of having a professional school leader who is properly trained to take on his/her demanding and high-level tasks. In many countries of the world, programs for the education of school managers have already taken place, while a specialization certificate is required (US, UK, Canada). According to Bouradas (2005), there should be integrated development programs that will focus on the strategic data of the organization and the environment where it exists. They should also focus on developing the leadership characteristics and competencies of managers through training programs, assignments, counseling and guidance, and specific learning experiences with the appropriate organization of the organizational framework for leadership.

## Future research

In a potential future research, the principals' needs for personal and professional improvement in Greek schools could be explored as well as the importance of creating specialized structures for the training and education of school leaders staff so that they can respond to their demanding and complex role. A research work focused on the structures of the Greek school, such as school books, curricula, and the structure of teaching subjects would also be necessary. For years, the above factors have not been studied in depth and they have not been adapted to contemporary pedagogical and technological data. They have only been fragmented. The study of the organizational structure of the Greek educational system could positively contribute to the improvement of the administrative function since studying and developing leadership practices could decisively contribute to effective school administration (Leithwood et al., 2006, a.c. Pashiardis, 2014).

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