

Perceptions of Educational Leaders in Relation to the Development and Implementation of Educational Policies within the Educational Organization and the Evaluation of Their Effectiveness

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Abstract: This research study aims to explore the views of educational leaders in relation to the educational policies developed in the educational community and their effectiveness. The sample of this study constitutes of 105 educational leaders of primary, secondary and post-secondary education from all geographical areas of Greece. From the statistical analyzes of the findings it emerged that educational leaders encourage the development and implementation of educational policies within the educational organization and more specifically they focus on the school policy for creating the school learning environment and to a lesser extent on school policy for teaching, which they evaluate as particularly effective for improving the development of the educational community.

Keywords: Educational leaders, educational leadership, educational policy, school policy, evaluation, effectiveness

Introduction

It is evident that despite the remarkable efforts aiming at decentralization, -the first law on decentralization of the education system was passed in 1980- the Greek education system remains largely centralized and bureaucratic. Although, following institutional decrees, responsibilities have been transferred from the central authority of the Ministry of Education and Religion to the regions -giving them the possibility and legitimacy to hold the necessary authority of their region - the dominant role in the administrative organization of education, in decision-making, in the coordination, planning of educational policy, promotion of educational innovations and the granting of funding, is played by the central authority and the representatives of the Ministry, with the districts and local directorates being mere executive bodies (Saitis, 2008).

Thus, educational leaders, among the administrative and leadership tasks that guarantee the smooth functioning of the educational environment, are also considered responsible for the implementation of state educational policies within the educational community, as well as for the formulation of policies according to the specific needs of the educational community. In particular, the successful implementation and practice of educational policies in the educational environment requires leadership practices and leadership skills that assist educational managers in the strategic planning and programming of educational policies, in guiding and motivating subordinates and students to achieve continuous learning, growth, development, realization of common predetermined goals and ultimately change (Gu et al., 2018; Leithwood, 2005).

The educational leaders, as elements of authority and influence, are the most competent to design and implement a range of educational policies that can contribute to the successful realization of the predefined objectives of the educational community and can ensure access to equitable learning opportunities that promote equality and social justice (Mavrogordato et al., 2020). Important educational policies designed and implemented within the organization relate to the curriculum and teaching, in order to ensure full correspondence with the learning objectives and capabilities of the members and the prevailing specificities of the educational community. A typical example is the introduction of a new curriculum, the writing and publishing of new school textbooks to promote the society of knowledge and the reframing of pedagogical discourse at the micro-level of the school community, taking into account the pedagogical practice of each teacher, the developing relationships between teachers, students and the wider society during pedagogical interaction (Bakalampassi et al., 2011; Koustourakis, 2007; Caldwell 1992).

Moreover, the management of material, financial and human resources, the exercise of educational policies, the financial budget, planning, the organization of priorities, the allocation of resources and the time required, the finding of grants and funds, the purchase of material and supervisory means, the introduction of technology to facilitate the effectiveness of educational work, as well as educational policies related to the achievement of professional and personal satisfaction and development of teachers through the organization of training, education and counseling programmes are among the areas in which educational leaders can implement educational policies (Shaked et al., 2019; Gu et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2017; Noah et al., 1979).

In addition, educational policies that can be formulated and implemented relate to social issues of inclusion and breaking down phenomena of exclusion and reproduction of inequalities, incidents of social exclusion due to special educational needs, social and economic differentiations, racial discrimination and even due to the inability of new students and teachers to adapt to the educational environment (Ball et al., 2011; Nilsen, 2010; Smyth, 2010).

Materials and Methods

Design

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of educational leaders in relation to the educational policies developed within their educational organization and to record the views of educational leaders in relation to the evaluation of the effectiveness of the educational policies of their educational organization. This research was therefore be conducted using the quantitative methodological approach to quantitatively measure the data, examine statistically significant correlations of the variables and through descriptive and inferential analysis, to determine whether the results can be generalized to the wider society (Yilmaz, 2013; Gelo et al., 2008; Bryman, 1984).

Instrument

In order to investigate the implementation and practice of educational policies within educational units, the Dynamic Model of Educational Effectiveness (DMEE) by Creemers and Kyriakides (2008) was used. The Dynamic Model of Educational Effectiveness is therefore considered to be multilevel and focused on four different levels: the student, the classroom, the school and the educational system. Therefore, this research study focuses on the factors of effectiveness at the school level and in particular school policy on teaching and school policy on creating the school learning environment that are developed within the educational organization and impact on learning outcomes and the collective improvement and effectiveness of the wider environment (Kyriakides et al., 2012; Kyriakidis et al., 2012; Sammons, 2009; Creemers et al., 2010, 2006).

Participants

The sample of this research study consists of 105 educational leaders from primary, secondary and post-secondary education in all geographical areas of Greece. Specifically, the majority of the sample was male (73.3%), held undergraduate degrees (49.5%), worked in secondary education (70.5%), 43.8% of the participating sample of educational leaders had 10+ years of experience in an administrative position and 42.9% of the educational leaders belonged to the age group of 55+ years.

Data Collection

The research tool used to conduct this research project is the questionnaire. More specifically, with the help of the Google forms application, the selected questionnaire was formatted along with a preface explaining the reasons for conducting the research and giving instructions to the research participants for its correct completion, and distributed via email to all educational organizations of primary, secondary and post-secondary education in the Greek educational system, in order to ensure a sufficient sample capable of approaching the research questions.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis of the data of this research work was carried out using Jamovi 2.3.16 version and PSCP 1.6.2 version software with the data being transferred and coded to ensure proper statistical interpretation.

Results

Since the questionnaire was distributed and a sufficient sample of educational leaders responded, the internal consistency index Cronbach's reliability coefficient alpha of the scale and its subscales were tested. The statistical analysis showed that, the questionnaire had an internal reliability index of $\alpha=0.962$, a fact which ensures that the research tool is highly valid and reliable. The following tables show the reliability coefficient of the scale and its subscales.

Table 1. Reliability coefficient of the DMEE research tool (Cronbach's alpha)

Scale DMEE	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbach's α
	2.90	0.319	0.962

Table 2. School Policy reliability coefficient on teaching (Cronbach's alpha)

School policy on teaching	Cronbach's α
	0.932

Table 3. Credibility coefficient School's policy on creating the SLE (Cronbach's alpha)

School policy on creating the SLE	Cronbach's α
	0.914

Table 4. Reliability coefficient of evaluation of the school policy on teaching (Cronbach's alpha)

Evaluation of the school policy on teaching	Cronbach's α
	0.903

Table 5. Reliability coefficient Evaluation of the SLE (Cronbach's alpha)

Evauation of the SLE	Cronbach's α
	0.759

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of the DMEE survey tool

Scale DMEE	Mean	Standard deviation
School policy on teaching	2.67	0.389
School policy on creating the SLE	3.04	0.312

Table 6 showed that educational leaders largely agree that a school policy is developed within their educational organizations to create the school learning environment ($M=3.04$, $SD=0.312$). On the contrary, their statements demonstrate that there are apparent deficiencies in the implementation and practice of school policy on teaching within their educational institutions ($M=2.67$, $SD=0.389$).

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations of School Policies for Teaching and its dimensions

A.School policy on teaching	Mean	Standard deviation
Quantity of teaching	2.43	0.496
Provision of learning opportunities	2.95	0.338
Quality of teaching	2.64	0.466

Table 7 showed that the educational organizations in the participating sample provide satisfactory teaching learning opportunities ($M=2.95$, $SD=0.338$), but few school policies are developed to ensure quality teaching ($M=2.64$, $SD=0.466$) and utilization of teaching time ($M.O=2.43$, $T.A=0.496$).

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations of the School's Policy on the creation of the SLE and its dimensions

B. School policy on creating the SLE	Mean	Standard deviation
Student behavior outside the classroom	3.05	0.353
Collaboration and interaction between teachers for professional development reasons	3.26	0.399
Partnership policy	2.92	0.327
Provision of sufficient learning resources	3.23	0.405

Table 8 showed that the educational organization develop school policy that promotes cooperation between teachers (M.O=3.26, T.A=0.399), a policy that uses the available learning resources of the educational organization (M.O=3.23, T.A=0.405), and policy on students' behavior outside the classroom (M.O=3.05, T.A=0.353). However, Table 8 shows that there is no policy developed that promotes the cooperation of the educational organization with the parents and/or guardians of the pupils, but also with the wider school and local community (M.O=2.92, T.A=0.327).

Table 9. Means and Standard Deviations of the School Policy Evaluation

Evaluation of the school policy	Mean	Standard deviation
	3.19	0.369

Table 9 showed that the educational leaders evaluate the school policy of their educational organizations as highly effective (M=3.19, SD=0.369).

Table 10. Means and Standard Deviations of School Policy Evaluation for Teaching

Evaluation of the school policy on teaching	Mean	Standard deviation
	3.07	0.352

Table 10 showed that educational leaders positively evaluate the effectiveness of implementing school policy on teaching in the educational environment (M.O=3.07, T.A=0.352).

Table 11. Means and Standard Deviations of the School's Policy Evaluation for policy for creating a supportive learning environment

Evaluation of the School policy on creating the SLE	Mean	Standard deviation
	3.31	0.426

Table 11 showed that school policies in the context of educational units that focus on the school's policy to create the school learning environment are evaluated as very effective for the learning process (M.O=3.31, T.A=0.426).

Discussion

An important finding that emerges from the conduct of the present research is that within educational organizations educational policies are developed and implemented. In particular, the educational leaders report that in the educational organization are developed school policies to create the school learning environment, such as a policy on cooperation between teachers, a school policy on the use of all the learning resources of the educational organization, a policy on the behavior of pupils outside the classroom. On the contrary, educational leaders agree that policies that foster collaboration between educational organizations and parents and guardians and the wider educational community are not developed and implemented in educational organizations. As can be seen, therefore, the findings of the study are consistent with the research of Ronfeldt et al. (2015), in which the promotion of teacher collaboration policies enhances the improvement of student and teacher performance to provide higher quality learning, while according to the research of García-Martínez et al. (2021), the development of collaborative environments among teachers is a lever for the collective improvement of the educational organization. Furthermore, the findings of the study are confirmed by Öztürk's (2020) research, which studied English students' participation in extracurricular activities outside the classroom, and from which it is evident that involvement in extracurricular activities maximizes students'

academic performance, autonomy, self-regulation and independence. According to the same perspective, Kuh's (1993) research highlights that participation in extracurricular activities contributes to students' learning and all-round personal development. In addition, the school's implementation of a policy to use the learning resources of the educational organization is consistent with the findings of the Kabugo (2020), on the implementation of Open Educational Resources in the educational organization and the findings of Puspitarini et al. (2019) on the use of technology, internet, video projectors to make the learning process interesting and diverse. Regarding the lack of policy implementation on parent-educational community collaboration, according to the research findings of Hornby et al. (2011) and Koutrouba et al. (2009), although parental involvement brings about positive effects on student development, behavior and academic achievement and although Greek teachers view parental involvement positively, parents are reluctant to collaborate with the educational organization, either because the organization does not involve them in the decision-making process and information meetings, or due to ineffective communication with the educational organization, socio-economic and racial inequalities, personal beliefs, special needs of their children and behavioral problems.

However, while school policy on creating the school learning environment is encouraged, school policy on teaching, such as policy on the use of teaching time and policy on the quality of teaching, are not equally developed in the context of educational with the exception of school policy on the provision of learning opportunities. Therefore, the above research findings are in line with the findings of Sainz et al. (2019), which suggest that students have difficulty in long-term planning while setting short-term goals, indicating that they have difficulty in managing and organizing time. In addition, Ekundayo et al. (2013), which examined time management skills and managerial effectiveness of secondary school principals, revealed that although these were encouraging, there were barriers such as responding to emergencies and difficulties in allocating time properly. In addition, according to Grissom et al. (2015), principals who have good stress management practices spend time teaching and do not invest in internal school relationships and have low workplace stress.

At the same time, the present study concludes that education managers evaluate as highly effective the policy of school's policy on creating the school learning environment and the school's policy on teaching in order to produce a more effective and higher quality learning and educational process. Thus, these findings are in line with the findings of Hult et al. (2016), in which educational leaders state that evaluation improves teaching, learning performance and school life, and of Tuytens et al. (2010), according to which teachers are in favor of developing an evaluation policy in which educational leadership has a catalytic influence.

Conclusion

The above findings show that educational policies are developed in educational organizations. The findings of this study show that educational leaders agree that they encourage the development of school policies to create the school learning environment by implementing school policies that foster collaboration among teachers, policies that assist in utilizing all available learning resources in the educational setting, and policies on student behavior outside the school setting, while the school does not contribute to the development and implementation of a school policy that does not foster the involvement of pupils and the wider educational community in general, which may possibly result either from a lack of adequate communication skills or from the inability to find the necessary time and appropriate resources, which does not promote openness, interaction and interconnection with society.

Additionally, from the relevant findings it is evident that the development and implementation of school policies to create the school learning environment is not correlated with the demographic characteristics of educational leaders, which highlights that educational leaders are fully aware of their educational work, focus on promoting learning through the creation of a positive school climate and the cultivation of an appropriate school culture in order to have the support and synergy of all members.

Furthermore, the research findings suggest that educational leaders develop policies that provide instructional learning opportunities beyond the formal curriculum, which may suggest that educational leaders understand the value of experiential learning and ensure that the educational organization is involved in extracurricular activities beyond the classroom, but they do not encourage the development and implementation of school-based teaching policies in the educational organization, which may be due to the lack of pedagogical training of education leaders and their minimal teaching involvement outside of administrative duties.

Moreover, educational leaders rate as very effective the implementation and development in the educational organization of the school's policy on creating the school learning environment and the school's policy on teaching, which may emphasize that educational leaders understand the importance of effective

teaching and care about the teaching needs of all stakeholders members. Finally, the evaluation of the effectiveness of the school's policy on creating the school learning environment and the evaluation of the school's policy on teaching are associated with the degree, the educational employment organization and the leadership style adopted by each educational leader, while no significant correlations are observed with the administrative experience and age group of the educational leaders. Therefore, educational leaders who hold advanced degrees, work in secondary and post-secondary education, and adopt the transformational leadership style possibly indicates that they have sufficient knowledge and skills to evaluate the educational policies developed in the school unit, that they understand the needs of the educational organization they manage, and that they accept any evaluation, and that they may perceive that the effectiveness of the school's teaching policy is very important in strengthening the teaching practice.

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