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FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: OPINIONS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN GREECE

The importance of the present research arises from the value that has been given – at the national, European, and international level – to the work of the teacher and the necessity of his or her professional development but also in the research gap that exists in this field. The aim of the research was to clarify the views

of school principals on factors influencing their professional development. A questionnaire was administered through the Google form. The data were analyzed using the SPSS v.25. To reply to the research questions, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis and the Pearson coefficient were used to assess the statistical significance of the data. The sample consisted of 100 primary school principals in Greece. The results of the study showed differences in attitudes towards professional development between heads of primary education institutions with different specializations. Participants with a specialization in math and computer sciences more often supported the idea that their professional development depends on their basic studies. Those who specialized in humanities, agreed on a higher level that their professional development depends on their first two years of education experience, participation in introductory training programs, participation in training programs organized by the state and on the school culture, and their transition to another school or position. The participants who followed a science field were more positive about their professional development depending on their participation in European mobility programs, the professional support they get from their colleagues, and the way the school leadership is practiced. There were differences in the understanding of the role of the educational institution in supporting the professional development of teachers depending on the professional experience of the participants: its importance was recognized by teachers who had less than five or more than thirty years of professional experience. It was found that the more positive was the attitude of the participants toward their own professional development, the wider range of needs for further training they expressed. Most often, such needs related to improving professional competence in such areas as classroom management, solving problems with complex student behavior and school discipline, counseling, and assessment of students.

***Keywords**: professional development, skills, qualifications, school principal.*

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ЧИННИКИ ВПЛИВУ НА ПРОФЕСІЙНИЙ РОЗВИТОК: ПОГЛЯДИ ДИРЕКТОРІВ ШКІЛ ГРЕЦІЇ

Прискорення темпів наукового, соціально-економічного, технологічного розвитку сучасних суспільств підвищує вимоги до рівня професіоналізму учителів та актуалізує питання їхнього професійного розвитку. Пошуку ефективних шляхів і способів підвищення професійної компетентності педагогів приділяється важливе значення як на національному, так і на європейському та міжнародному рівнях. Розуміння чинників, які впливають на розвиток професійної компетентності педагогів і, зокрема, керівників навчальних закладів, є важливим для розробки та впровадження відповідних програм. Мета дослідження полягала у визначенні чинників, які впливають на професійний розвиток директорів початкових загальноосвітніх шкіл у Греції. Його учасниками стали 100 керівників навчальних закладів з різних регіонів країни, більшість з яких становили особи жіночої статі з дипломом магістра та стажем роботи у сфері освіти від 6 до 11 років. Проведене опитування було спрямоване на визначення залежності між спеціалізацією учасників дослідження на їхнім ставленням до необхідності професійного розвитку, досвідом професійної діяльності та баченням ролі школи у підтримці професійного розвитку учителів, а також ставленням до професійного розвитку та потребами у подальшому навчанні. Обробка кількісних даних здійснювалася з допомогою методів описової та інференційної статистики. Для оцінки статистичної значущості отриманих даних було використано непараметричний тест Краскела-Уолліса та коефіцієнт Пірсона. Статистичні розрахунки здійснювались з використанням пакету програм SPSS v.25. Результати проведеного дослідження засвідчили відмінності у ставленні до професійного розвитку між керівниками закладів початкової освіти з різними спеціалізаціями. Учасники зі спеціалізацією у математичних і комп'ютерних науках частіше підтримували думку про те, що їхній професійний розвиток залежить від якості базової освіти. Учасники, які викладали гуманітарні предмети, вважали, що він передовсім залежить від перших двох років навчання, участі у ознайомчих програмах для вчителів-початківців та навчальних програмах, організованих державою з питань шкільної культури, а також такого чинника, як перехід в іншу школу або на іншу посаду. Учасники, чиєю спеціалізацією були природничі науки, зазначали, що їхній професійний розвиток залежить від участі в європейських програмах мобільності, підтримки колег та керівників. Виявлено відмінності у розумінні ролі навчального закладу щодо підтримки професійного розвитку учителів залежно від стажу професійної діяльності учасників: її важливість визнавали педагоги, які мали менше ніж п'ять або більше тридцяти років досвіду професійної діяльності за фахом. З'ясовано, що чим більш позитивне ставлення демонстрували учасники до власного професійного розвитку, тим ширший спектр потреб у подальшому навчанні вони

висловлювали. Найчастіше такі потреби стосувалися підвищення професійної компетентності у таких сферах як управління класом, вирішення проблем зі складною поведінкою учнів та шкільною дисципліною, консультування та оцінювання учнів.

Ключові слова: *професійний розвиток, навички, кваліфікація, директори шкіл.*

Due to the changes in the economic and social development, the teacher must be adjusted to being a source of information and experiences and facing the new requirements concerning the interconnection of pedagogy with learning. It is therefore important to have the necessary cognitive equipment, to update the knowledge in teaching subjects, new teaching techniques, and educational research. Extended professional knowledge, skills in problem handling and decision making, as well as critical thinking are now required. Teacher professional development, as a multifaceted issue, seems to be directly related to training.

The skills and qualifications of teachers are found in a framework for lifelong learning with the ultimate goal of improving the education provided. Teacher training is promoted as a means of improving teaching and therefore as a means of improving students' learning. It is part of the professional development and lifelong learning of teachers Therefore, the quality of training is associated with improving the quality of education but also with the professional development of teachers and its lifelong dimension.

The importance and necessity of this study are due to the importance given at the national, European, and international levels to the work of teachers and the need for their professional development. Specifically, the scientific and research approach of linking these two concepts (professional development and training) has been attempted in the past, targeting a population mainly of secondary school teachers and primary school teachers or teachers in general without mentioning their specialty. The various conclusions that emerged mainly concerned the subject of training, the forms, the ways of training, the reasons that push them to get training, the difficulties they encounter, and the benefits they obtain.

The results of some studies indicate the important role of school principals in such issues as teacher satisfaction with work [3]; their commitment to teachers 'organizations [5]; and successful school conflict resolution [2]. However little empirical research has been done to investigate the perceptions of primary school principals 'about their professional development. At the same time, this issue is important because the attitude of school leaders toward professional development and their understanding of the factors that influence it effect their support of teacher development and educational change in general.

The aim of the research was to clarify the principals' opinions about the opportunities, the peculiarities, and the training needs for their professional development. According to the above aims, the following research questions are investigated: (1) if the participants' specialty affects their opinions about the factors on which their professional development depends; (2) whether the participants' years of service affect their opinions about the schools' support of their professional development; (3) the extent in which the participants' professional development is one of their professional goals affects their opinions on their training needs.

To achieve the goals of the research, a questionnaire consisting of 2 chapters was administered. The first part consisted of a total of 4 close-ended questions, which analyzed the participants' demographic characteristics. The second part contained a total of 53 Likert-type questions, with answers ranging from 1 to 5 (1-not at all, 2-a little, 3-moderately, 4-much, 5-a lot). It analyzed the participants' opinions about the factors on which their professional and career development depends and the professional development activities in which they participated, but also the extent to which they influenced their development. Furthermore, it focused on the participants' training needs and the influence that principals and schools have on the teachers' professional development.

The sample consisted of 100 primary school principals, who worked in schools in Greece. Most of the respondents were females. Also, the majority of the participants had a postgraduate diploma and teaching experience from 6 to 11 years in the educational field.

To collect the needed data, a Google form that contained all the variables of the questionnaire was distributed online to the participants. The file was sent to their e-mails, accompanied by an introduction note, through which they were informed about the aims and goals of the research. Also, it

was made clear that their participation was anonymous and voluntary and they could stop the competition of the questionnaire whenever they felt like it. Lastly, the participants were encouraged to reply truthfully and honestly and to reach out to the researcher via his e-mail, in case they had any questions or problems during the competition of the survey.

From the Google form, a Microsoft Excel sheet was created, in which the data was coded. The data were analyzed in the SPSS v.25. Through it, frequencies and percentages were calculated to present all the variables of the questionnaire. Also, to reply to the research questions, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test [2] and the Pearson coefficient [1] were used.

Descriptive statistics were applied to describe the participants' demographic characteristics. 64 % of them were females, while males occupied the rest 36 %. As for the principals' specialty, those who had a direction in science fields reached 41 %, 25 % belonged to those who followed the physical and aesthetic education, and 20 % and 14 % were those in math and computer science or in humanities respectively. Additionally, 55.2 % of them had a postgraduate diploma, 32.8 % – had a doctoral degree, and 11.9 % occupied the participants with a second degree. Lastly, as for the principals' years of service, those who had experience from 6 to 11 years occupied 30 %, 28 % belonged to the participants who had 18 to 23 years of experience, and 18 % – had up to 5 years of experience. Also, 10 % occupied the participants with an experience from 12 to 17 years, 9 % had 24 and 29 years of experience and 5 % had 30 years of experience and more.

Table 1

Participants' demographics

		Count	Column N %
Gender	Male	36	36.0 %
	Female	64	64.0 %
Teaching specialty areas	Humanities	14	14.0 %
	Science fields	41	41.0 %
	Math and computer science	20	20.0 %
	Physical and aesthetic education	25	25.0 %
Additional studies	Postgraduate diploma	37	55.2 %
	Doctoral degree	22	32.8 %
	Second degree	8	11.9 %
Years of service	0-5	18	18.0 %
	6-11	30	30.0 %
	12-17	10	10.0 %
	18-23	28	28.0 %
	24-29	9	9.0 %
	30 and above	5	5.0 %

Further, we will analyze the participants' opinions about the factors on which their professional development depends on. As shown, the participants agree more about the professional support and motivation that they received from their school colleagues (3.940).

Table 2

Factors on which the professional development of participants depends

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your basic studies, which has been a recruitment qualification	3.170	0.766
Your experiences in education during the first two years of your professional life	3.540	0.926
Your participation in introductory training programs	3.340	0.819
Your participation in European mobility programs	2.680	0.764
Your transition to another school or another position of responsibility	3.520	0.689
Your participation in continuing and organized training programs by the state throughout the professional career	3.700	0.847
The professional support and motivation you received from colleagues	3.940	0.839
The way the school leadership is practiced	3.240	0.889
The school culture and the ability to develop your own initiatives in the school unit	3.720	0.900

The descriptive statistics were used to characterize the participants' opinions about the extent to which the schools affect the teachers' professional development were investigated and presented (Table 3). 47 % of the participants moderately agreed that the school in which they work offered them opportunities to practice and apply the skills they had required through their involvement in professional development activities. 24 % of the participants agreed a little, 23 % – much, and 6 % – a lot.

Table 3

Opportunities to practice and apply the skills acquired through the involvement in professional development activities provided in schools

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A little	24	24.0	24.0
	Moderately	47	47.0	71.0
	Much	23	23.0	94.0
	A lot	6	6.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	

Table 4 shows whether the school supports the implementation of education innovations according to the respondents' views. 60 % of them believed that the school moderately supports them, 28 % – that it much supports them, while those who replied "a little" and "a lot" occupied 6 % respectively.

Table 4

School support in the implementation of educational innovations

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A little	6	6.0	6.0
	Moderately	60	60.0	66.0
	Much	28	28.0	94.0
	A lot	6	6.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	

In Table 5, the extent to which the participants believed that their school encourages the creation of cooperative groups among teachers to improve school goals is presented. 46 % of the participants moderately agreed with the above statement, 37 % much agreed and 14 % agreed a lot. The rest 3 % believed that their school encourages them that way just a little.

Table 5

School encouragement in the creation of cooperative groups among teachers to improve school goals

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A little	3	3.0	3.0
	Moderately	46	46.0	49.0
	Much	37	37.0	86.0
	A lot	14	14.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	

Table 6 demonstrates that 51 % of the participants moderately agreed that their school gives them feedback from their colleagues about their teaching and pedagogical practices, while 27 % much agreed. Participants who agreed a little occupied 15 % and 7 % belonged to those who agreed a lot.

Table 6

Feedback from the colleagues about participants' teaching and pedagogical practices

d		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A little	15	15.0	15.0
	Moderately	51	51.0	66.0
	Much	27	27.0	93.0
	A lot	7	7.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	

In Table 7 information on whether the participants' school gives importance to the role of the teachers' association in the design of the educational policy, is presented. 41 % of the teachers agreed that their school does so, 37 % think that it does so on a moderate level, and 22 % of the schools give moderate importance to the teachers' association.

Table 7

The importance the school gives to the role of the teachers' association in the design of the school's educational policy

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Moderately	37	37.0	37.0
	Much	41	41.0	78.0
	A lot	22	22.0	100.0
	Total	100	100.0	

In Table 8, it is revealed that 44 % of the participants agreed that their school supports initiatives and participation in decision-making, while 31 % moderately agreed so. As for the participants who believed that their school does so a lot, reached 19 %, and those who suggested the school does so a little occupy 6 %.

Table 8

School support of initiatives and participation in decision-making

		Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	A little	6	6.0	6.0
	Moderately	31	31.0	37.0
	Much	44	44.0	81.0

A lot	19	19.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

Inductive statistics were applied to assess the statistical significance of the data. In order to analyze the first and second research questions, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test was used. As for the third research question, the Pearson coefficient was chosen.

In Table 9, the p-values of the Kruskal-Wallis for the 1st research question are presented, from which 9 statistically significant dependencies are revealed.

Table 9

Dependencies as for the teaching specialty areas

	Specialty
Your basic studies, which has been a recruitment qualification	0.000
Your experiences in education during the first two years of your professional life	0.001
Your participation in introductory training programs	0.000
Your participation in European mobility programs	0.000
Your transition to another school or another position of responsibility	0.000
Your participation in continuing and organized training programs by the state throughout the professional career	0.003
The professional support and motivation you received from colleagues	0.002
The way the school leadership is practiced	0.000
The school culture and the ability to develop your own initiatives in the school unit	0.005

More specifically, it was revealed that participants specializing in math and computer sciences more often support the idea that their professional development depends on their basic studies. Also, the participants who specialized in humanities agreed on a higher level that their professional development depends on their first two years of education experience, their participation in introductory training programs, their transition to another school or position, their participation in training programs organized by the state and on the school culture, and ability to develop their initiatives in the school unit. The participants who followed a science field were more positive about their professional development depending on their participation in European mobility programs, the professional support they get from their colleagues, and the way the school leadership is practiced.

The 2nd research question asked if the participants' years of service affect their opinions about the schools' support of their professional development. The findings indicate that the participants with 6 to 11 years of experience agreed more that their school offers opportunities to practice and apply the skills they have acquired through their involvement in professional development activities. The participants with up to 5 years of experience were more positive about their school supporting the implementation of educational innovations, encouraging the creation of cooperative groups, and giving feedback from their colleagues. Also, participants with 30 years of experience and more agreed on a higher level that the school gives importance to the role of teachers' association, while the participants with 24 to 29 years of experience were more positive that their school supports initiatives and participation in decision-making (Table 10).

Table 10

Dependencies as for the years of service

	Years of service
Offers you opportunities to practice and apply the skills you have acquired through your involvement in professional development activities	0.000
Supports the implementation of educational innovations	0.002
Encourages the creation of cooperative groups among teachers to improve school goals	0.000
Gives you feedback from your colleagues about your teaching and pedagogical practices	0.000
Gives importance to the role of the teachers' association in the design of the school's educational policy	0.001
Supports initiatives and participation in decision-making	0.004

In Table 11, the results of the Pearson coefficient for the 3rd research question are presented, from which 9 statistically significant correlations were revealed. More specifically, the more the participants agreed that their professional development is one of their professional goals, the more they support their need to train in class management, problems with students' behavior and discipline, and student counseling and evaluation. However, the less they agreed that they need training in teaching differentiation, deepening the understanding and teaching of cognitive fields, and computer applications in teaching and teaching students with disabilities or multicultural classes. The above correlations range from 0.325 up to 0.623, while they are statistically significant in a 99 % trust level.

Table 11

Participants' professional development influence on their training needs

	Training needs
Class management	.623**
Problems with students' behavior and discipline	.538**
Teaching differentiation	-.348**
Deepening the understanding and teaching of cognitive fields	-.522**
Student counseling	.380**
Student evaluation	.469**
Computer Applications in Teaching	-.448**
Teaching students with learning disabilities	-.413**
Teaching in multicultural classes	-.325**
Development of programs in the school unit	-0.070

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The above research focused on investigating the professional development of school principals in Greece. It was revealed that the participants agreed more that their professional development depends on the professional support and motivation their colleagues provides, while they moderately agreed that professional development is one of their professional goals.

Through the first research question, it became clear that the participants with a specialty in math and computer sciences seemed to be more positive about their professional development depending on

their basic studies. In the meanwhile, the principals with a specialty in science fields suggested on a higher level that their professional development depends on their participation in European mobility programs, the professional support they get from their colleagues, and the way the school leadership is practiced. Furthermore, the participants who teach humanities, agreed more that their professional development depends on the first 2 years of experience in their field, participation in introductory training programs, transition to another school or higher position, participation in training programs organized by the state and on the school culture and ability to develop their initiatives in the school unit.

In the second research question, participants with 6-11 years of experience were more positive that the school in which they are occupied offers opportunities to practice and apply the skills they have acquired through their involvement in professional development activities. The participants who have 24-29 years of experience agreed more that the school supports initiatives and participation in decision-making, while respondents with 30 years of teaching experience agreed on a higher level about the importance to the role of teachers' association that the school gives. Lastly, the principals with up to 5 years of teaching experience suggested on a higher level that the school supports the implementation of educational innovations, encourages the creation of cooperative groups, and gives feedback from their colleagues.

In the third and last research question, it became clear that the more positive the participants were about their professional development as one of their professional goals, the more they agreed that they needed training in class management, in problems with students' behavior and discipline and student counseling and evaluation. Although, the less they seemed to agree about needing training in teaching differentiation, deepening the understanding and teaching of cognitive fields, and using computer applications in teaching and teaching students with disabilities and multicultural classes.

As far as practical implications of the research findings are concerned, they offer useful insight for school managers, teachers, and researchers in the field of teachers' professional development and provid a starting point for future research on various aspects of this issue.

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