THE PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER AS A PRINCIPAL AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE NEED TO IMPROVE ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCE TOWARDS AN EFFECTIVE SCHOOL

Abstract

The thought of a Physical Education Teacher (PET) being assigned the position of a Principal and exercising educational leadership in Primary and Secondary Schools hasn’t always been taken for granted, as it was the case with the other disciplines. Indicative of the hindered equal accessibility in the position of a school Principal is the fact that only since 1985 (Law 1566/1985) the Physical Education Teachers (PET) are allowed to claim the Principal’s position in secondary schools. Currently, Physical Education Teachers (PET) have gained more self-confidence and identify differently their role in the Greek school. Given the fact that Physical Education Teachers (PET) already constitute the third in volume discipline occupying the position of school Principal in Secondary Education, a significant question rises: Can Physical Education Teachers (PET) be effective school leaders? The purpose of the present paper is to identify which administrative skills of the Physical Education Teachers (PET) need improvement, so as the latter to be considered effective Principals according to their teachers’ perceptions. Making use of a questionnaire (Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale-PIMRS) adapted to the Greek reality, a total number of 460 teachers of 32 schools run by Physical Education Teachers (PET) participated. The gap analysis technique applied revealed statistically significant results in all the items comprised in the measurement tool. The first three abilities/skills lacking and should be developed by Principals – PET are the following: “working with multilingual parent groups” with a mean difference of 0.75 ($t_{(454)}=14.649$ $p=0.000$); “converting the curriculum objectives into a curriculum on the school’s website” with a mean difference of 0.73 ($t_{(452)}=12.859$ $p=0.000$); and “informing parents on their children’s educational advancement” ($t_{(452)}=10.117$ $p=0.000$). The present study confirms the findings of previous research concerning the effective Principal’s catalytic role in the quality of education.

Key words: SCHOOL PRINCIPAL / SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS / PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHER (PET) / SECONDARY EDUCATION
INTRODUCTION

The relationship of the Physical Education Teacher (PET) with the school has never been congruous. The acceptance of the Physical Education Teacher (PET) as an important educational factor of the Greek school anticipated several obstacles. Often, similar views are expressed in studies conducted in other countries of a different cultural background (Fejgin, Ephraty, & Ben-Sira, 1995; Smith & Leng, 2003). All the above mentioned, together with the lack of any Management and Leadership courses in the discipline’s curriculum, led both students and their parents, as well as sometimes even the Physical Education Teachers themselves, to have low expectations and aspirations concerning the effective exercise of any administrative tasks.

For many years, the Gymnast (PET is even currently called like this in primary and secondary education) remained in shadow; he/she neither plays any leading role, neither participates in decision making in schools, not to mention undertaking any management positions and exercising educational Leadership. The mere thought of a PET undertaking some management position and exercising educational leadership faintly made its appearance in the first graduates of the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport Science, who, being thoroughly educated through their studies at the Departments of Physical Education and Sport Science, have gained more self-confidence and identify differently their role in the Greek school – a school bound to change.

It is a fact that school is an open system directly influenced by contemporary developments and challenges. The challenges of the 21st century require a school flexible, competitive, capable of adapting itself to changes, and creatively anticipating new knowledge within the information society. The widespread use of information and digital systems has established a new international social stage, with the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) opening up new perspectives for human dynamics by changing the way we learn, work, coexist or communicate. This dynamic is particularly valuable when concerning the role and objectives of the school, as well as the tasks it currently undertakes in the new digital reality. (Paraskeva, 2007)

Educational Management and Leadership is a very interesting subject, which plays a vital role in the development and qualitative improvement of the education system in all countries, without any exception. The role of the Principal, placed at the top of the hierarchical pyramid as the Principal-“Leader”, is vital to ensure the efficiency of an educational organization. International research findings, in early 21st century, maintained the importance of school leadership in ensuring the development of educational units (Harris & Bennet, 2001) and confirmed that school management plays an important role in improving the quality of education provided and consequently “school effectiveness”. However, the term “school effectiveness” involves complex concepts and multiple features and, because of this, even currently it is not fully clear. (Good & Brophy, 1986; Purkey & Smith, 1983). In many cases, researchers produced conflicting results, among others due to the survey design and focus on different efficiency factors. (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Creemers, 1994; Scheerens, 1992).

The role of the school Principal in the Greek reality is rather different than the same role in European educational systems, characterized by decentralized activities with wider boundaries and where the Principal has a strong influence on his/her subordinates. Of course, in such an environment, with increased competences burdening the Principal, his/her traditional role is differentiated as well. From the current role of Principal-“transactor” (Iordanidis, 2002; Matsagouras, 2006; Papanaoum, 1995), he/she should be transformed into a Principal-“leader” to better meet the contemporary demand for a more effective education.

The effectiveness of a leader depends both on the way in which the others anticipate him/her as such and the perception of this role by himself/herself. In short, teachers are expected to behave towards the school Principal according to their perceptions of this role. In case there is a convergence between the perceptions of both sides (the staff and the Principal), the school runs smoothly. In any other case (e.g. in case of discrepancy in the staff’s and Principal’s perceptions), problems arise in their cooperation and failures in school organization (Pashiaridis, 2001: Pashiaridis, Costa, Mendes & Ventura, 2005).

The question arising at this point is whether eventually PET are able to undertake the manage-
ment of a school which is changing and requires strengthening of the Principal’s competencies. Thus, the next question arising is whether the current Principals of the Physical Education discipline are able to meet these new conditions. Which are the characteristics of the Principals–Physical Education Teachers that will enable them meet the requirements of effective schools and be considered as effective Principal-Leaders?

**OBJECTIVE**

The present paper investigates Educational Leadership and aspires its findings to contribute to the establishment of effective School Units staffed with efficient and skillful Leaders, who will be able to meet the requirements of such effective and quality schools. The ultimate objective is to investigate and record the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers in schools of Secondary Education, in which the Principals are Physical Education Teachers. It also aspires to demonstrate the administrative adequacy of Physical Education Teachers as school Principals towards an effective school. Specifically, the present paper makes an attempt to identify which administrative skills of the physical education teachers (PET) need improvement, so as the latter are considered effective Principals according to their teachers’ perceptions.

**METHOD**

For the purpose of the present study, the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale-PIMRS (Hallinger, 1982, 1983, 1990) was selected. Researchers of school leadership consider the PIMRS scale as the most appropriate tool for measuring effective school management, based on the teachers’ perceptions. (Hallinger, 2008). Initially, the scale comprised 11 factors (subscales) and 72 items. After its review, it was limited to 10 factors (subscales) and 50 items. (Hallinger, 1983) In the original PIMRS validation study, high reliability standards (Hallinger, 1983) were found, with an internal consistency index over .800 in alpha Cronbach test. Ever since, several studies have supported the initial validation study of the scale (Howe, 1995: Jones, 1987: O’Day, 1983: Tarasina, 1993). For the purposes of this study, the questionnaire was partly amended so as to effectively correspond to the survey. The questionnaire was translated into Greek and its reliability was originally assessed by the test-retest method. In an effort to adapt it to the Greek reality, 8 factors (subscales) and 44 items were maintained. Making use of the gap analysis technique, the research focuses on the factors teachers consider effective for a school Principal and whether or not these factors characterize their Principals.

**RESULTS**

Due to the interval scale used, which allows the implementation of parametric methods, the statistical criteria applied were the averages, standard deviations, frequencies, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The method use to identify the item in the greatest need of improvement is gap - analysis technique. (Pasiardis, 1990). More specifically, the average “significance” is subtracted from the average “implementation” of the same item. This way, the difference between the two terms or gap is found. A t-test was performed on paired variables (items) in order to identify any statistically significant differences between the degree of “significance” and that of “implementation” in all the items of the questionnaire. The first three abilities/ skills lacking and should be developed by Principals are the following: “working with multilingual parent groups” with a mean difference of 0.75 (t(454)=14,649 p=0,000); “converting the curriculum objectives into a curriculum on the school’s website” with a mean difference of 0.73 (t(452)=12,859 p=0,000); and “informing parents on their children’s educational advancement” (t(452)=10,117 p=0,000). Some items belong only to 5 factors, out of the eight administrative efficiency factors in the questionnaire. Specifically, most items which exhibit large gaps between the ideal (what teachers consider important) and the actual level of exercising the duties of a school Principal (to what degree it is applied to their school) come under the
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factors “Parents’ Involvement”, which comprises four (4) items. There follow the factors “Educational mission & Targeting” and “Monitoring & Evaluation of Student Progress” comprising two (2) items. Then, one question appears to belong to each of the abilities / skills groups “Principal’s Training” and “Monitoring and improving of the learning process”. These results suggest that, according to the teachers’ perceptions, the Principals should improve in the Parents’ Involvement in School Life, shaping the Educational mission and Targeting, monitoring the student’s progress, monitoring the learning process and improving their training.

**DISCUSSION**

Teachers considered the items in the questionnaire, as of their opinion on the effectiveness of their Principal, rather important. The overall average of all the questionnaire items, as far as their importance is concerned, is 3.93. In all questionnaire items, the assessment of “significance” on the ideal level of performing the Principal’s duties (which is the factor that the teachers consider important) surpasses the corresponding “implementation”, on the actual level of performing the Principal’s duties (which is the factor that their Principal is actually exhibiting). This differentiation is statistically significant in all cases. This fact leads us to the first consideration. Teachers do not experience the leadership behaviors they expect from the Principal in their schools and their Principals’ abilities / skills exhibited are not the ones expected.

The present study confirms the findings of previous research concerning the effective Principal’s catalytic role in the quality of education. This research helps to diagnose needs, develop self-awareness and identify deficiencies in basic management skills of physical education teachers and of other disciplines as well as who undertake the Principal’s position. It enables Principals to get to know their strengths and weaknesses and the State to organize training programs in Education Management for Principals.

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout the questionnaire, the assessment of the “significance” on the ideal level of school management (which skill factor is considered significant by the teachers) supersedes the corresponding “implementation”, on the actual level of school management (which skill factor is actually exhibited by their principal). In all cases this difference is statistically significant. This leads us to the initial conclusion that teachers in schools do not experience the Principal’s leadership behavior they aspire and the skills exhibited by their Principals are not what they expected.

The first three abilities/ skills, in which the Principals – Physical Education Teachers are fall short and should develop are “working with multilingual parent groups” with a mean difference of 0.75 ($t (454) = 14.649 \ p = 0.000$), the “converting the Curriculum objectives into a curriculum on the school’s website” with a mean difference of 0.73
(t (452) = 12.859 p = 0.000) and “informing parents on their children’s educational advancement” (t (452) = 10.117 p = 0.000).

The actions which the Principal – Physical Education Teacher should prioritize, in terms of improvement, are the following: First, they should fast track the management ability/ skill “Parents’ Involvement”, so that they are able to apply appropriate strategies for effective work with multicultural and multilingual parent groups.

Then Principals – Physical Education Teachers, should develop the management ability/ skill “Monitoring and improving the learning process”, so as to be able to monitor the teaching of the scheduled curriculum (e.g. by observing in-class teaching or through the feedback he/she receives from the teacher).

Finally, the management ability/ skill “Educational mission and Targeting” should be improved, so that Principals-Phisical Education Teachers are able to implement strategies towards the teachers’ commitment to the educational objectives of the school and learning outcomes through each teacher’s individual work program.

REFERENCES


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