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**Effective Functioning of the Teachers' Association: Views of Management Executives of Secondary Schools in the Municipality of Monemvasia**

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**Abstract**

The Director of the school unit and the Teachers' Association are the two bodies responsible for implementing the school's programming. The Director also has the responsibility of coordinating and ensuring the effective operation of the Teachers' Association. The purpose of this research is to investigate, through semi-structured interviews with six (6) Principals/Vice Principals of Secondary Education schools in the Regional Unit of Laconia, their opinions regarding the effective functioning of the Teachers' Association. The participants in the research seem to particularly mention the behaviors of the teachers during the meetings of the Teachers' Associations, while also looking for the causes of these behaviors. They consider the mobilization of teachers to be particularly important and submit their opinions and suggestions regarding behavior parameters on behalf of the Director, as a basis for the more effective functioning of the Teachers' Association.

**Keywords:** Teachers' Association, Principal, effective operation

**1. Introduction**

School is a social institution with a strong presence at the local and wider society level, and its mode of operation is shaped according to the political, cultural, social, geographical, and economic situation of each society. At the same time, it is an administrative institution with strong bureaucratic characteristics whose operation is limited by the relevant legislation, while its organization follows the hierarchical model and is based on the existence of rules and the formation of positions and roles with specific duties (Mavrogiorgos, 2008). In any case, the modern and efficient educational unit must be governed by the active participation of teachers in the design and implementation of educational programs, cooperation, and the possibility of participation in decision-making (Kioulafas, 2016).

**2. Bibliographical review**

The Director of the school unit, in a series of legislative regulations (e.g., Ministerial Decision 105657/2002, assisted by the Deputy Director (where this is provided), is the hierarchically superior body of all staff serving in the school. The Director is also responsible for the smooth

operation of the school and, through it, for ensuring the functional development of the school act and procedure. Additionally, bears the responsibility of coordinating school life, compliance with laws, circulars, and official orders, and the implementation of the decisions of the Teachers' Association. With his/her scientific training and administrative capacity, cooperative relations are developed with all members of the unit and other bodies outside it.

Law No. 1566 (1985) introduced the institution of the Teachers' Association, consisting of the teachers currently teaching, regardless of employment relationship, as a school administration body. It also established the basic principles concerning its composition, the manner of its formation, as well as its purpose and operation. The decisions of the Teachers' Association are always within the framework of the current educational legislation. Its task is to set guidelines for the school's better functioning. Thus, with its key contribution to solving problems and, consequently, to the smooth operation of the school, it acquires a key role as an administrative body in a school unit. In fact, Saitis (2001) argues that the Introductory Report of this Law reveals the legislator's intention to promote changes in the administrative organization and decision-making process in Greek schools, with the ultimate goal of administrative decentralization and democratic planning in the field of education.

The Teachers' Association is a group of individuals. A group is defined as "a gathering of individuals in which each individual is aware of the presence of others, interacts with others, accepts that they have rights and obligations as a member, shares a common identity, while at the same time experiencing some form of dependence on others for a specific period of time" (Tsiboukli, 2012, p.16). The dynamics of the group are one of the most important factors that influence the completion and success of a collective project. "Dynamics" (Tsiboukli, 2012) refers to everything that happens within a group and is related to the rules, relationships, roles, social influences, and effects on behavior that have developed. The above framework of relationships also differentiates groups from random gatherings of individuals. It is also a set of formal and informal interventions that are developed within the group and focus on improving the social relationships of group members, clarifying their roles, and resolving interpersonal problems that affect the functioning of the group (Klein et al., 2009). Such interventions - activities could be creating a sense of commitment, empowering team members, providing support from senior executives, cultivating a culture of continuous support and improvement, providing rewards, developing strong communication channels, directly managing conflicts and problems, as well as involving the team in the planning of work (Guiney, 2009). Regarding team effectiveness, Katzenbach and Smith (1993), in a classic study, concluded that values such as listening, constructive feedback, providing support, and recognizing the interests and achievements of other members promote team effectiveness. At the same time, according to the above research, effective teams depend on the ability to communicate internally and hold effective meetings, the emotional climate, and the team's ability to deal with and resolve conflicts by providing support to all members and increasing their commitment.

### **3. The research**

#### *3.1 Purpose of the research.*

This research was conducted within the framework of the training program "Leadership and Administration in Education" of the National Council for the Promotion of Education under the supervision of Mr Piliouras Panagiotis, Senior Advisor of the IEP. Its purpose was to explore the experiences and opinions of Directors of Secondary Education schools of the Regional Unit of Laconia regarding the behaviors of teachers during the operation of the Teachers' Association, to interpret these behaviors, and to record practices that can cultivate the effective operation of the group.

#### *3.2 Research questions*

Based on the above purpose, the research questions of the study were posed as follows:

1. What behaviors do teachers exhibit during the operation of the Teachers' Association?
2. What are the cause(s) that determine the behavior of each of the teachers during the operation of the Teachers' Association?
3. What manipulations in the dynamics of the Teachers' Association group have the potential to increase the effective functioning of the group?

#### *3.3 Methodological approach.*

The research was carried out using a qualitative data collection method. According to Creswell (2016), this method is a more flexible form of research as it emphasizes emergent processes that illuminate many aspects of the research issue. More specifically, the interview technique was used, the advantage of which is direct contact with the participants, the possibility of utilizing both verbal and non-verbal data, and, above all, the flexibility to adapt the questions depending on the direction the discussion has taken (Robson, 2010). In this research, the semi-structured interview was used, with predefined questions but with the possibility of reformulation or explanation if necessary (Robson, 2010). An interview protocol was created that included the procedure that would be followed during the interview. It included basic information about the purpose, content of the research, the rules of ethics, as well as a demographic data form (gender, years of service, position of responsibility, etc.). The protocol then contained the questions that were constructed, in collaboration with the research supervisor, based on the research questions and aimed at delving deeper into specific points of the topic. The interview was structured into three thematic axes, as were the research questions. An effort was made, through the questions, to draw from the participants both their experience and their knowledge on the research's subject .

In the Municipality of Monemvasia, there are nine (09) Secondary Education schools (3 General High Schools, 2 Vocational High Schools, and 4 Gymnasiums). These are, basically, schools with a small number of students, in which twelve (12) education executives serve (9 Directors and 3 Deputy Directors). School executives were approached and invited to participate in this

research. The participants were individuals who wished to participate (convenience sampling), but who had as a common element the service in a position of responsibility in a school unit (purposive sampling). The interviews conducted were six (6) in total and were coded S1...S6. More specifically, of the six participants, five (5) were women and one (1) man, three of them held a postgraduate degree, five (5) were school principals and one (1) was a deputy principal, three (3) had 11 to 20 years of experience, three over 20 years and had served in a position of responsibility for an average of six (6) years. The content of the interviews had as its essential subject the metacognitive dimension of the execution of their administrative work, in the sense that they were asked to express evaluative judgments on the administrative work they were already performing. Before the official start of data collection, a pilot interview was conducted, with the help of which two questions were reformulated and one was removed from the original question form. The interviews were audio-recorded. During the interviews, it was considered appropriate to use probing questions, i.e., sub-questions aimed at obtaining more information and clarifying the participants' positions and perceptions. The method of thematic analysis was used to process the interview material. Thematic analysis aims to detect, organize, and understand patterns of meaning that are identified within a set of data and ultimately lead to cognitive access to collective opinions and experiences.

#### **4. Results**

The education executives who took part in this research seem to agree on the view that the teachers, their subordinates, during the operation of the Teachers' Association, and more specifically during its meeting, operate with a more or less typical tone without taking any particular initiative. Participant S2 states that "it is a simple and formal function," while participant S2 claims that "the meetings are held institutionally without much margin". The most recognizable behavior of the participants in a Teachers' Association meeting is the waiting attitude accompanied by silence. Participant S5 states characteristically: "more than half of them keep silence, awaiting developments". According to Participant S6, "Most colleagues do not participate in the issues that are up for discussion. They are inactive. They wait for the Director's suggestion", while Participant S2 adds, "they remain apathetic, they do not take action". Finally, Participant S5 states the opinion of "indifference to a multitude of school issues" without missing, according to Participant S4, "incidents of conflict".

Regarding the participants' opinions on the causes of the above behaviors, there were a multitude of reports. What consistently appears as the main cause of the behavior manifested, each time, is the character and personality in general of the teacher. In addition, a series of individual factors was recorded that influence the behavior of teachers. These factors can be categorized into two sub-categories: those related to each teacher (individual) and those related to the general environment, the general situations (contextual factors). In any case, these factors cannot be isolated as they do not operate autonomously and individually, but in combination and interrelated with each other. More specifically, at the level of individual factors, S5 mentions the "philotimo", "conscientiousness", "personal interest", and the "sense of power" that they experience, while S6 speaks of a feeling of "personal benefit" but also of "absence of recognition

of their contribution to the school". The contextual factors are clearly more numerous and are related to the "behaviour-profile of the Principal" (S1, S5), and to the extent to which the teachers "serve at the school for many years together" (S1, S2). S2 adds the "workload" that already exists and the "personal problems" of each one. The "topic of the meeting" is a key influencing factor for S2, S3, S5, and S6. S3 argues that "the strict framework that the legislator gives to the Association's responsibilities" is responsible. The "time (of holding) meetings after 1:50 p.m." significantly determines the behavior of teachers, according to S3 and S4. S4, furthermore, relies on the "inadequate information on the topics of discussion" and the fact that "many times the Association has approved the behavior of not participating". S5 mentions the "absence of training" on issues related to the responsibilities of the Teachers' Association. S5 and S6 attribute responsibility to the "correlation of forces" between the individual informal subgroups, to the "differentiation" of the characteristics of these groups, and to the status of a "civil servant" who approaches his work with purely utilitarian motives. S6, finally, to the above factors, adds the "ignorance of the applicable legislation" and the absence of "motivation" on the part of the school management.

For this research, the manipulation of the dynamics of the Teachers' Association group with the aim of its effective operation was approached at the level of behaviors, desirable and unacceptable, on the part of the Director. More specifically, the Director's main concern, according to S1, S5, and S6, must be the formulation of "clear goals" of action. A second element is "the fair distribution of roles and tasks among all teachers" (S1, S5). S1 suggests that the Director "strengthen the climate of trust between teachers" within a framework of "encouragement" and "democratic dialogue". S2 adds to the proposals, the "seriousness of the issue each time", acting as an "example" himself, and highlighting the "positive side of things". S3, for its part, suggests that the Director "leave room (for teachers) to express their point of view" and "try a colleague's approach that is better than the current one". S4 refers to "continuous information" on the issues that concern the Association, the proper functioning of the school at a "logistical level", "adherence to schedules", and emphasizes the need for a "communication person with sweet words without insults". S5 asks the Director "to keep the famous balance between manager and visionary leader", "to work a lot himself", "to get involved in individual action groups", and "to inspire by being a leader". S6, finally, asks the Director "to keep balance", "to be objective", "to show interest", and to ensure that "the teachers' ideas are heard".

On the other hand, the main undesirable behaviors on the part of the Director are "self-initial behavior", as mentioned by almost all participants (S1, S2, S5, S6), and the "absence of flexibility", as supported by S1 and S4. In addition, S1 mentions the "absence of a sense of justice", the "lack of respect for each personality", and the absence of "emotional intelligence", while S3 suggests avoiding "limiting the boundaries of teachers". Finally, S5 adds to the unacceptable behaviors, the "absence of communication skills," and the fact that the Principal "relies on only two people to get all the school's work done".

## 5. Discussion

Despite the small size of the sample (6 participants) and the underrepresentation of the group of Deputy Principals (1 participant), it is possible to record some interesting observations. Studying, overall, the opinions of the participants in the research (Principals, Deputy Principal), it seems that they, when asked to talk about the operation of the Teachers' Association, focused more on the behaviors of the teachers during the meetings of the Association. This can be interpreted by the need for decision-making on behalf of the Association, in the context of the operation of a centralized type of public Greek school. In other words, it appears that there is a priority on its part for implementing the relevant circulars and less for taking initiatives, which, as they themselves admit, are more difficult to manage. In this context, the meetings of the Teachers' Associations are distinguished by formality and are treated by the teachers with a transactional attitude, as is evident from the reluctance of the teachers to participate actively and, above all, to take the initiative. This phenomenon is consistent with the picture presented in their work by Kousoulos et. al. (2004).

The first, and perhaps most important, step towards a more effective functioning of the Teachers' Association, with great difficulties in management on the part of the Principals, seems to be the mobilization of teachers. Kastanidou and Tsikanderi (2015) argue that the participation of teachers, and especially during the decision-making process, is positively correlated with the creation of an effective climate of cooperation and increased communication, which in turn leads to more alternative proposals and therefore to the greatest possible results. Nielsen and Randall (2012), for their part, emphasize that cooperation and job satisfaction before the planning of actions determine the degree of participation in the planning and implementation of actions. Finally, according to Kioulafas (2016), it is clear that the sharing of issues and the assumption of responsibility for the execution or individual planning by members of the Teachers' Association leads to the achievement of goals without shocks and problems.

Studying the views of the participants in this research, on the desired way of acting of the Principal in his/her relationship with the other teachers and the Teachers' Association in general, a wide variety of such behaviors is recorded. The proposed - desired behaviors can be argued that, although they are characterized by quite general references without a corresponding variety of proposals for specific and immediately applicable measures, they are, however, drawn up, at a theoretical level, fully in line with the types of modern educational leadership proposed in the literature. Thus, behaviors of the Principal related to the activation of all members of the Teachers' Association, to optimize the operation of the Association, to develop a climate of dialogue and democracy, are found in the research of Kastanidou and Tsikanderi (2015). At the same time, analogies also appear with the conclusions of the research of Papageorgakis and Sismanidou (2013), who speak of a Principal responsible for creating a positive climate within a framework of action that is distinguished by impartiality, collaboration, and collectivity. Finally, the findings of this research are consistent with the proposals of Katsiri (2015), based on the principles of Total Quality Management, for the promotion of human and colleague relationships, maintaining the cohesion of all those involved, and providing impetus and

momentum to achieve the goals that have been set. Such a framework of action, on the part of the Director, mobilizes mechanisms of commitment of teachers towards the group's targeting and its effective operation (AEE Observatory, 2012).

## **6. Conclusions**

The participants in this research state that they face difficulties in managing the operation of the Teachers' Association, mainly during the meetings of this body. At the same time, however, they recognize the positive correlation that exists between the effective operation of the Teachers' Association, either in the specific context of its meetings, or, mainly, in the broader context of its daily operation, and the effective operation of the school unit as a whole. With the aim of the effective operation of the Teachers' Association, they even submit a series of various proposals and practices related to the mobilization of teachers, the behavior of the Director as a leader model, and the development of commitment in the team. The need for targeted interventions on the part of the Director is emphasized so that teachers understand the creative role that they could play, as members of the Teachers' Association, both in the dynamics of the relationships that develop and in the effective operation of this collective body.

The above summary of the responses - evaluative judgments of the education executives serving in Secondary Education schools of the Municipality of Monemvasia, can be supported by modern theoretical and empirical literature. More specifically, it seems that the profile of an education executive who operates according to the principles of distributed leadership, encouraging cooperation, collectivism, teamwork, and the recognition of expertise and knowledge throughout the organization, is in demand (Crawford, 2012; Mifsud, 2024). Such a function on the part of the education executive provides the opportunity to reduce the amount of emotional burden experienced by the teacher in his/her daily professional life (Özdemir et al., 2023). At the same time, the operation of the Teachers' Association in a collaborative context and the monitoring of the emotional aspects of the collaboration of its teacher-members could serve as an effective strategy to strengthen their capacity development efforts at the educational and administrative levels (Weddle et al., 2019).

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