

Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions on Management Training Issues and Needs

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Received: August 23, 2019 Accepted: September 22, 2019 Published: September 30, 2019

doi:10.5296/ijld.v9i3.15552

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijld.v9i3.15552>

Abstract

This study refers to the unexplored scientific field of administration in preschool education and comes to investigate the views of teachers working at the public kindergartens of Piraeus region, regarding their educational administration needs and the form of relevant training programs they wish to attend. In Greece, one kindergarten teacher of each school unit is required to perform both administrative and teaching tasks simultaneously, as there is not a separate principal who performs only administrative tasks. This survey was conducted from April to May 2019, whereas the quantitative approach was chosen for the collection of data. The questionnaires were delivered through the e-mail addresses of the kindergarten schools of the Piraeus region. The population of the survey was 150 kindergarten teachers, whereas the sample was 71 kindergarten teachers (response rate 47.3 %). The results of the survey show

that the vast majority of teachers regard management training as being a crucial factor of effectiveness, while in terms of training programs they state that they desire a combination of introductory and periodic training organized by institutions such as the Institute of Educational Policy, Universities, the Ministry of Education and the Regional Centers for Educational Planning. In addition, they prefer to attend compulsory and fast-paced training programs whenever there is a change in administrative duties and whenever an educational reform occurs, organized by experienced school unit principals and the Professors of the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government during working hours with exemption from teaching duties. The results of the present study provide guidance for the development of an educational program for kindergarten teachers in administrative issues.

Keywords: training, needs assessment, administrative effectiveness, preschool education

1. Theoretical Underpinning

1.1 Administration in Preschool Education and the Administrative Duties of Kindergarten Teachers

The administration of school units presents many peculiarities (Bakalbassi & Fokas, 2014: 146), while the role the principal is called to play is crucial for its proper functioning and organization (Brinia, 2008: 109), although the position of a manager of a school unit is ranked in the lower tier of the Greek educational system (Polymeropoulou & Lazaridou, 2017: 377).

Kindergartens, like other school units, are bureaucratic educational and administrative institutions, and their operation is based on relevant legislation and central authority decisions (Katsaros, 2008: 19). The handling of administrative tasks is carried out by the central government bodies through their policies, and the regional bodies which come to accomplish them (Michopoulos, 1993: 62).

According to the Presidential Decree 79/2017, kindergartens are units characterized by autonomy, regional boundaries, a timetable, archive material and power. They can function, on proportion of the number of infants, as single and double occupants, and in regions with a dense population they operate with three classes or more (Theocharidi & Xristopoulos, 2012: 62). What is more, principals and the Teachers' Association have a dual role to play, since on the one hand they come to discharge their administration duties, whereas on the other hand they try to implement the pedagogical goals set at the beginning of the school year (Theocharidi & Xristopoulos, 2012: 64).

In addition to creating a good climate among parents, pupils and teachers, the administrative duties of the Head of Kindergarten are to enforce the laws, circulars, presidential decrees, regulations, and service orders of Education Officers, by observing and implementing the decisions of the Teachers' Association (105657/2002 Official Government Gazette 1340, Vol. B). In addition, she/he is responsible for the registration and transcription of infants, the evaluation and planning of educational work and the maintenance of school books (Presidential Decree 79/2017).

In the contemporary age of knowledge and volume of information, the widespread use and utilization of technology is now dominant within the school administration and completion of bureaucratic work (Saitis, 2008: 144, 148). International research findings even suggest that teachers face problems related to their personal use of technology and expect advanced technology development programs in preschool education (Kara & Cagiltay, 2017: 132).

1.2 The Training of Kindergarten Teachers in Greece

Initial teacher training, which is based on a cycle of vocational training and internships, is not sufficient for the teachers to carry out the work tasks effectively throughout their professional life. Thus, continuous development and lifelong learning are an integral part of their professional lives (ETUCE, 2008). Universities place greater emphasis on the scientific training of future teachers and less on their preparation for positions of responsibility and special roles (Katsarou & Dedouli, 2008: 75).

This gap was attempted to be filled through the planning of training and retraining programs, where the subjects of "Management and Organization of Education" or "Educational Legislation" were taught. The content of these courses initially concerned the systematic analysis of current school education legislation and later school unit administration (Doulkeridou, 2015: 93). In addition, the training needs of primary education teachers and administrators were initially covered by the Maraslio Teaching School (1922-1970) and then by the Regional Training Centers (Katsarou & Dedouli, 2008, p. 45), which were amended by Law 45 / 2018 (Brinia & Pavlakis, 2018: 8).

Following numerous fluctuations in the field of educational training combined with the impact of European policies on national education, the "Teacher Training Organization" was established by law (Law 2986/2002) in 2002, which undertakes the planning of training framework with similar actions for Primary and Secondary Education teachers (Pedagogical Institute, 2009: 6). Though, these actions were not implemented.

Within the framework of training policy in Greece the high-quality administrative training programs of the Training Institute for Managers and Executives of Education that were implemented during the year 2013-2014 should be also mentioned (Brinia & Pavlakis, 2018: 11). It is also worth mentioning that in article 11 (5) of Law 3848/ 19-05-2010, a distinction is made between Kindergarten Heads and Principals of Elementary Schools, as it is stated that Kindergarten Heads candidates should be teachers who have at least eight years of educational service, and serve at the time of selection with an organic position in the school unit to which the selection relates, without making any reference either to their administrative competence or to their required training.

Preschool education to date, within the broader training context of all country's teachers, included mandatory educational activities with the School Counselor and now, according to the recent Law 4547/18, with the Educational Project Coordinator (up to two working days per year, from 1 to 10 September and from 15 to 21 June). These training activities concern (Presidential Decree 79/2017, Article 17, 2) the pedagogical and scientific guidance of teachers, the planning and evaluation of educational work, the implementation of curricula, and the

handling of problems that impede the smooth functioning of teachers and school units, while taking into account the suggestions of the district teachers or groups of school teachers.

The new Law 4547/18 establishes also the Regional Educational Planning Centers, which are now responsible for organizing teacher training, including introductory. Their responsibility is to organize and implement training programs for teachers at the Regional Directorate of Education on issues highlighted by the recording of the needs of school districts in their area of responsibility.

A longitudinal study of the stages of education policy in Greece, though, shows that there is a lack of organized training and implementation of training activities for principals and especially for Head teachers in administrative matters (Theocharidis & Xristopoulos, 2012: 61).

The majority of teachers are called upon to take responsibility and meet the needs of this multifaceted role without proper preparation, with a major focus on their experience (Lemoni & Kolezakis, 2013: 166). The lack of properly trained staff in the school unit and their inadequate preparation for management positions highlights the need for compulsory education through appropriate training programs (Iakovidis & Theologou, 2017: 161). This is also seen in the study by Bloom and Sheerer (1992), where principals who attended certified training programs developed greater perception and skills regarding school decision making (a.c. Zinsser & Curby, 2014).

Besides, according to the principles of contemporary management, human resource is the most important factor in ensuring the progress and effectiveness of a healthy organization. This means that an organization should grow if it is flexible, willing to develop the knowledge, skills and creative thinking of its staff and motivate highly trained and qualified individuals (Panagiotopoulos & Karanikola, 2017).

2. Methodology of Research

2.1 Research Objective –Research Tool

The fundamental objective of the present research is to investigate the training needs of kindergarten teachers regarding administration issues and the type of training they prefer. It is worth mentioning that kindergarten teachers themselves are obliged to perform both administrative and teaching tasks simultaneously given the absence of a separate supervisor who performs only the administrative tasks in kindergarten units. The quantitative method was used for the collection of the data using a questionnaire, which was created with the help of Google Forms and sent by email to the addresses of the public kindergartens of Piraeus Region on April 15, 2019. It is an improvised questionnaire, whereas its construction was based on the relevant theory and research studies (Argyropoulou & Symeonidis, 2017; Antypas, 2018; Bakalbassi & Fokas, 2014; Brinia, Vassilopoulou & Saravanou, 2015; Polymeropoulou & Lazaridou, 2017; Tsalagiorgou & Avgididou, 2017).

It consists of 25 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question, divided into three axes. The first line (nine questions) includes demographics, administrative experience and

participants' studies. The second axis (seven questions) relates to preschool education and management and the third axis (ten questions) to kindergarten training needs in preschool management and desired forms of training. This paper will present the findings concerning the first and third axes.

Regarding reliability, it is ensured when the values of a tool are stable and consistent each time a researcher delivers it (Creswell, 2016). For this reason, prior to conducting the present research, a reliability test was carried out through the tool-re-granting process (Creswell, 2016), by being voluntarily completed by five kindergarten teachers. Then, the questionnaires were sent to the e-mail addresses of Piraeus Region, preserving the anonymity of the participants so that the answers could be reliable and sincere. Data analysis was performed with SPSS version 25.0, while Cronbach α was found to be 0.918, which represents satisfactory quality of the measurement.

2.2 Research Findings

The first section of the questionnaire contains nine questions related to the demographic and personal data of the participants. In terms of gender, the kindergarten teachers of the public kindergartens of Piraeus Region (97.2%, $N = 69$) are women, while men are only 2.8% ($N = 2$). Participants' ages are dominated by the age range of 41-50 with 46.5% ($N = 33$), followed by ages 31-40 with 32.4% ($N = 23$), with over 50 with 16%, 9% ($N = 12$) and only 4.2% ($N = 3$) ages 22-30. Most kindergarten teachers were permanent 76.1% ($N = 54$), while temporary were 23.9% ($N = 17$). 57.7% ($N = 41$) of kindergarten responders serve from 11-20 years in kindergarten, 23.9% ($N = 17$) serve from 1-10 years, 12.7 ($N = 9$) from 21-30 and finally 5.6% ($N = 4$) have more than 30 years of service.

In the 2018-2019 school year, 62% ($N = 44$) are in charge of the Headmaster, compared to 38% ($N = 27$) that are not. 35.2% ($N = 25$) stated that they have an administrative job of 1-5 years, 28.2% ($N = 20$) over 10 years, 19.7% ($N = 14$) of 6-10 years while 16.9% ($N = 12$) reported having no administrative experience in kindergarten.

Regarding their studies, 58.3% ($N = 60$) have a University degree, 17.5% ($N = 18$) a postgraduate degree and 90.1% ($N = 64$) a foreign language certification. Finally, in terms of certified computer literacy, 35.2% ($N = 25$) have the A Level of certification, 33.8% ($N = 24$) have a B Level of certification, 15.5% ($N = 25$). $N = 11$ have ECDL and finally 15.5% ($N = 11$) have no certification.

Asked if they need administrative training, kindergartens respond favorably with an overwhelming 88.7% ($N = 63$), while only 11.3% ($N = 8$) claim that they do not. Regarding the field of training, the kindergarten teachers answered in the following way (table 1):

Table 1. Training objects

Training objects	not at all	a little	enough	much	very much
Organization and administration of school units	1,6%	19%	41,3%	25,4%	12,7%
Financial management	4,8%	20,6%	39,7%	20,6%	14,3%
Crisis management/ Interpersonal relationships	7,9%	46%	27%	11,1%	7,9%
Educational legislation	1,6%	23,8%	44,4%	17,5%	12,7%
New technologies	17,5%	49,2%	23,8%	6,3%	3,2%

As for the provider of administrative training programs, the percentages appear to be divided: 22.2% (N = 14) for the Institute of Education Policy, 20.6% (N = 13) for the Universities, 20.6% (N = 13) for the Ministry of Education and 20.6% (N = 13) for the Regional Educational Planning Centers.

Regarding the educators, 42.9% (N = 27) prefer Experienced Principals of Primary School Units, 30.2% (N = 19) professors of the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Governance, 12.7% (N = 8) University professors and 12.7% (N = 8) the Director of Education.

As to the type of training, the highest rate of 76.2% (N = 48) prefers the introductory and periodic training, 12.7% (N = 8) only the introductory training and 11.1% (N = 7) the periodic.

The vast majority (85.7%, N = 54) consider that training is necessary in the case of educational and administrative changes (table 2), while 84.1% (N = 53) consider the most appropriate training time to be "during working hours" with exemption from teaching duties. Participation in training is preferred to be "compulsory" (82.5%), while the preferred duration of training is the fast-paced (47.6%) and the three months training (42.9% N = 27).

Table 2. Training periodicity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	When there is an educational reform	2	2,8	3,2
Valid	When there are changes in administrative duties	7	9,9	14,3
	Both	54	76,1	85,7
	Total	63	88,7	100,0
Missing	System	8	11,3	
Total		71	100,0	

3. Discussion on the Results

Concerning the training needs of kindergarten teachers who perform both administrative and teaching tasks, it is found that the great majority of them face difficulties in the field of educational legislation, where there is a difficulty in knowing laws, decrees and regulatory decisions. Though, each manager should know the basic principles of administrative law in order to perform his / her duties legally (Argyropoulou & Symeonidis, 2017: 56).

In addition, specialized knowledge requires constant training and information. Almost half of the sample of managers in the Polymeropoulou and Lazaridou survey (2017: 379) face this difficulty, confirming the findings of the present study. Regarding the necessity of training, the great majority (88.7%) answered positively. The necessity of training is also confirmed by the surveys of Batsouta and Papayiannidou (2006:148-149), Papaioannou, Yavrimis, Balkanos and Katsafouros, (2013: 9), Brinia, Vassilopoulou and Saravanou (2015: 152-153), according to whom training contributes to the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, to the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness and the professional development.

In addition, the research of Bakalbassi and Fokas (2014: 151, 162) shows that teachers consider it necessary to be trained in organizational and educational issues, as training contributes to better administrative tasks and school effectiveness.

In addition, kindergarteners require significant training in the field of "organization and administration of school units", a finding that is supported by similar surveys (Antypas, 2018: 98; Tsalagiorgou & Avgididou, 2017: 267). In the field of "use of resources and financial management" kindergarten teachers also ask for training, since finances is a field almost unknown to them, given that they have not attended management and economics courses in their initial studies. This is also confirmed by Fokialis and Rapti research (Pedagogical Institute, 2010: 18), where teachers seem to be far behind in financial management of the school unit.

Kindergartens also recognize that they need training to improve themselves and improve their day-to-day practices, which will also have a positive impact on children. This desire is also confirmed by research from the Pedagogical Institute (2010: 27), where the development of creative relationships with parents is considered to be of major importance.

Polymeropoulou and Lazaridou (2017: 379) also claim that principals regard conflict management at school as a very important administrative area in which they need training, while the need to improve communication and cooperation with parents in preschool education is also emphasized in the research of Demir, Arcagök, Şahin, and Durukan (2017: 38), as parents' involvement in kindergarten activities is frequent and contributes significantly to the development of schools open to societies and communities (Argyropoulou, 2010: 11).

As far as the "Training Body" is concerned, they seem to almost equally prefer the Institute of Education Policy, the Universities, the Ministry of Education and the Regional Centers for Educational Planning.

The Institute of Educational Policy (formerly the Pedagogical Institute) is also referred to the

research of Batsouta and Papayannidou (2006: 150), where teachers seem to trust it more than the Universities. The educators preferred by the kindergarten teachers are the Experienced Directors of Primary School Units and the Professors of the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Governance. This finding confirms previous research by the Pedagogical Institute (2010) in the context of the "Major Teacher Training Program 2010-2013", where preschoolers prefer to be trained by specialized teachers and professors, who seem to combine scientific knowledge with practice.

The kind of training that kindergarteners want is “during working hours with exemption out teaching”, as they consider that the State should support the fact that their training is part of vocational training. This is also confirmed by the research of the Pedagogical Institute (2010: 29). On the contrary, Kristoforidou's research (2012: 4) finds that preschoolers are also heavily involved in voluntary training programs, which take place outside working hours, in the afternoons and at the weekends.

4. Conclusions

The need arising from the present research is the planning of a consistent management policy framework that will combine introductory and periodic training for all kindergarten teachers, whether they are called to perform administrative tasks or not. Training programs should be short and their attendance should be discharged from work duties.

In addition, the findings of the present work may form the basis for a research project in order to approach the topic in different areas of the educational region of the Greek territory, in order to achieve a complete and comparative study.

5. Limitations of the Investigation

This study was conducted in Piraeus Region. The sample used is not representative of the general population of kindergarten teachers throughout Greece. The sample is also relatively small, as 71 out of 150 questionnaires were completed, despite the fact they were delivered to kindergarten emails more than twice and there was informative telephone communication with many kindergartens. Therefore, the findings of the present study are only indicative and may provide guidance in organizing a kindergarten-based training program for administrators.

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