

Freedoms and Restrictions of School Leaders and the Pedagogical Guidance They Exercise in the Greek Bureaucratic System

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Abstract

The subject of this work is the investigation of the existing educational legal framework that determines the operation of school units as well as the pedagogical directions of the principals towards the educational staff. The 43 leaders of secondary education who took part in the research expressed their views and perceptions about the difficulties and limitations posed by the bureaucratic structure of the Greek education system and the positive elements of this particular way of organization. In addition, they describe the pedagogical directions they give to the rest of the staff in the context of the operation of the school units. The survey was

conducted in the summer and fall of 2020, the time when schools were called to adapt to the Covid-19 health crisis. The research problem of this work was the investigation of the possibilities of application of participatory administration in the wider centralized education system in combination with the instructions for the support of students and teachers. The analysis of qualitative data confirms the bureaucratic and centralized structure of the Greek educational system. However, in schools, principals apply different policies and practices to support the educational and student community depending on the needs and circumstances.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, participatory-democratic leadership, education system, centralism, Greece, management, administration

1. Introduction

All organizations have a specific organization and structure in order to operate more efficiently. The same is true about educational ones. The head of the school units is the principal who, among other things, is responsible for the execution of the administrative functions as well as for the guidance of the rest of the teaching staff (Waaland, 2016). The basic functions of the administration include planning, organization, management, decision making and control.

The term administration is relative to the achievement of goals through collaboration which enables teachers to improve teaching methods and enhance student performance (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Thus, education systems are made up of various elements such as human resources, schools, curricula and teaching methods that work together and interact to achieve set goals.

In the performance of their duties, school leaders are faced with many ethical dilemmas because they try to make complex decisions for the benefit of both staff and students (Cranston et al., 2006). Therefore, they are responsible for the smooth operation of the schools as well as for the management of the teaching staff and body of students. But the concept of leadership includes the element of cooperation. Indeed, most of its definitions refer to the deliberate influence of thoughts, attitudes and feelings on a group or organization so that other people voluntarily, willingly and with the right cooperation give their best to achieve effective goals (Yukl, 2009: 21; Brinia, 2008: 166).

Two basic systems of education management are centralized and decentralized. Max Weber, who is a representative of the classical school of management, considered bureaucracy as the most effective system for managing and coordinating a large number of people to achieve collective goals (Tenuto, 2014). The Greek education system is bureaucratic and centralized as it requires principals to follow government decisions (Raptis & Grigoriadis, 2017; Athanasoula-Reppa, 2008: 26). Thus, a large part of the educational decisions are taken by the central directorate of the Ministry of Education. At school unit level, the principal is the administrative body that, based on the powers and responsibilities assigned to it, is the hierarchical head of the administrative and educational staff (Saitis, 2007: 106). School principals are therefore called upon to implement the political decisions of their superiors.

2. The centralized system and bureaucracy in education

It has been repeatedly pointed out in the literature that the Greek educational system is strongly centralized, leaving limited margins of autonomy to the schools and the teachers who serve in them. (Andreou & Papakonstantinou, 1994; IACM / FORTH, 2003; Kazamias & Kassotakis, 1995; OECD, 2001). In addition, it includes a large number of laws and regulations that have always been copies of foreign legislation from the metapolitefsi (change of regime after the fall of dictatorship) with the educational reforms of 1976/1977 (Athanasoula-Reppa, 2008: 123). The above picture is also outlined in the OECD data, which shows that an extremely large percentage of 80% of the decisions made daily in education are set at a central level, while the percentage of decisions made in schools is particularly low even when they concern courses, staff and financial resource management (Dimopoulos et al., 2015; Koutsampelas, et al., 2019). All of the above leads us to think that such a centralized system would be valid in a country

with a totalitarian regime (Karadimou, 2021), where the centralized character sabotages the democratic decision-making (Ifanti, 2007), but in a Greece that embraces the principles of democracy, decisions should be taken in a specific social, economic and political context with the continuous interaction of all participants in the educational process (Dakopoulou, 2004).

After all, the increased educational needs of the modern school require an immediate change in the above data. Both the principal and the teachers of the school are called to detach from the role of mere observer in matters of administration and educational policy of their school and to perceive their role as co-administrators. In order to compensate for the centralism that characterizes the Greek educational system, the implementation of a participatory management model would be particularly helpful, which will have as a direct consequence the decentralization of the decision-making system (Sifakakis, et al., 2016). This change, in order to be successful, primarily requires a change in the principal's own management culture, who will now be able to get rid of stereotypes that make them the head of a school and feel that they too are part of a team which they are simply called to lead. This implies that it is necessary for them to move from the role of a central leader who gives orders, received from above, to a participatory leader who will act as a lever to motivate their school teachers to be actively involved in decision making (Meyers et al., 2001).

3.Participatory and democratic leadership

One of the leadership styles applied in educational organizations includes the participation of subordinates in the management process. More specifically, participatory leadership includes the division of the labor and the efforts of superiors to encourage the involvement of others in making important decisions (Yukl, 2009: 120). Thus, power and responsibility are shared among all members of the organization as they have the opportunity to take part in the functions of the administration with an emphasis on teamwork. Participatory leadership contrasts with the traditional principles of hierarchy and control. It is based on team effort as well as different views and beliefs (Kezar, 2001). Transformational leadership also contributes to the formation of a participatory climate as it includes teamwork which improves team cohesion (Dionne et al., 2004). The hallmarks of this leadership model are idealized influence, caring, inspirational motivation, and mental stimulation. This gives the rest of the staff the opportunity to actively take part in the training processes through the transformation process.

For some researchers, the process of involving their subordinates in the decision making involves democratic principles because the staff themselves are involved in the debate (Doyle, 2003). As Katsaros (2008) points out, participation involves democratic processes as long as the leader gives the other members the right to express their views or even to act in an advisory capacity, thus providing the right to free expression. On the other hand, democratic values contribute effectively to the management of conflicts and controversies (Begley & Zaretsky, 2013). Thus, the application of this particular style of administration contributes to the formation of a positive school environment. Every school organization sets goals that it tries to achieve through specific procedures. In a democratic leadership environment, educational goals are easier to achieve if a democratic culture prevails (Liggett, 2020).

In addition, the implementation of pedagogical leadership that emphasizes the development of human capital is proposed as an alternative to the bureaucracy of educational organizations. According to Sergiovanni (1998) through pedagogical leadership teachers work together as members of a community with an emphasis on caring for and improving student performance. In this case the teachers themselves are responsible for teaching and managing the students in the classroom. In addition, with the development of a collaborative culture, staff develop new responsibilities and skills by participating in planning and decision making (Petrou & Aggelidis, 2016).

4. Methodology

The purpose of the research is to investigate the perceptions of secondary education executives about the existing institutional framework that regulates their duties in conjunction with the administrative directions to teachers.

This is a case study because the data were collected by principals of public schools from the regions of Thessaly and Central Macedonia. The case study can be used to describe, explain or evaluate a phenomenon (Gall, Borg & Gall, 2014). In this work, the phenomenon under investigation is the existing bureaucratic-centralized character of the Greek educational system in combination with the leading directions of the principals during the educational practice. In addition, the sample consists of a group of secondary school principals.

The data collected were qualitative and emerged from semi-structured interviews. The qualitative method involves the collection and analysis of narrative and verbal data to investigate a specific phenomenon (Mills, Gay & Airasian, 2017: 21).

The interviews were conducted either in person or remotely via Skype, telephone or other means of supporting communication such as Social Media. For the better collection and subsequent processing of the data, the method of transcription was used. Only in two cases were the interviewees not willing to record the conversation and for this reason the necessary field notes were kept.

The role of principals in a secondary school unit is multidimensional: administrative, educational, that of training staff. In the present work, emphasis was first placed on the educational part and in particular on the pedagogical directions given by the supervisors to the teaching staff and those that co-decide with them.

5. Results

The data which collected and analyzed bellow, include the views and beliefs of the executives and the guidelines they are giving to their teaching staff. The centralization and the bureaucratic management system as well as the leading instructions have been analyzed at various levels.

From the analysis of the data, it appears that the manner of managing the bureaucracy that governs the Greek educational system is not the same and uniform by all leaders. Furthermore, the research illuminates the centralized and bureaucratic nature of education as the principals referred to it, though each presenting different facets of it. Their approaches differ depending

on the environment and the conditions of the school unit. In cases where the opportunity of teachers' participation in the administration is given, a positive school environment is formed in combination with the democratic values that prevail in this context. Teachers are given the opportunity to take part in administrative decisions. Finally, leaders seek to address problems and issues not foreseen by the central administration.

The bureaucratic way of organizing the education system influences the administrative decisions of the principals even in the management of the staff since the selection is not made by the leaders themselves. Consequently, the guidelines of the principals towards the teachers are influenced by the structure of the education because in many respects it determines the way of organization and operation of the school units.

As for the guidelines, the principals try to guide the teachers both personally and institutionally for the more effective management of the educational practice. Some of them go beyond their typical position as principals and try to give personalized instructions regarding students but also the behavior of teachers.

5.a The legal framework of administration in Greece

Interviewees were initially asked to answer a double and overlapping research question. They were asked, on one hand, whether they consider the existing legal framework to be ancillary to their work and, on the other hand, whether this framework provides them with freedoms or restrictions. Regarding the first part of the question, from the quality data collected, it becomes clear that the directors of Gymnasiums and Lyceums of the sample seem divided and it is possible that this arises as a result of the personality of each principal and the leadership style they adopt in their everyday educational practice.

The first group of principals is made up of proponents of the view that the legislative framework is bureaucratic, but they understand the broader framework behind this finding. Most likely, these leaders embrace the approach that bureaucracy has positive elements, which as a management model potentially ensures management neutrality and is associated with the organization of a successful management system (Zavlanos, 2003: 37-54). The following answers are indicative, such as the one given by Principal 1: *"In recent years, the bureaucracy has been tackled, that is, information systems have been created and it is not like in the past when various statistical things were demanded. There is the information system my school and a lot of things have been taken off my shoulders. We have saved time "* while the Principal 16 considers that: *" The legal framework is helpful but I think that the bureaucracy, this complicated system of laws, directions and orders, often complicates things and makes our life difficult, although it could give more initiatives either to us or to the parents association "*.

Another approach not far from the above position points out that how helpful a legislative framework is depends to a large extent on the principal's flexibility who is called to manage the respective school unit, since, as Pasiardi (2001:48) reasonably argues, the principal is called to bring balance between the expectations of his team members as leader and his superiors hierarchically. Characteristically, School Leader 6 states: *"To a large extent I would say that it is helpful but of course there are many shortcomings and gaps that often act as a brake*

regarding the goals you set", and continues *"the administration system is bureaucratic and many things find obstacles many times, the system works for some schools and for others it does not"*, Principal 7 also supports the above point of view claiming that *"The principal is bound by the laws, the advantage of this is that you can have peace of mind but this is not always good, because that is not the question"* an answer which expresses their inner desire to operate outside predefined framework in order to be more effective.

A second large group includes a number of principals who acknowledge the existence of bureaucracy in the legislative framework regarding the education administration but seem to find it helpful, as they seem to identify with the logic that a structured bureaucratic system contributes to the implementation of rules resulting in a sense of equality and justice (Hoy & Miskel, 2013).

Specifically, Leader 9 states that *"It is not bad to have a bureaucracy for our convenience, not as an obstacle."* However, these leaders also believe that Principal 12 argues that *"Better is the enemy of Good. The existing legal framework provides several possibilities"*, adding: *"but I believe that there is enough room to improve the institutional framework"*, Principal 13 points out that the legal framework *"is helpful but not fully adequate, it is helpful because we have something to rely on. Restrictions exist on everything"*, Principal 26 considers that the legal framework is: *"Okay, it does not hinder anything, nor is it authoritarian, I can say, to the point of not letting us govern properly"*. The positive attitudes towards the auxiliary role that the legislative framework plays in their administrative work continue from the following subjects, such as Principal 31 who states that *"Yes it is helpful, it is supportive we have no problem"*, Principal 35 who claims that *"We have a legal framework based on which we move, but we will also do things not outside the legal framework"* with 40 saying *"I think we are at a good level and the upcoming circulars are to facilitate"*, while finally Principal 38 recognizes that *"there is room for flexibility in recent years. It used to be more centralized. Everything is based on the law. There is security. The law has you covered. You rely on the legislation"*.

Many secondary school principals are adamant that the legal framework in Greece is highly bureaucratic and does not contribute to the smooth running of their school unit. Typical examples of the above approach are the views of the following principals of Gymnasiums and Lyceums such as the School Leader 2 who claims that *"Not at all. We have become instruments of the state. We are supposed to be managers here. We are not leaders"*, 10 who states that *"I would say that it is very bureaucratic while it is supposed to try to be helpful, in practice there are overlaps.... it consumes too much available time...."*. In the answer that follows, it becomes clear that the personal beliefs of each person can contribute to how they evaluate a situation with 15 characteristically stating that the education system *"is very centralized especially with the current government. It tries to regulate every aspect of school life in a very central way"*, 16 argues that *"it is a strict framework in which you can not be original and do what you want"* and 18 argues that the legal framework *"No it is not helpful at all is a bit atherosclerotic, bureaucratic in many things"*. Negative responses as to whether the legal framework is helpful continue with the views of other interviewees such as 21 who states that *"No, it does not help us. There are limitations and we can not realize our vision"*, 27 argues that *"No, because it is strictly legal"*, 29 considers that *"It is very negative, does not*

support the principal, the principal has only responsibilities, they are responsible for everything and nothing more, the director's duties are not well structured " , while 30 discourages the involvement of someone with management issues since according to them the legal framework " is a deterrent and creates many problems. It's really discouraging towards dealing with school administration issues, not at all helpful." By some the fact that they feel trapped to serve the specific legal framework without being able to escape at all from the narrow framework it defines is of great importance. After all, one of the main disadvantages of the bureaucratic system, as mentioned in the literature, is the reduced morale of teachers due to the impersonal orientation that prevails since its implementation does not provide incentives for teachers to contribute to the development of their team (Hoy & Miskel, 2013). Indicative to that are the answers provided by Principal 32 who claims that "No, for the principal who wants to do things it is restrictive", Leader 36 states that "I think the director has been made executor and enforcer of some laws to exercise administrative control regarding these laws". Following is a view of a principal who describes the administration in the education system in a firm manner, since as she claims "In general the framework regarding the administration is almost suffocating, the Greek state is strongly hydrocephalus and bureaucratic and centralized".

Concluding the views on the first part of the question, it is important to point out that the views of two survey participants are interesting as they characterize the system as bureaucratic but expressing a deeper difficulty of the greater system of Greek public administration which coincides with the view by Floratou (2005: 228) according to which the formal organization of the structure of public administration contributes to the lack of coordination and cooperation and the inability to deal with complex problems. Characteristically, Principal 11 states that "Anything that has to do with a civil servant is bureaucratic" and 7 "but if I want to bring someone I believe will benefit the children, I do not care at all if I will be accused. Like the entire public administration in Greece the system is bureaucratic and centralized. "

In the second part of the question concerning the freedoms and restrictions offered by the system, there is also a dichotomy that we consider to arise as a result of what one defines as taking responsibility and freedom of action. In particular, there is a portion of principals who recognize the limitations that exist but at the same time understand the necessity of their existence, taking into account that the concept of power is contained in the bureaucratic model and is defined as the voluntary compliance of subordinates with the orders of their superiors (Weber, 1947: 182). Typical are the following answers such as that of Principal 3 who states that: "Of course there are restrictions in the legislation and we must respect that. We can not do otherwise, we can not take an initiative on our own without an institutional basis. We follow the institutional framework ", Principal 6 states that " Of course there is room for freedom but also restrictions ", while 8 states that " Yes, I think it leaves us room for flexibility, yes it leaves us room, I can not say that there are restrictions ", with 9 considering that "Yes I think enough. Although I can not recall the whole legal framework, it does give initiatives."

A legislative framework is there to establish the appropriate framework in which the education management system should operate, but the human factor plays a dominant role in this whole endeavor and can differentiate it. Below are a number of responses from principals who tend to identify with this approach such as 10 who states that "There are freedoms, without of course

breaking the laws and decrees, I would not say it is flexible, but hierarchical control leaves room for the principal or the teachers' association to take initiatives ", 12 claiming that *" It goes without saying that there is room for flexibility, always respecting privacy as principals... .. there is room as long as there is will from the teaching staff "*, 18 considers that *" In Greece there is always room for flexibility, always relying on positive predisposition and mutual understanding "* involving in his answer elements from the value system of the Greek teacher, 19 argues that their freedom of action is based *" in everyone's positive predisposition, there is room for flexibility "* with the principal 21 identifying, stating that *"Yes, there is room for flexibility and it is in whether the principal wants to do it. They can expand their role and act not just as a bureaucrat "*, 34 emphatically stated that *"there is no limitation, there is self-action in the school, both as a principal and as school staff, there is a lot of flexibility, as long as there is will and purpose"* with 42 emphasizing the role that the school plays in this whole process since they consider that *" The principal has room for flexibility but to tell the truth this has to do with the personality of each principal. That is, the extent to which one deems they can be flexible in some cases while in other cases they must follow the letter of the law "*. There are many who openly state that the system leaves room for flexibility though not being able to completely escape from the basic structure that exists for everyone, with 26 characteristically stating that *"Okay it does not hinder something nor is it authoritarian to the point that it does not leave margins to manage properly, I can say "*, 27 argues that *" there is great potential to take initiatives but within the framework defined by the pyramid, there are margins of flexibility that still need to be lawful "*, with 28 stating that *" there are no restrictions, we apply legislation, we fully take advantage of any margins, where present "*, while two modest answers follow from a principal who claims that *" there is room for flexibility but I never move outside of the law "* and 31 considers that *" there is room for flexibility but our freedom is not unlimited "*.

On the other hand, there is the part of the directors who consider that their freedoms of action are limited and that the restrictions of the legal framework act as a brake on their administrative work, since they do not feel free to function as they would like, confirming the well-known term *bureaupathology* that indicates the negative effect of bureaucracy on the functioning of an organization (Michopoulos, 1997: 90). Typical are the following views as argued by 16 *"I think it is not very flexible, there are restrictions. You have to refer to your superiors, it does not leave you room for many initiatives. And I think it is a strict framework where you can not be original and do what you want "*, and 25 who considers that *"There are certainly a lot of limitations, which would help us to function more efficiently if they did not exist"*, 33 states that *" There are restrictions of course we can not do what we want, we always consult the laws and the Government Gazette which they send us which are constantly updated "* and 36 states that *" Yes. There are many restrictions, to do anything at school we need to see if it is approved by law. We do not have the flexibility, we make sure they do what the law says."* Finally, Leader 37 expresses their frustration with the framework as *"there should be more freedom for educators and especially for school principals to make moves"* acknowledging that there is *"some room for flexibility, very little, in fact when implementing a law we should take into account the human factor "*.

5b. Pedagogical directions of principals to the teaching staff

In relation to this issue, the principals of secondary school units refer to the instructions they give to the rest of the staff in the context of the operation of these units. Initially, they were asked to answer the question of whether there are guidelines for teachers and then to specify the "type" of said guidelines. The specific directions refer to the updates, encouragements and instructions given both during the pedagogical meetings and informally in the daily personal meetings with the fellow teachers. The "guidelines" of the principals concern both the educational support of the students and the professional behavior of the teachers.

More specifically, the leaders formulate the instructions that concern the students and aim at improving the educational process. These relate to the management of sessions for dealing with delinquent behaviors, as well as to the guidelines for the grading of foreign students who face problems in understanding the Greek language. For many principals, it is also a priority to inform teachers in relation to the reports of the competent bodies concerning children with special educational needs. For example, Principal 11 states: *"I consider it important to be informed about the reports of children with learning difficulties given by the Counseling and Support Center, so that teachers know the situation of each student before entering the classroom."* In this case, the principals find it important to inform the teachers regarding the learning difficulties that a student may face, in order to differentiate the teaching methods to achieve better learning outcomes. Principals encourage teachers to participate in training programs in schools as well as to study each child's individual file.

In schools where the concentration of vulnerable groups is increased, several leaders emphasize the psychological support of the student community. Family problems, according to the principal 22, often affect the students' psychology and consequently their school performance. *"We also talk a lot about encouraging and mentally supporting students. Children have come to have anxiety, we have children coming with problems from home. So, if we do not hold regular meetings, we do not perform any pedagogical action "*. In this case, the frequent pedagogical meetings of the teachers' association are considered important not only for the educational but also for the social support of the children.

Ministerial Decision 1340/2002, which defines the responsibilities and duties of the executives, states, among other things, that the principal of the school unit "supervises the teachers and coordinates their work". Thus, the teachers' association consists of the teachers and the principal who is in charge and the latter ensures its smooth operation. The cooperative and efficient operation of schools, moreover, presupposes the participation of all those involved (Saitis, 2008). In this context, the dialogue that develops in the pedagogical meetings of the teachers' association, offers important elements for the organization and the orderly administration of the school units. Principal 12 expresses her opinion on the assistance of teachers: *"In the 1st pedagogical meeting that will take place in a few days, the teaching and learning goals for the whole year will be set and the actions that will be developed will be determined step by step. Of course, during the year the association can take corrective action to achieve the goals. It's our strategic goal to have a democratic school."* In this school unit the leader gives the opportunity to the subordinates to actively participate and to co-formulate the

annual educational program that concerns the students. On the contrary, in another school unit, the principal 39 undertakes the entire educational program as she states *"In the pedagogical meetings that take place, I make the program and I decide on the actions that will be developed"*. The model of participatory leadership, after all, can help in preventing narcissistic choices and in making egocentric decisions (Oplatka, 2016). In schools where the collaborative and peer management model is applied, the guidelines are not imposed but are proposed by the principals. Principal 41 reports on their collaboration with the rest of the staff. *"Of course every day over our morning coffee we talk about specific cases and how we will deal with them. I work mainly in a "brainstorming" context. I wait for everyone to submit their thoughts and suggestions and in the end I prefer to compose them "*. According to the leaders who enable their colleagues to express their thoughts on the various school challenges, friendly and democratic cooperation influences the formation of a good school environment. However, the institutional framework regarding the duties and responsibilities of the principals limits the time pedagogical approach of the students. The team spirit of the teachers' association contributes to the solution of this problem. As Principal 1 points out: *"In our school, for example, in addition to the head of each department, we have appointed a second co-responsible person with the criterion that they know them well, say their mathematician, who is willing to listen to them, to confide in them about their problems to mediate between two children. It is very difficult to find half an hour to listen to the child, what they tell me and to help them because I have many responsibilities. That's how work is divided. "* At this point it should be noted that this is the largest general high school in Greece with over 400 students. The problem that arises due to the concentration of a large number of students in the school unit is solved through the camaraderie between principal and teachers.

On the other hand, the same atmosphere of camaraderie and provision of administrative directions to teachers was not observed in all educational organizations. On the contrary, some principals have expressed the view that they are not responsible for instructing teachers. In this case, the interviewees believe that they are more responsible for the management and execution of the administrative functions of the school unit in conjunction with the supervision of the implementation of the orders of the Ministry of Education. Principal 4, the principal of a general high school, reports on this subject: *"I do not give directions because every teacher has their own 'contract' behind them. I am responsible for administrative matters. I supervise their scientific work, whether for example they do the right planning of what they will teach, what they will do every week. My job is to see it, to monitor it."* The school principals who belong to this category therefore presented as a priority the execution of their duties in terms of administration and control in combination with the supervision of the daily work hours. That is, the time of arrival and departure from the classroom. Regarding the subjects of the material and the curricula, they themselves stressed that these are predetermined by the ministry and therefore there is no possibility of intervention. Most principals in this category emphasized their role as mediators between ministry and teachers. Thus, Principal 15 expresses the opinion: *"It is very central and especially with the current government which tries to regulate every aspect of school life in a very central way. This means that if I want to follow it literally I am covered. But it lacks a degree of autonomy. "*

The negative structure of the Greek educational system includes the constant change of staff as supported by Principal 35 *“Every year the central administration brings different teachers and this is negative. Imagine that every year I train staff to do the obvious. Everything is done by me and that requires effort and a lot of work.”* In this school unit, the human resources do not remain stable every school year, as a result of which the appropriate conditions for teamwork and cooperation cannot be created.

6. Conclusions

The fact that the present study is a case study on a limited number of participants from specific geographical regions of Greece does not allow us to make generalizations. Nevertheless, the sample reflects the reality that the directors of the Gymnasiums and Lyceums of the country are called to face every day. Everyone's personal beliefs, both political and social, are able to influence the views they express about the education system in the country. From the analysis of the above data we are led to the conclusion that opinions differ. For the majority of teachers, the current legal framework is considered bureaucratic, but each of them gives their own interpretation and different definition of the freedom it provides. After all, Greece is not the only country in which there are strong elements of bureaucracy. For example, there are countries such as the Czech Republic, China, Israel, Poland and South Africa where their education system has a similar structure and organization (Raptis & Grigoriadis, 2017).

The fact that the majority of the sample uses the term bureaucratic to describe the current context in education makes it clear that there is an urgent need to break away from this outdated notion. However, it is worth noting that quite a number of principals point out that the personality, will and ambition of a school principal are what can contain the centralized character of the education system. Regarding the limitations of the system, their existence is acknowledged by many principals according to whom the formalism and strictness of the system do not leave them the necessary scope for action. On the other hand, there are many who believe that there is room for flexibility if the principal and teachers want to take action but do not indicate in which areas.

On the other hand, regarding the directions of school leaders towards the staff, they concern the improvement of the learning and educational process in parallel with the supervision of their duties. In addition, secondary school principals strive to empower teachers by providing instruction to them. Thus, they "escape" from the formal and bureaucratic limits of the education system, allowing flexibility in their actions. Great importance is given to the psychological support of those students who face difficulties. In any case, the above data show that there has been some progress in recent years in the field of educational administration, but it is particularly important that the central administration contributes substantially and practically to the autonomy of schools, contributing through training to principals to understand the exchange of common goals and vision with their teachers (Leithwood, 2012). School principals understand the bureaucratic basis of the Greek education system. We are therefore led to the conclusion that the school should and must utilize the positive elements of a bureaucratic administration, ignoring its negatives in order to stand out as an organization that

defines its course and controls it through evaluation and reflection processes (Theofilidis, 2012: 70) aiming at greater efficiency.

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