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Educational Evaluation and Professional Development of Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the views of primary school teachers regarding the evaluation of their educational work. The main goal was to examine Primary school teachers' professional and training needs both for their development and improving quality of education. This is a comparative study exploring the views of teachers working in primary schools in Greece and Austria. To explore the above objectives, we examined the existing evaluation system in these two countries, the forms and criteria of teachers' evaluation and the impact of training programs on teachers' preparation. To conduct the research a qualitative approach was embraced. The research was carried out using semi-structured interviews with a sample of 10 teachers who were working in Primary education in Greece and Austria. The primary findings of this research revealed the significant influence of teachers' evaluation on their professional development both in Greece and Austria. Few teachers in our sample in Greece were against the use of evaluation for teachers' professional growth. Moreover, and according to the results of our study, the participation in training programs plays a pivotal role in enhancing and expanding the knowledge base of teachers both in Greece and Austria. The results showed the importance of training programs related to ICT, the usage of innovative and inclusive teaching methods as well as classroom management as some necessary actions for the effective use of evaluation targeting at the professional development of teachers.

Keywords: Educational Evaluation, Quality in Education, In-Service Training Programs, The Professional Development of Teachers

1. Introduction

In general evaluation and the criteria according to which teachers are evaluated it is the way according to which the educational system is assessed through time. According to this procedure and via the evaluation of teachers' professional work, an attempt is made to improve the quality of education. To be more precise, it has been noticed the conversion from summative or final evaluation to formative evaluation and the appraisal of teachers has been subordinated to their professional development. To date and according to the studies that have been conducted on an international level, the importance of evaluation has been examined on institutional manners and according to its necessity. Evaluation monitors the progress according to the achievements and the desired goals and objectives that have been set by the school unit. Moreover, assessment is a process that has been centered according to all the improvements whether we are talking about the quality of education or the effective faction of schools. Briefly

evaluation policy makers and researchers emphasize on school evaluation since it focuses on the quality control of the provided education, the quality assurance and the development of both teachers and students through the exploitation of evaluation practices. Therefore, evaluation has been presented as an important process with multiple purposes. The most significant are related to administrative and pedagogical improvements. Evaluation is, therefore, linked to improvements related to the quality of education provided by the assessment of all aspects of schools and its impact on the development of the educational system in total (Shamsa et al., 2018).

In similar terms, in-service training programs are integrated into lifelong education and professional development that aim to meet the educational needs of teachers. To put it in another way, in-service training programs called to fill the gaps of the initial university education and reorganize the acquired knowledge (Sakkoulis et al., 2017).

In this paper, we briefly provide information related to the research study, the necessity of the study and information about previous studies. The paper is followed by the setting of the research questions and the methodology that we adopted, the presentation and analysis of data and the discussion of the results.

2. Theoretical Framework

The conduct of this research is considered important since it has been found from our analysis that most of the studies in Greece and Austria focus on the professional development of teachers through training and not through evaluation. To put it another way, the already existing studies focus on the in-service training programs for the professional growth of teachers and not the knowledge and feedback that teachers can receive from the evaluation process. Therefore, the significance of this study arises from the absence of comparable research that investigates the impact of evaluation on teachers' professional development.

Previous studies underscore the critical role of teachers, with their evaluation being a key process in determining the extent to which they acquire the knowledge and skills essential for the effective execution of their professional duties (Kassotakis, 2019; Kapsalis & Rambidis, 2006; Apostolopoulos, 2014). Specifically, the evaluation of a teacher's work is intrinsically linked to the functioning of the school unit and serves as a mechanism for collecting information about the teachers, their instructional practices, and the overall learning environment. The main purpose is to enhance the quality of education provided and to foster the professional development of teachers, who play a direct role in students' development (Kontoleon & Kyriakaki, 2023). Furthermore, consistent with the findings of prior studies (Jiang, Spote & Luppescu, 2015; Tuma, Hamilton & Tsai, 2018; Steinberg & Sartain, 2015; Taylor & Tyler, 2012), teachers' evaluation is closely tied to the feedback process, which is considered particularly valuable for improving instructional practices.

Evaluation, both in Greece and Austria, can take two forms depending on the role of the evaluator in each case. Specifically, evaluation is divided into internal and external, with the design of the evaluation procedure forming part of the annual collective planning of a school unit's educational work. This planning involves the setting of educational objectives, and the development of corresponding collective actions aimed at addressing various issues and ultimately improving the quality of educational delivery (Institute of Educational Policy, 2022; Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria, 2021).

However, it is important to emphasize, that in Austria, evaluation falls under a broader framework of quality assurance in education. According to the German term *Qualitätsmanagementsystems für Schulen* (QMS), evaluation is a process of information gathering that does not solely focus on teachers but encompasses the entire school unit. The objective of evaluation is to set specific goals for managing the daily functioning of the school and fostering its development to ensure a higher-quality educational system. This is achieved under certain conditions such as the establishment of specific developmental goals by each school unit which are regularly assessed based on data that examines the achievement of these goals. A higher-quality educational system is subsequently distinguished by identifying the needs of teachers to promote their professional development and knowledge acquisition. Within this framework, the development of collaborative relationships and partnerships with internal and external stakeholders is encouraged to facilitate the active exchange of information (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria, 2021). Finally, the criteria used to evaluate teachers in both countries pertain to pedagogical and instructional functions, administrative duties and professional

development, which, in the case of Austria, is further supported through the cultivation of relationships with external organizations for the exchange of ideas among educators (Institute of Educational Policy, 2022; Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research of Austria, 2021).

3. Methodology

In this research, a qualitative approach was adopted, utilizing interviews as the primary research tool. The interviews were conducted between December 2023 and January 2024. The research questions explored were as follows:

1. What are teachers' perspectives on the institution of evaluation?
2. Does evaluation contribute to teachers' professional development, and if so, how?

The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling. Specifically, the sample consisted of ten active primary school teachers from Austria and Greece. The selection criteria for the teachers included having undergone evaluation in their professional careers. More precisely, the sample was composed of five teachers from Austria and five from Greek primary schools, all of whom had been evaluated, held a master's degree, and had a minimum of two years of professional experience. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom, scheduled in coordination with the participants, and recorded with their informed consent.

For data analysis, qualitative content analysis was employed. The aim of the analysis was to uncover meanings related to the participants' views and their interactions within their respective educational environments. More specifically, we adopted the qualitative content analysis, which focuses on the characteristics of language as a medium of communication, emphasizing on the content or meaning of the text (McTavish & Pirro, 1990). In line with the qualitative nature of this study, we adopted a conceptual categorization approach for analyzing the interviews, guided by our research questions. After transcribing the interviews and converting them into written text, content analysis was applied, and the recording unit upon which the analysis was based was established. In this context, the sentence was chosen as the unit of analysis. Additionally, an inductive approach was employed to construct the conceptual categories, where categories emerged during the examination of the research data, aiming for direct alignment with the research questions (Patton, 2002). Finally, the codes derived from this process led to the formation of the final conceptual categories for our research.

The categories we established to present and analyze the data, as well as to address our research questions, are as follows:

1. Teachers' views on evaluation.
2. The contribution of evaluation to teachers' professional development and the improvement of student learning.
3. The role of training in teachers' professional development.
4. Proposed methods for enhancing teachers' professional development.

Finally, for the presentation and interpretation of the research findings, a comparative analysis was conducted between the data collected regarding the views of teachers in Greece and Austria on the role of evaluation and in-service training in their professional development. The results of the study were also compared with previous studies related to teachers' evaluation and training, as well as their significance to teachers' professional growth.

4. Presentation and Analysis of Data

The findings of our research indicate that evaluation positively contributes to the professional development of teachers in both countries. The sample teachers expressed their views as follows:

"I am in favor of evaluation because I believe it does not harm anyone, but rather contributes to our professional development. Evaluation motivates you to learn new things and keeps you alert." (P1)¹

"My view of evaluation is positive. Evaluation helps me improve my teaching methods and adopt new techniques suggested by the school advisor." (P2)

¹ The coding we selected concerns the educators in the sample from Greece and Austria, using Latin characters, which is followed throughout the flow of the research data. Latin letters and the number "x" represent the unique numeric code that corresponds to a specific educator each time.

"I believe teacher evaluation is quite important as it determines the quality of education and offers opportunities for improving student learning. Additionally, through evaluation, teachers acquire practical knowledge, which they might lack due to age...teachers should be evaluated." (L3)

It is also worth noting that the question regarding teacher evaluation had to be adapted to the existing quality assurance system in Austria. Participants in Austria indicated:

"Some teachers feel pressure... but through the quality assurance program, we set the goals each school wants to achieve during the academic year. This system helps schools develop. It was created because the state wants schools to progress with a clear purpose. Furthermore, I would say that the quality assurance system does not exclusively target teacher development but focuses on the school's overall growth, aiming to transform it into a modern organization that meets its students' needs." (K2)

"I believe it's a way for schools to continuously evolve rather than remain stuck in outdated practices. Schools work toward achieving higher quality goals, which they may not always meet but can always review to assess their progress." (P4)

The responses from both Greek and Austrian teachers reflect a shared recognition of the importance of evaluation and the feedback it provides for their professional development and the evolution of their teaching practices. This finding is consistent with the research by Sofou & Dieronitou (2015), which highlighted the positive impact of feedback on teachers' preparation. Similarly, Kirkilianidou & Konstantinou (2016) found that teachers in their study supported evaluation to improve and upgrade the educational system.

In Austria, our findings are corroborated by the research of Wiesner, Schreiner, Breit, & Lücken (2020), which classified evaluation as a process for achieving desired changes in school development. However, this contrasts with the findings of Brauckmann & Böse (2018), where teachers perceived evaluation as an intrusive measure. Additionally, a limited number of teachers in our study expressed challenges in utilizing the evaluation results, with statements like:

"Feedback from the evaluation may affect teachers. You try to correct the negatives, but we don't know how to utilize it." (P1)

"I'm not against evaluation, but sometimes it's difficult to make use of the results..." (P1)

Moreover, a group of teachers pointed to the deficiencies within schools in Greece and the conditions under which they are evaluated, expressing concerns such as:

"I am against the way evaluation is conducted today. I've been teaching for many years, but this is my first time being evaluated... Evaluation makes me anxious, and I'm not sure if the evaluator is the right person for the job." (P3)

"Evaluation is a waste of time. It causes anxiety to have an evaluator in the classroom, and school deficiencies are not considered during the evaluation process." (P5)

These findings align with the research by Moutzouri-Manousou & Daskalopoulos (2005) and Dounavi & Zbainos (2020), which revealed that teacher evaluation is often associated with stress and professional insecurity. Negative evaluations are seen as undermining teachers' capabilities. The same studies highlight the impact of inadequate resources on teachers' preparation for instruction.

Regarding the contribution of evaluation to professional development and student learning, most of the teachers in our sample held positive views. Specifically, they mentioned:

"Teacher evaluation by the school advisor allows teachers to learn more about new teaching techniques and better organize their lessons. As a result, teaching improves, and student learning outcomes also improve." (P5)

This finding is supported by the studies of Schildkamp, Visscher, & Luyten (2009), Taylor & Tyler (2012), Hallinger, Heck, & Murphy (2014), and Steinberg & Sartain (2015), which offer evidence that evaluation can enhance teachers' skills and, in the long run, improve student learning. However, a small group of teachers placed more emphasis on personal development rather than evaluation-driven improvement. One teacher stated:

"Evaluation has nothing to do with students. The evaluator was in the class for only two hours. I wouldn't change anything about my teaching just because someone observed me for two hours. Moreover, we are not able to put

everything we learn into practice, the feedback we get back. The evaluator doesn't have more knowledge, just more experience. It would be better to receive a piece advice rather than be evaluated." (P3)

Nevertheless, the research of Konstantinou & Konstantinou (2017) presents teacher development as a collective activity that can be achieved through evaluation. Similarly, Vergidis (2001) emphasizes the interdisciplinary and exploratory nature of evaluation, which not only focuses on individuals but also on educational programs and school units.

Additionally, the role of professional development in teachers' growth was examined. Greek teachers in the sample highlighted dissatisfaction as it concerns the training programs offered, with four out of five indicating that these programs do not meet their actual needs. They emphasized the role of the school principal in selecting training programs that align with the staff's needs. One teacher stated:

"Professional development is a concern. The programs are inadequate because they are not offered frequently enough in schools. It depends on how often the principal allows teachers to attend training programs. I'm not satisfied. The programs are outdated and irrelevant, ignoring topics like sexual education and digital skills." (P2) However, one teacher acknowledged the importance of introductory training, citing skills workshops as an example. These findings are consistent with the research of Asimaki, Mylonopoulou, & Vergidis (2016), who emphasized in the value of initial training for teachers' professional development, while also expressing dissatisfaction with the extent to which their needs were met. Our data confirmed that the respondents felt their training needs were only partially or not at all fulfilled.

In contrast, Austrian teachers expressed satisfaction with the variety and practical nature of the training programs available to them:

"I enjoy the training programs. Usually, you can immediately put everything you have learned into practice. I often link this knowledge to difficult classroom situations or students I had trouble collaborating with in the past and find immediate solutions." (L3)

"There's a wide range of training programs in Austria, so you can choose what suits you. As a result, 80%-90% of the knowledge you gain is quite practical and can be applied immediately in the classroom. Professional development is more practical than what we learned at university." (K2)

Finally, regarding teachers' suggestions for their professional development, Greek participants focused on training and lifelong learning, while Austrian teachers emphasized in peer collaboration and the development of collegial relationships. Teachers noted:

"I would suggest a source of information such as moving on with postgraduate studies. I am in favour of lifelong learning." (D3)

"I enjoy exchanging ideas with my colleagues. They know me well, as well as my teaching style. Their informed feedback, considering my personality, helps my professional growth. I like sharing ideas with them and learning from them." (P4)

"I would suggest exchanging information between colleagues and teachers from other schools." (K2)

5. Discussion-Conclusion

The analysis of the research data revealed that evaluation contributes significantly to the professional development of teachers, findings that align with previous studies (Sofou & Dieronitou, 2015; Kirkilianidou & Konstantinou, 2016; Wiesner, Schreiner, Breit & Lücken, 2020). Teacher training also plays a crucial role in professional development, with participants in the sample placing particular emphasis on introductory training. This finding is corroborated by the research of Asimaki, Mylonopoulou, & Vergidis (2016). Additionally, teachers highlighted the importance of lifelong learning and the exchange of ideas among colleagues as contributing factors to their professional growth.

Evaluation and training are presented as the most prevalent forms of professional development, both of which play a decisive role in the advancement of teachers and, consequently, in improving student learning outcomes. However, we observed notable differences in the views of teachers from Greece and Austria, particularly regarding

the practicality of training programs. In Austria, the percentage of influence that training has on teachers' development appears to have a positive impact on their preparation. Conversely, while Greek teachers consider training as an essential part of educational activities for professional development, questions arise concerning the ability of training programs to meet their needs (Sakkoulis et al., 2017). Specifically, the Greek teachers underlined the need to set goals for improving training programs in order to provide knowledge that aligns with the contemporary challenges educators face. Teachers' training in Greece seems to be constrained by ineffective frameworks, as professional development programs are not offered frequently enough and are not linked to the actual needs of teachers.

With respect to identifying teachers' professional development needs, both groups underscored the necessity for programs that focus on the integration of technology into classroom instruction, the use of innovative and inclusive teaching methods, and effective classroom management. In conclusion, the evidence suggests that, under the right conditions, evaluation and training can serve as dynamic tools for teachers' professional development.

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