"Ἔχεις μοι εἰπεῖν, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἃρα διδακτὸν ἢ ἀρετή; ἢ οὖ διδακτὸν ἄλλ', ἀσκητὸν; ἢ οὔτε ἀσκητὸν οὔτε μαθητὸν, ἄλλα φύσει παραγίγνεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ ἄλλω τινὶ τρόπῳ.
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The scope of the MEJER is broad, both in terms of topics covered and disciplinary perspective, since the journal attempts to make connections between fields, theories, research methods, and scholarly discourses, and welcomes contributions on humanities, social sciences and sciences related to educational issues. It publishes original empirical and theoretical papers as well as reviews. Topical collections of articles appropriate to MEJER regularly appear as special issues (thematic issues).

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ABSTRACT

Given that a) education is the key for the socioeconomic development of a country, b) school leadership is a key factor in the effective school performance and c) a school principal is effective when possesses administrative knowledge and skills, the analysis of administrators’ multifaceted roles is of particular importance for a deeper understanding of the professional and leadership development in education. The purpose of this paper is to investigate – through empirical analysis- the current degree of the Greek primary school principals’ administrative professional development and to assess their natural growth in administrative matters related to the operation of their schools. Results showed that knowledge and managerial abilities is the most important factor for the motivation of the teaching staff and the development of a positive and harmonious school climate. Moreover, the Greek school principals seem to satisfy the above factor.

Keywords: primary school principal, attitude, competence, administrative professional development.

1. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

The institution of school management is of special interest at international level in terms of the research into, as well as the professional development and the training of, school principals - whether in primary or secondary education. This interest can be attributed to the scientific, socioeconomic and political developments apparent at all levels of social life, as well as to the fact that the contemporary school is characterized by much more complex management issues, in comparison with its earlier counterpart (Bush, 2008; Harris, 2005; Leithwood, et.al., 2004)

The following constitute some of the responsibilities/duties that a school
primary school principal performs on a daily or weekly basis:

- He/she supervises teachers and coordinates their work,
- He/she monitors and directs teachers in order to respond to their commitments in a timely manner,
- He/she supports, motivates and mentors the teachers - especially the novices - and takes initiatives of an educational and pedagogical nature,
- He/she is in constant communication with parents,
- He/she organizes meetings with the school staff, etc.

Clearly, such a demanding working environment and society's ever-increasing expectations make the role of the school principal critical. The smooth operation of the school depends to a large degree on the principal's efficacy (Bush, 2008; Dean, 1995; Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Harris, 2010; Levine, 2005; Saiti, 2012). A leader should:

- have a vision for the school unit that manages and ensures the commitment of the teaching staff in order to achieve common objectives,
- act as a model for the teachers,
- create an appropriate communication climate that encourages the free expression of opinions and ideas, and offers constant feedback, and
- act as mediator for students, teachers, parents and the authorities.

The above-mentioned responsibilities present several areas of the multifaceted activities of the school principal (Saitis, 2007, Mlekanis, 2005). Of course, a school principal can successfully respond to these responsibilities only if they possess the appropriate knowledge (general, specialized and managerial) and skills (technical, human, intellectual) (Saitis, 2007:74). The construction of a good communication climate, for example, does not only derive from the innate talent and the personality of the school principal, but very often is the result of constant training on management and administration issues. Indeed, in order to ensure effective school leaders several steps are required, including selection on merit and appropriate & continuous management training.

Despite the importance of school administration, in Greece it does not seem to be as effective as it should be, unlike in other developed western countries [e.g. England (Howson, 2005; Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Nika, 2008), Australia (Gamage & Ueyama, 2004; Barty, et al, 2005), U.S., Sweden and Canada (Bush & Jackson, 2002)]. This is due to the following:

- school principals’ selection is based on criteria characterized by institutional instability (Andreou, 1997),
- it is questionable whether selection boards composed of education officials and elected representatives have the necessary knowledge and expertise in areas of educational administration (Saitis, 2007; Nika, 2008; Saiti, 2012; Saitis & Eliophotou-Menon, 2004),
- there is no exact and detailed job description (definition of responsibilities, duties, working conditions, etc.) and job specification (identification of the
knowledge, specific skills and competencies required for the particular post). Since qualifications such as a doctorate or a masters degree are not designed to provide an indication of the administrative capabilities of a candidate teacher / principal, as a result, the candidates selected are not necessarily the most appropriate candidates for the particular administrative post (Saitis, 2007; Saitis, 2012)

- great emphasis is placed on the candidates’ years of service, even if it is scientifically accepted that an effective manager is neither the oldest nor the best teacher, but the one with the knowledge and skills required for a managerial position (Saitis, 2007; Saiti, 2012),

- The vast majority of school leaders lack special training in modern management (Zavlanos, 1981; Saiti & Michopoulos, 2005; Saiti, 2012), even though school administration is of strategic importance for the effective operation of the school unit. Of course, some efforts towards the training of directors in education have been made (Saitis et al, 2001) [such as the establishment of the School of Secondary Education teachers in 1910, the bills of 1913, the establishment of the Further Education School for Secondary Education Teachers (SELME) in 1978, the Further Education School for Primary Education Teachers (SELDE) in 1979, the Regional Training Centres (PEK) in 1985, and the proposals of various committees]. However, their fragmentary character and operation - due to the lack of continuity and perspective - did not allow the integration of these initiatives into a long-term plan for training.

Based on the above, this paper aims to explore the degree of administrative competence of school leaders in primary education in Greece, considering that school leadership is a very important factor for the effective functioning of school units. The research aims to:

- explore Greek school principals’ attitudes and perceptions towards their administrative professional
- reach documented conclusions and proposals, according to survey results, and highlight the importance of developing competent school leaders for the smooth and efficient operation of primary schools.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND THE NEED FOR SCHOOL LEADERS’ DEVELOPMENT

The role of the school manager is essential for the effective functioning of the school. Although school principals are at the lowest rung in the administrative organization of education, they assume an important communicative role, particularly in providing a link between the senior leaders in educational administration and school teachers. While the senior hierarchy designs the educational policies for schools, it is the school principal who has the responsibility for their effective implementation.
Educational innovation and the achievement of the objectives depend on the selection of the most skilled school leaders. Indeed, in a properly organized educational system, the school principal plays a key role in handling the human factor (Bettignies, 1975; Saiti, 2012; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Hopkins & Stern, 1996; Whitaker, 2003). Even if an educational policy is carefully and wisely designed, it cannot attain the expected outcomes if the most competent persons are not selected for school management (Saitis, 2007; Harris, 2005; Saiti, 2012).

The achievement of the teaching and learning goals, for example, requires the teaching staff to adopt a philosophy that emphasizes the usefulness and necessity of knowledge and not merely prepare the students for examinations. The philosophy adopted and applied by a teacher in the classroom reflects the belief of what education is. This belief and interpretation of the nature of education determines a teacher’s approach towards the teaching and learning process, the definition of the learning objectives, the selection of specific teaching methodology and their relationship with the students. As teachers’ approaches vary, it is the school principal who provides the necessary guidance to the teaching staff, so that they can better understand the pedagogical and social conditions of their particular school.

Ideally, an ongoing school manager development plan would be provided by the central administration of education to school principals, in order to cultivate the skills (intellectual, technical, etc.) that will boost their professional efficiency (Bush, 2008; Fullan, 2001, 2006; Saiti, 2012). In view of the above, the following question arises: Why is school leader development so crucially important?

First of all, the teacher/school principal is called to perform administrative tasks that are completely different in nature from the teaching task. The school principal also has to work harmoniously with all members of the school community, to communicate with senior management bodies of education, the students’ parents and the various social organizations such as the local authorities, etc., to effectively address potential conflicts between the teaching staff, and take decisions related to the smooth running of the school, etc. responsibilities which are not related or limited to the pedagogical tasks.

Secondly, the school environment is characterized, as already mentioned, by complexity, due to the pluralism of beliefs and attitudes of the collective bodies in education.

Thirdly, the need for the proper implementation of the educational legislation in schools presupposes administrative knowledge and skills, which calls for specific training on those aspects.

Finally, the need for effective state schools demands the enrichment of school leaders’ knowledge with the latest developments in management, technology and the social environment. This requires "an additional body of training" for school leaders (Xochelis, 2005:99), essential for a successful response to the needs of the modern school. In other words, in addition to their development as teachers, in parallel, it is necessary to further their development as managers (Fullan, 2001:261).

Summarising, it can be claimed that the administrative development of school
leaders is of strategic importance since the relationship between principals and the school working environment is constantly being redefined.

The key role of school leadership in the effective functioning of schools and the development of education as a whole is clear and undeniable. Successful school management, however, is accomplished only if the school leaders possess administrative efficiency, the acquisition of which should not be an arbitrary process but be the result of systematic training. For a development programme addressing school leaders to be effective, it must be methodical and tailored to the administrative needs of the trainees. Certain parameters should be set in place to facilitate the success of such a programme:

- Participation in a training programme should be driven by internal incentives (Koontz et al, 1982).
- The content of training should be adjusted to the needs of school leaders, since the conscious participation "stems from the relationship between the individual (school leader) and the given object of learning (Noye & Piveteau, 1999:104).
- Theory must be consistent with practice, i.e. training projects should include tasks for practical application, since the two modes of learning (experiential learning and theoretical presentation) “are complementary to each other” (Boukis, 1990:14).
- School principals’ trainers should be experts, they should have an excellent, thorough knowledge of their subject area, and be capable of identifying their trainees’ real needs.
- The teaching methodology should be based on the pedagogical principles of adult education (Kakavoulis, 1992, Galanis, 1993). School leaders should be treated as "capable, experienced, responsible, mature and balanced individuals” (Rogers, 1999:76).

Finally, any attempt at designing educational policy to accommodate training programmes for school leaders should first secure the necessary financial support for their implementation and focus on a) the proper structure and content of the programmes, based on a thorough study and research, and b) the evaluation of the processes and the outcomes of these programmes.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

A survey was conducted to collect primary source data for the paper. Questionnaires were administered to 480 primary school heads (including deputies). Of those issued, 317 (response rate: 66.04%) were completed sufficiently for analysis. Greece administratively is divided into 13 regions and 54 prefectures which include municipalities and communes. Based on the latter, the sample would cover all the 13 regions of Greece. The first section of the questionnaire includes school size, the location of the respondents’ school as well as personal and professional characteristics of the primary school leaders. The second section of the
questionnaire asked respondents to reply to 31 statements that expressed perceptions relating to their current managerial abilities. The third section of the questionnaire asked respondents to reply to 32 statements that expressed perceptions relating to the significance of the managerial abilities. This particular questionnaire used in the current research was implemented in the Galbraith, Sisko & Guglielmino (1997). Hence, the same research instrument was adopted for this research with slight amendments. Primary school leaders were asked to rate the degree of actual or expected satisfaction by using the following scale: 1 = disagree very much, 2 = disagree moderately, 3 = average, 4 = agree moderately, 5 = agree very much. The statistical analyses used in this research provide the principal components for factor analysis and this method was applied to the original statements of current managerial abilities and the significance of the managerial abilities included in the questionnaire. All variables (statements) included in the last two sections of the questionnaire have been reduced to a number of factors which were rated by respondents. Thus, the factor analysis resulted in groups of statements in both cases. The specific research hypotheses are the following:

H1 Primary school principals in Greece face difficulties in exercising their administrative tasks.

H2 Primary school principals in Greece lack the necessary administrative competence to respond successfully to their tasks.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Demographic characteristics

From the sample of 317 primary school leaders in question, 66.6% were men and 33.4% were women. According to the results, 42.3% of the respondents stated that their schools were up to six post, 55.5% were from 7 post to 12 post and only 2.2 were above 13 post. Over half of the respondents 56.8% stated that their schools are located in urban areas, 25.6% in rural and 18.0% in semi-urban areas. The vast majority of the respondents (89.0%) were married and 11.0% were unmarried. Regarding the age of the respondents 53.0% were between 41 and 50 years of age, 31.9% were above 51 years, 8.5% were between 31 and 40 while 6.6% were below 30 years. To the question whether or not primary school leaders in question had a second degree or certificate in a different field, the majority 44.5% had stated that they followed a training course and hence received a certificate in a particular subject, 27.1% had received a second degree in a different field, 10.4% had followed postgraduate studies and only 1.3% and 4.7% had received a PhD and specific training on school management, respectively.

In terms of total teaching experience, overall, 58.7% had between 21 and 30 years’ in public primary education, 18.0% of the respondents had between 11 and 20 years’, 15.1% had over 30 years’ teaching experience in public primary education and 8.2% had between 1 and 10 years’ relevant experience.

The majority of the respondents in question, 77.7%, had served at the same
school between 1 and 10 years, 16.4% had served between 11 and 20 years’, 6.3% had served between 21 and 30 years and just 0.3% had served at the same school for over 31 years.

With particular reference to school managerial experience as a school head 92.1% had stated between 1 and 10 years, 6.9% had between 11 and 20 years and only 0.9% had over 20 years managerial experience as a school head. Regarding the managerial experience as deputy head, 93.7% had served as a deputy head between 1 and 5 years, 5.0% had served between 6 and 10 years and only 1.3% had served as deputy head over 10 years. Finally regarding their managerial experience as a head of an Education Office and as a director of an Education Direction only 0.3% in both cases had served below 3 years.

4.2. Main factors of current managerial abilities

The application of factor analysis resulted in the extraction of six factors that have an Eigenvalue above 1. Of these, seven factors were selected (see Table 1) which provide an explanation for 62.076% of the total sample. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient was 0.938. Based on the empirical findings, the following factors are extracted:

- The first factor is related to educators’ work stimulation and implementation of the school climate. These were: Ability to carefully hear both educators and students; Staff motivation; Managing and Solving conflicts among teaching staff with mutual agreement; Managing effectively crisis in school; Understanding educators personal needs; Ability to implement positive culture in school; Ability to make rational decisions; Awareness the techniques needed in changing school climate; Ability to plan and allocate duties to the deputy head.

- The second factor is related to planning and programming school activities. These were: Plan the school activities for the whole school year; Ability to range in a hierarchical way the school needs; Plan and allocate of out-school activities among educators; Design school activities; Ability to prepare and use an induction plan for new appointed educators; Recognition of professional development of the teaching staff.

- The third factor is related to managing school financing. These were: Understanding the procedure of the management of school economics; Development communication with parents; Awareness of the school financing process.

- The fourth factor is relevant to capabilities of communication and appraisal. These were: Ability to attract grants and in the school; Plan and carried out appraisal; Design and implement effective interviews; Ability to plan an effective program of activities with the local community; Exercise effective monitoring among the school members; Understanding of the determinants for self and career development;
4.3. Main factors of significance of the managerial abilities

The application of factor analysis resulted in the extraction of six factors that have an Eigenvalue above 1. Of these, seven factors were selected (see Table 2) which provide an explanation for 64.54% of the total sample. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient was 0.951. Based on the empirical findings, the following factors are extracted:

- The first factor is related to educators’ work stimulation and the implementation of school climate. These were: Ability to carefully hear both educators and students; Staff motivation; Managing and Solving conflicts among teaching staff with mutual agreement; Managing effectively crisis in school; Understanding educators personal needs; Ability to implement positive culture in school; Ability to make rational decisions; Awareness the techniques needed in changing school climate; Ability to plan and allocate duties to the deputy head.

- The second factor included capabilities relevant to communication and appraisal. These were: Ability to attract grants and in the school; Plan and carried out appraisal; Design and implement effective interviews; Ability to plan an effective program of activities with the local community; Exercise effective monitoring among the school members; Understanding of the determinants for self and career development.

- The third factor is related to understanding school legal and administrative issues. These were: understanding the administrative principles; Understanding the administrative theories; Understanding the educational legislative framework; Understanding school legal issues.

- The fourth factor is related to technical and librarian capabilities. These were: Organising and managing the school archives; Organising and managing the school library; Ability to support the new teaching substructure; Effective use of the Information, Communication and technologies.

- The fifth factor is related to planning and programming school activities. These were: Plan the school activities for the whole school year; Ability to range in a hierarchical way the school needs; Plan and allocate of out-school activities among educators; Design school activities; Ability to prepare and
use an induction plan for new appointed educators; Recognition of professional development of the teaching staff.

- Finally, the sixth factor is related to managing school financing. This factor included three statements and these were: Understanding the procedure of the management of school economics; Development communication with parents; Awareness of the school financing process.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that knowledge and managerial abilities are considered to be the most important factors for the motivation of teaching staff and the development of a positive and harmonious school climate. Moreover, the Greek school principals seem to satisfy the above factors.

This paper has underlined the key issue of recruitment and selection while the empirical results revealed that the Greek school leaders consider the most significant factors to be the successful exercise of their duties, the appropriate knowledge and capabilities, the motivation of the teaching staff and the cultivation of a positive and harmonious school climate. At the same time, the research results showed that the Greek school leaders do indeed have the appropriate knowledge and abilities both to motivate school teachers and to create the supportive conditions in which to develop a creative and sustainable school climate. All these factors would inspire the school members to seek the maximum benefit from their education, thus helping the school to achieve its aims.

With reference to the second factor of significance, which concerns the design and planning of the school activities, school principals did not consider it to be important since factor analysis showed the second most significant factor to be managerial abilities, which are closely linked to the communication and appraisal of the teaching staff. Certainly, the cooperation of all members of the educational process, the coordination of all school activities and the school climate demand a smooth two-way communication process among educational members (Henkin, et.al. 2000; Middlewood & Abbott, 2012; Tourish & Robson, 2003, 2006). Irrespective of how the educational process is considered, a receptive learning environment is based upon good communication. A sound understanding of communication substantially facilitates the functioning of the school since, as a social phenomenon, communication is the principal factor of all interpersonal relations among the members of a typical organization.

In addition, communication is closely connected with the appraisal of teaching staff since appraisal (among other issues) requires the manager to liaise with staff members in order to objectively ascertain their scientific and pedagogical training needs. Of course, it is not always easy for a school leader to determine the most effective way for teachers to transfer knowledge and skills to students since the factors that affect human behaviour are rather complicated. However, among the essential managerial abilities for a school leader are the skills to effectively manage the human resources available (Bush, 2008; Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Harris, 2005;
Saiti, 2012).

According to the empirical results the third factor of significance concerns an understanding of the school’s legal and administrative issues. Indeed, knowledge of the school’s legal issues and efficient administrative problem solving were considered the third most significant for the Greek school leaders. Moreover, the research results showed that the Greek school leaders are capable of managing school finances.

This result can be attributed to the fact that school management is a complex process where, together with all their didactical responsibilities, school leaders are also mainly responsible for the management of school mail and the correct implementation of the laws governing the school. This renders many of their activities and the decision-making processes being based upon the function of legislation. Hence, for a school leader, as well as key personal characteristics such as their spirit of cooperation, etc., their knowledge and continuous information on school legislation is also considered to be essential, especially in the Greek context where many changes are taking place.

Finally, as concerns the training necessary for Greek school leaders, the fourth factor of significance, according to the results, was their technical abilities in terms of school organization and the functioning of school libraries. Indeed, the organization and the functioning of a school library is of crucial importance especially if one considers that the responsibility for its day-to-day running lies with the librarians whereas the coordination and management activities are restricted to the role of the school leader.

To conclude, the empirical results indicate that Greek school leaders appropriately rate both the significant abilities and the requirements needed to maintain those abilities in terms of managerial training. However, it seems that Greek school leaders do not appropriately rate the significance of the crucial managerial function of design and programming. This can be attributed to the fact that, due to the high and heavy centralization of the Greek school system, a school principal does not have the power to plan and programme school matters and activities, even for the short-term, since this managerial function is mainly implemented by the central administration. In fact, school management in Greece is mainly limited to distributing the didactical and out-of-school activities among educators. Even though this managerial function is essential for the effective performance of public education, planning and programming in this domain in Greece, it seems to be relatively low, both in terms of development and operation.

In the particular case of Greek public education, and given the difficult economic situation that Greece has been facing for the last two years, there is a real urgency for continuous and systematic planning and programming in education so as to minimize inefficiencies and most importantly to achieve the development necessary to improve the prospects for Greece’s students in the highly competitive environment. Ultimately, the sustainability of any system can be achieved only through systematic, composed, coherent and continuous strategic planning in order
to maximize the development and the productiveness of its individual parts.

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**APPENDIX**

Table 1. Variables included in each factor and factor Loadings

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<th>Factors</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Loadings</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factor 1</strong> Educators’ work stimulation and</td>
<td>Ability to carefully hear both educators and students (19)</td>
<td>748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the implementation of school climate.</td>
<td>Staff motivation (20)</td>
<td>699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing and Solving conflicts among teaching staff with mutual agreement</td>
<td>793</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing effectively crisis in school (2)</td>
<td>586</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding educators personal needs (18)</td>
<td>547</td>
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Table 2. Variables included in each factor and factor Loadings

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Design school activities (11) 347
Ability to prepare and use an induction plan for new appointed educators (15) 596
Recognition of professional development of the teaching staff (16) 269

**Factor 6**
Managing school financing

Understanding the procedure of the management of school economics (12) 278
Development communication with parents (22) 765
Awareness of the school financing process (13)