Resolving School Staffing Problems in Greece: A Strategic Management Approach

Nikolaos Alexopoulos*

Department of Primary Education, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

Schooling constitutes one of the most fundamental means to social well-being, cultural advancement, and economic growth in a nation. In order for school units to be effective in this role, it is imperative for their teaching staff to be well-trained, skilled, and eager to perform their duties. In Greece, staffing in primary and secondary public education is performed at a central level by the Ministry of Education, whose utmost priority is to safeguard transparency in the selection process rather than select those candidates who would be most capable of improving the operation of the country's public schools (in terms of its pedagogical, teaching, and administrative functions). Since early January 2019, the Greek Ministry of Education has reviewed existing school staffing practices, sparking reactions among the education community and professional teachers' unions as well as fueling discussions in society. The aim of this study is to critically deliberate upon school staffing practices in Greece by perusing pertinent literature and legislation. In particular, through the strategic management approach, it shall investigate whether school staffing in Greek schools is consistent with current and future education requirements concerning teaching staff with adequate knowledge and skills, as well as proper attitudes and behaviors. The present study also aims at identifying the degree to which this system provides newly appointed teaching staff with professional support so as to ensure a smooth and productive incorporation into the school unit.

Keywords: strategic management, strategic thinking, school staffing, teachers selection, school's operation, Greece

INTRODUCTION

Schools, being at the core of every educational system, have attracted the attention of researchers, parents, political actors, and other social entities as to how they can function more effectively. However, existing literature (e.g., Scheerens, 1992; Hargreaves, 1995; Sammons et al., 1997; Taylor, 2002; Reynolds, 2010; Hallinger and Heck, 2011; Sammons and Bakkum, 2011) does not seem to concur on specific attributes that make a school effective. On the contrary, researchers seem to associate school effectiveness with various factors such as improving students' achievements (Houtveen et al., 2004), improving the quality of instruction (Thoonen, 2012), redressing social inequality (Thrupp, 1995; Sammons, 2007), preparing students for the job market, and increasing productivity (Heyneman, 1997). Despite the diversity of opinions, though, what they do seem to agree upon (see e.g., Kalin and Zuljan, 2007; Reynolds, 2010; Saitis and Saiti, 2018) is that, in order for schools to be considered effective, they should (among other things) demonstrate competent leadership, regularly updated curricula and textbooks, adequate teaching means, proper material

and technical infrastructure, unobstructed administrational operation as well as close cooperation with parents (Thoonen, 2012; Babalis and Tsoli, 2017). What they particularly need, though, is scientifically and pedagogically trained teaching staff with adequate and updated knowledge/skills and a positive attitude with regard to teaching, learning, and classroom management aspects (Flower et al., 2017; Révai and Guerriero, 2017). Indeed, it is common knowledge in modern management theory—both within and outside the educational field—that in order for an organization such as a school unit to operate effectively, material resources *per se* are not sufficient and cannot yield results without the contribution of staff members (Gamage and Pank, 2003).

Consequently, establishing a staffing selection system for the appointment and development of competent educators in the public schools of a country, in conjunction with fostering proper working conditions therein, should be among the priorities of every educational system. Relevant research and studies have underlined that such a system in Greece is lacking (e.g., Darra et al., 2010; Rogari et al., 2015). What seems to be the case is quite the opposite: while the country's school staffing system may be impartial for those who wish to work as educators in public education, it nevertheless exhibits weaknesses. For example, it has been stated (Rogari et al., 2015) that, during the process of selecting new teaching staff, personality traits are not taken into consideration. In addition, the state recruits thousands of temporary substitute teachers for the country's schools each year while constantly evading their permanent appointment. But even in the case of permanent appointments, newly appointed teachers quickly acquire the right (within just 2 years) to relocate from the school where they were first placed. What should also be noted is that many substitute and permanent teachers (especially those newly recruited) are simultaneously placed in more than one school in order to meet their quota of working hours (Thanasopoulou, 2019). Thus, it could be asserted that the requirements of the school system and students regarding school staffing have been consistently neglected by the Greek State, and not just because of the recent economic crisis (see Saitis, 2001)—a fact that is in sharp contrast to the spirit of modern administration which tries to find "a balanced management model that serves the needs of both sides, namely, organizations and their employees" (Saiti and Saitis, 2018, p. 13). Ultimately, however, the above research findings manifest a lack of strategic planning in the staffing of primary and secondary schools.

The ineffectiveness of the Ministry of Education's central directorate in adequately equipping public schools with appropriate permanent staff has given rise to numerous abnormalities. Amongst the gravest are the failure of newly appointed teaching staff to acclimatize to their new school units, high stress levels (Mlekanis, 2005; Antoniou and Garyfallaki, 2016), professional burnout (Antoniou and Mitsopoulou, 2016), the lack of an open and favorable climate, and the subsequent lack of good cooperation in tandem with the school community members (Katsaros, 2008; Papadatou, 2018; Rapti and Papadatou, 2018; Thanasopoulou, 2019). In contrast, according to pertinent studies (Lawler and Boudreau, 2009; Odden and Archibald, 2009; Odden, 2011; Primary Academies Trust., 2016; Saitis and Saiti, 2018), the school staffing process in countries such as England and the USA draws upon teachers' qualifications and experience, an evaluation of the current situation, as well as estimations and projections of current and future teaching staff requirements. In this way, candidates for teaching positions are scrutinized in terms of their qualifications and experience in the context of well-defined prerequisites so as to ensure, to a great extent, that the newly appointed staff will be competent in their profession and fully consistent with the future requirements of school education.

It is worth mentioning that the evaluation of the current situation created by the school staffing processes of those countries has been criticized, mainly due to its neo-conservative views, according to which "a good dose of proper subject knowledge" is sufficient for entering the teaching profession (see Whitty, 2014, p. 473). However, despite certain deficiencies, a study of those international educational systems in which students exhibit strong performance in international learning assessments and the rates of educational attainment are high could provide a set of criteria that would help improve school staffing policies and practices. Australia and Canada, for example, have incorporated into their school staffing processes some recruitment incentives for candidate teachers in order to work in remote parts of their respective countries, while New Zealand provides new teachers with incentive payments for teaching in lower performing and severely isolated schools or in high-demand subject areas such as science, mathematics, and English (NCEE, 2019). In addition, Singapore shows how important it is for a country to calculate every year the number of teachers it is going to need and to select its teaching personnel after a grueling application process that safeguards teachers' willingness to be engaged in professional learning and to build a school environment of sharing and collaboration (Low and Tan, 2017; Tucker, 2018).

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THIS STUDY

In this article, building on the contextualization set out above, we argue that is imperative for Greece's education administration to reshape the school staffing system based on the principles of modern administrative thinking. Within this framework, the purpose of this paper is to examine, with the aid of pertinent literature and legislation, the ability and readiness of the Greek education administration to equip its schools promptly with suitable teaching staff. The individual objectives of the current study are directed at researching Greek school staffing in terms of:

- the selection criteria for new teachers
- the time frame of their selection and placement at schools
- their preliminary induction training
- the process of their integration into school communities.

The originality of this paper lies in that the staffing issue is examined through the strategic management approach. The need for this examination emerges from the fact that the implementation of a strategic plan for the education staffing system is expected to help school units plan better for their

mission, make full use of their resources, and adapt successfully to future changes that might arise in the Greek education system. Furthermore, this paper shall serve to provide insights into the implementation and effectiveness of education staffing systems that bear a resemblance to the Greek paradigm with regard to its culture, operation, and extremely centralized decision making. For more decentralized education staffing systems the current paper could be useful in providing criteria that should be considered by local executive bodies (either for-profit or non-profit) and international readers, responsible for hiring school teachers. As far as the strategic management approach to school staffing itself is concerned, international readers could, through the failures of the Greek case defined in this paper, critically think about how school systems can be helped so that to have the right teachers for the right teaching position.

This article will now introduce the notion of strategic thinking and staffing as indispensable preconditions in the development of a strategic plan on the requirements for filling posts at schools, and will subsequently present the Greek school staffing process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SCHOOL STAFFING IN THE LIGHT OF STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic Management

Strategic management is considered in pertinent literature (e.g., Chakravarthy, 1982; Halachmi et al., 1993; Cox et al., 2012; Sklavou, 2013; Saitis and Saiti, 2018) as the orientation of an organization's administrative operations, typically by senior leadership, toward fundamental and long-term changes. Those changes aim at transforming the organization in order to be better equipped to meet any challenges presented by an ever-changing environment, to perform under present circumstances and, above all, to fulfill its goals with regard to its future success (Georgopoulos, 2006; Wang et al., 2007). The transformation refers to all administrative functions (such as defining the organizational structure, making full use of existing resources, staffing, managing human resources and performing appraisals) but it mainly concentrates on designing a vision and revising the decision-making process in conditions of uncertainty (Papadakis et al., 1998; Dubrin, 2010; Pearce and Robinson, 2011; Hill et al., 2015).

Most researchers (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Liedka, 2000; Steiss, 2005; Dubrin, 2010; Hill et al., 2015; Saitis and Saiti, 2018) concur that strategic management is carried out in three stages: (i) analysis of the working environment, estimation of possible changes in the future and development of a vision and goals accordingly, (ii) development of alternatives for the implementation of strategies and materialization of the vision as well as the goals, and finally (iii) implementation of the selected strategy as well as appraisal and evaluation of outcomes. However, the above stages need not always be followed, least so in the order presented. That is because in an uncertain future, "during decision making, senior leadership might encounter new facts or some goals might change, therefore those executives should proceed to corrective changes" (Saiti and Saitis, 2018:69).

Fundamental elements underpinning the strategic management concept (Georgopoulos, 2006; Sklavou, 2013; Saitis and Saiti, 2018) are:

(a) Strategic analysis, that is, the collection of accurate information by senior leadership, based on which their decision making shall be grounded. This information relates to organizational resources (material and human), challenges, risks, and opportunities in the external environment as well as the potentials and weaknesses of the organization in its response to them. This is a key part of strategic management of utmost significance, since incomplete or unreliable information may lead executives to fallacious alternative strategies, erroneous decisions, and subsequently allow the organization's course of action to take a negative twist.

(b) Strategic selection, through which the greatest number of potential alternatives for action are formulated and then the most appropriate one is selected for implementation. This selection constitutes an extremely difficult process, given the impact of uncertainty and unpredictability that the future holds. However, the degree of this difficulty can be moderated if the data collected through strategic analysis are taken into consideration, together with the organization's long-term objectives. Correspondingly, an important assistance for strategic selection is offered by strategic thinking, for which there is no commonly accepted approach in literature (Goldman and Casey, 2010). However, given available definitions (Stumpf, 1989; Liedtka, 1998; Mintzberg, 2000; Bonn, 2005; Stan, 2005; Goldman and Casey, 2010), it could be acclaimed that it is the aptitude of a senior executive to incorporate realism in conjunction with personal vision in their thinking process so as to develop potential suggestions/alternatives that will allow circumstances anticipated in the future (both positive and negative) to be handled in best alignment with the organization's goals.

(c) Strategic implementation, during which "pertinent executives communicate the strategy selected to all parties involved in its implementation and potential modification so as to stay in line with any arising changes and the rest of the organization's operations" (Saiti and Saitis, 2012, p. 69). Subsequently, the selected strategy is implemented and its results are then appraised and evaluated, in order to provide feedback to stakeholders for possible deviations from expected outcomes and take any corrective measures necessary.

In the education field, strategic management is deemed as absolutely necessary since it refers to the future—in which educational organizations are extremely interested— and prepare their students accordingly but also because it further emphasizes education's presence and value in society (Kemp, 2008; Freeman, 2010; UNESCO, 2010). In line with what is applicable in other organizations, strategic management in education is comprised of strategic analysis, selection, and implementation (Tsiakkiros and Pashiardis, 2002; Bryson, 2004; Saitis and Saiti, 2018) and is not always exercised nor does it follow a uniform pattern of implementation since strategic decisions vary in accordance with the personality of the educational leader (e.g., beliefs, values), the nature of the educational organization (e.g., primary or secondary education) as well as the threats and opportunities present

in the environment, for instance, the available resources and information (Hall, 1998).

Staffing

The term "staffing" connotes the administrational function through which an organization ensures that the positions appointed in alignment with its organizational structure are filled with the most suitable personnel. It is an extremely important administrational function as it refers to the organization's human resources, an element that differentiates organizations in terms of their operation as well as the degree to which their objectives and outcomes are met. Owing to its paramount importance, staffing in our days requires preparation, meticulousness and strategic thinking on the part of the organization's senior leadership (Millmore, 2003).

Upon perusal of the relevant literature (see Barber, 1998; Breaugh and Starke, 2000; Breaugh, 2008; Dineen and Soltis, 2011), staffing seems to follow the following stages:

(a) Planning/programming of human resources. At this stage, the number of staff necessary to bring the organization's goals to fruition is qualitatively and quantifiably determined, i.e., the teachers who will be able to reach the goals set for their school by the State.

Sub-stages in human resource planning/programming (Papalexandri and Bourantas, 2003; Saiti and Saitis, 2018) are cited as:

Assessment of the organization's current circumstances regarding human resources, taking into consideration future changes and goals. Extremely useful in this phase is the inventory process through which "administration knows whether and to what degree the required staff is readily available, which are the anticipated modifications in human resources" (Saitis and Saiti, 2018:348). Inventory consists of gathering and classifying data in terms of the staff's numbers, specialties, etc., the ratio of both sexes among the newly hired, their age distribution (so as to prevent a massive outflow in the future due to their retirement), their replacement during periods of absence (e.g., family obligations, long-term hospitalization), consideration for the rational distribution of duties among staff, the ratio of management to staff members, and supervision boundaries.

Estimation of human resource requirements, through which the organization's future requirements for human resources are assessed. Of decisive importance in this phase is pairing the knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes (namely, the professional and personal profile of future members of staff) with the requirements of positions to be filled. By achieving this pairing, the administration ensures that the staff will be in a position to contribute with all their might and their best possible attitude to the realization of the organization's future goals (e.g., introduction of new subjects, changes in the teachers' work schedule, size of the students' body, etc.) (Smith and Robertson, 1993; Robertson and Smith, 2001; Bush and Middlewood, 2006; Saitis and Saiti, 2018).

Pairing the profile of each candidate with the position's requirements. To achieve that, management should firstly clarify the position's job description, that is, define the position's subject matter, duties, responsibilities, and working conditions. Subsequently, a job specification should define the desirable/necessary qualifications that candidates should have (Raymond, 2001; Ellington et al., 2015). Those qualifications should mainly refer to expertise, experience, skills, and personality traits such as self-discipline, accountability, a sound judgment of others, openness, and a tendency for sincere communication (see e.g., Tsaousis, 1999; Olver and Mooradian, 2002; Roccas et al., 2002).

Essentially, the teaching staff appointed at schools should possess the scientific knowledge, skills, and social strands (attitudes and behaviors) (see Zuzovsky, 2005; Emery, 2012) that would allow them to:

- motivate their students so as to acquire as much knowledge as possible and transform into socially/emotionally complete personalities, and
- cooperate with a multitude of other parties, entities, authorities, and bodies from the local and broader society who are involved in their teaching profession and in the school's smooth operation.

(b) Attracting the right candidates, those who possess the right qualifications for the job for which they are being considered. Both the internal and external environment of an organization are commonly referred to as the usual source of employee pools. Particularly in the case of school staffing, the pool from which new teachers will be selected is the external environment of the school organization—something that contributes new ideas, values and dynamics to the school. On the other hand, during the adjustment period of new teaching staff, it is likely that this might fuel certain problems in the school units' climate (Saiti and Saitis, 2012). As regards attracting teachers, relevant research has proven that, despite the requirement for recruiting a sizeable number of new teachers in the years to come, it is expected to be a hard and demanding issue (Luekens in: Robertson and Smith, 2001; Carless, 2007; Aragon, 2016; UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2016; Carlsson et al., 2019). This is due to the fact that in countries where young people have the opportunity to choose among a plethora of various job positions, they are reluctant to work in schools, opting for other more attractive occupations (in terms of wages, benefits, working conditions, social recognition, and personal satisfaction). This reluctance is particularly true when young workers are male, more highly educated, have a higher social status and no family obligations. In contrast, a teaching position offers lower wages, often in an urban inner-city area with no professional support and with no prospects for professional advancement/promotion or personal satisfaction (e.g., Abernathy et al., 2001; Ingersoll R., 2001; Clotfelter et al., 2004; Hanushek et al., 2004; Podgursky et al., 2004; Borman and Dowling, 2008; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011).

(c) Selecting staff from a pool of candidates based on required or desired qualifications. This is quite a strenuous process which entails studying available data on each candidate (e.g., CV, reference letters, scientific studies, proven records of experience, professional profile in social media, etc.) and correlating them with the demands of the position. Then, those who are in charge of making the selection shall proceed with their final selection after using practical means of testing the applicants'

suitability, knowledge and skills, such as interviews, aptitude tests, written exams, assessments of personality, interests, and emotional intelligence, etc. (e.g., Hough and Oswald, 2000; Robertson and Smith, 2001; Salgado et al., 2001; Ployhart, 2006; Kluemper and Rosen, 2009; Saiti and Saitis, 2018). What plays a fundamental role in the staff selection policy of a school is the shortage or surplus of interested applicants. For example, in the latter case, stricter selection criteria could be set for candidates on behalf of the school so as to ensure that only those with the most suitable knowledge, attitude, and skills will get the job.

In addition, management should keep in mind that staff selection should comply with the criteria of effectiveness and broad acceptance (Derous and Witte, 2001; Anderson et al., 2008). Those criteria could include: (i) credibility and legitimacy: identify repeatedly and successfully those applicants that have manifested increased predisposition/enthusiasm to teach their students, (ii) financial and time restraints, (iii) particularities of the teaching profession in terms of knowledge and skills (primarily social skills), a sense of socially accepted values, love of children, etc., (iv) avoiding discriminations and prejudices (e.g., regarding gender, race, physical handicap, etc.) so as to ensure the fair and impartial treatment of all applicants.

(d) Placing and orienting the staff in their post. The staffing process does not end when the most suitable candidates have been selected. Equally important is their placement by providing written notice to each candidate on their selection and the position they will be called to fill. The smooth induction of the new personnel is also important. For example, in school education, this induction could include the briefing and adaptation of newly hired teaching staff to the school's microcosm (structure, operations) through psychological and professional support as well as proper information and encouragement by the school principal or other senior experienced teachers (Guarino et al., 2006; Ployhart, 2006; Anderson et al., 2008; Kardos and Johnson, 2010). The benefits of a comprehensive induction process are not only enjoyed by the newly hired (since their enthusiasm for their new post tends to increase and so they are more likely to remain in the profession), but also by the school in its entirety since the initial experience of the teaching staff have an impact on student performance in school classrooms (Ingersoll and Smith, 2004; Joiner and Edwards, 2008; Ingersoll and Strong, 2011).

(e) Appraisal of the staffing process, that is, evaluate the degree of success in hiring and integrating newly appointed staff on the grounds of their personal degree of incorporation into the workplace and their effectiveness in performing their duties.

In conclusion, it could be hereby asserted that staffing comprises attracting, employing, maintaining and developing human resources that are apt to fulfill the organization's goals. It constitutes a significant factor in management as the human capital can represent a comparative advantage of great value. The fact that staffing relates to the organization's human factor, however, allocates this administrative function with an increased degree of difficulty and uncertainty in its realization as it refers to the future and entails the human factor which is complex, intricate, and hard for other people to comprehensively assess.

The Significance of Teaching Staff in the School's Operation

As already stated, the contribution of staffing in the unobstructed and effective operation of schools has been repeatedly raised and substantiated in relevant literature. Researchers seem to concur in their majority that teachers should be selected with the utmost scrutiny if State goals for the country's school education are to be attained. That said, there is no consensus regarding the characteristics that candidates should possess in order to perform their multifaceted and demanding job, improve the academic performance of their students, and contribute to the latter's social, psychological, and emotional maturity (Ingersoll R. M., 2001; Stronge, 2018). Indeed, a distinction is often made between personality traits and professional skills/competences. The first category entails traits such as a positive attitude toward each individual student, respect for children's personality, expressing affection and love toward them, and having a sense of empathy and justice. Those traits, although hard to pinpoint according to some researchers (Glass, 2002), are crucial in shaping teacher-student relations.

As for the second category which comprises traits that support teachers in their job, the most significant are: in-depth knowledge of their scientific discipline, teaching techniques and learning theories, the ability to draft teaching plans and organize their classroom, familiarity with psychological and social school principles, and effective communication in order to keep an open and constant interaction with entities, both from the micro and macro environment of the school unit (see Glass, 2002; McEwan, 2002; Anderson, 2004; Day, 2004; Goe, 2007; Gurney, 2007; Stronge et al., 2011; Stronge, 2018).

At this point, it is worth stating that the significance of candidates' social skills is being increasingly acknowledged, given the intense and close social relationships developed among the school community's member (teachers, parents, students) as well as the school management's collective nature. Additionally, though, employees' social skills (both within and outside the education field) have been found to favorably contribute to an improvement in the organization's performance in terms of the effective introduction of changes, greater decentralization, promotion of creativity and innovation, a decline in absenteeism, etc. (Recardo et al., 1996; Anderson and Speck, 1998; Glassop, 2002).

Similar to pertaining literature, the Greek legislation (article 36 of Ministerial Decision, 105657/Δ1/16-10-2002) stipulates that teachers' duties are primarily "teaching, educating and forming students." It also recognizes that "progress, economic growth, culture, and social cohesion are greatly dependent upon…the contribution and effort of educators." For this reason, the legislator considers that teachers should possess personality traits, professional skills, and knowledge so as to be in a position to:

- shape and educate students in accordance with educational objectives and goals,
- teach various disciplines consistent with the pertinent curriculum, prepare, and organize their lesson on a daily basis, implement modern and appropriate teaching methods

in accordance with the students' needs and the particularities of their discipline

- update and enrich their knowledge on their discipline as well as the teaching practice through several types of professional training and scientific pedagogical guidance, offered within the auspices of the organized educational system as well as through self-training
- show interest in the living conditions of their students, both within their family and their wider social environment, and take measures in order to tackle potential inconveniences
- cooperate with students, colleagues, parents, and education executives who have undertaken a leading and supportive role in their work in the classroom.

LEGISLATIVE DIMENSION OF STAFFING

Current legislation (Explanatory Memorandum to the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs' Draft Law, 2019) for the staffing of primary and secondary education schools contains the following provisions:

First, the existing selection system, which is based on written exams organized and delivered by the Central Staff Recruitment Board in Greece (ASEP) and also determines the order of priority for the appointment of teachers in primary and secondary education vacant teaching posts (permanent and temporary), is repealed. Repealing the exam-based selection process for new educators was an incessant request on the part of the educational community, based on the assertion that an exam of a few hours (the largest part of which consisted of multiple choice questions) could not adequately assess the knowledge or competences of candidates nor bring forth their personality traits. Apart from criticism on its suitability and adequacy, the country's school staffing system has also been called into question by the educational community as regards the "credibility and validity of its process" (Didaskaliko, 2015; Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers, 2019), p. 66; Center for Educational Research Studies and Documentation (Center for Educational Research Studies Documentation (of OΛME) (KEMETE)., 2012), while relevant research has also expressed similar concerns (Darra et al., 2010; Rogari et al., 2015).

Second, a ranking priority order is to be established for the recruitment of permanent or temporary educators through the allocation of points based on three sets of criteria, each with equal weight: (a) experience as substitute teachers in public education, (b) academic qualifications, that is, university degrees, and (c) social criteria: number of children, any special needs, etc.

Third, certified pedagogical training is to be established as a prerequisite for the appointment of school teachers.

Fourth, the supervision of the entire process is to be assigned to the Central Staff Recruitment Board in Greece (ASEP).

This law also provisions that, upon their placement, newly hired educators are obliged to remain in their school unit as trainees, and to be assessed based on eligibility criteria that are expected to be determined by means of a ministerial decision in the future.

Additionally, newly hired educators shall benefit from professional guidance provided by the head teacher during their first term and are expected to have priority in terms of support and guidance on their teaching work by those who are in charge of supervising educational work at schools. The latter should "place special emphasis on supporting new teachers and organizing occasional model teaching sessions in cooperation with teachers while also making joint decisions on the content of the lesson, methodology, means, strategies, and learning process evaluation" (article 3 Ministerial Decision, 105657/Δ1/16-10-2002).

Upon presenting the legislative framework, it becomes evident that school staffing in Greece is grounded upon the State's intention to prevent any kind of exclusion (e.g., based on academic qualifications or former experience in public schools) of those interested in serving in public school education as well as safeguarding the impartiality of the process through ASEP. This intention derives from the constitutional obligation of public management to safeguard equality among citizens as provisioned by (Law, 1994) which established objective recruitment processes in Greek Public Education for the first time.

Nevertheless, intention alone does not seem to be sufficient to ensure that schools are staffed with suitable human resources, nor does it subsequently promote the effective operation of schools.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

At this point, the following question arises: to what degree does the aforementioned staffing process contribute to the selection of appropriate teaching staff so as to cover the educational needs of particular school units? In order to be in a position to provide an answer, the following parameters should be considered:

The profession of public school teaching has not been fully analyzed by the central administration responsible for decision making as regards school staffing. In particular, the legislative framework does not include a job description that would outline the content of a particular job, that is, the duties, responsibilities, working conditions, etc. that it entails. Furthermore, qualifications such as knowledge, experience, skills and personality traits that public school teachers should possess, namely, a job specification, is also not provided. Owing to these omissions, lessons of various disciplines are often assigned to teachers of different disciplines in Greek secondary schools. For example, a Math's teacher could be teaching Information Technology and a French or English language teacher could be teaching History (76099/Δ2/11-5-2018 Ministry of Education decision; Ministry of Education Circular, 2018). It thus becomes evident that the central educational administration does not implement the administrative principle of having "the right teacher for the right position" and, as a consequence, various types of Greek public schools fail to meet their students' needs (e.g., special needs education, music, intercultural, multigrade and second-chance schools, etc.). Of course, the fact that the current school staffing process is impartial constitutes a significant parameter. However, objectivity of the selection

process alone does not guarantee the school's smooth operation in terms of learning.

The significance and dynamics of teamwork have been given second place among school staffing criteria. In particular, it could be observed that, according to the current school staffing system, academic qualifications (university degrees) hold the same weighting as the former experience of substitute teachers in public schools. However, if we consider that (Sergiovanni, 2001; Kelly, 2006; Robbins and Judge, 2016): (a) the presence of teams in school units plays a significant role, given the fact that it positively correlates with the level of synergy among school community members, team motivation, and a team's educational operation, and (b) group spirit at schools is shaped to a great extent by colleagues' day-to-day involvement in their work environment (shared feelings and common interests, maturity acquired through various stages of team building in the workplace, interaction with administrative and pedagogical affairs through participation in the teachers' association, etc.), it could be asserted that the teaching experience of new educators seems to be of greatest value in effectively staffing school units as opposed to basing selection on university degrees attained by candidates. It should be further noted that the current selection system allocates points to numerous university degrees with no actual relation to the school education discipline!

The current teaching staff selection system, once again overlooks the requirement to evaluate mental health, sociability and interpersonal skills of candidates, in spite of the fact that pertinent literature has emphasized their contribution to students' learning (e.g., Anderson, 2004; Day, 2004).

School staffing lacks any kind of evaluation procedures for the entire hiring process as the relevant criteria are expected to be determined in the future. Educational management is thus deprived of any kind of feedback on critical issues such as how quickly newly hired teachers have adapted to the school environment, how well-prepared they were by the university department from which they had graduated and any difficulties they have encountered in teaching their students or handling issues in their classroom.

The assessment of current teaching staff requirements is unsound as the number of newly hired teachers does not concur with the number of current vacancies in school units across the country. That explains why every year, before the school year begins, the Ministry of Education proceeds with the massive hiring of substitute teachers—not for temporary positions but in order to satisfy permanent and ongoing operational requirements. In addition, as highlighted by relevant circulars issued by the Ministry of Education (e.g., Ministry of Education Circular, 2019), a significant amount of supernumerary teachers (who hold a permanent post in a school but cannot currently work there because there are not enough teaching positions to be filled for the existing number of students) further complicates any effort to promptly cover requirements in teaching staff due to bureaucratic procedures governing their movement/placement every September. It is thus evident that "the Ministry of Education Central Office seems to manifest constant inefficiency in determining the country's school requirements in teaching staff in a prompt and accurate manner" (see Darra et al., 2010). Failure to properly determine vacant posts does not only serve

to prove that the Ministry of Education is lacking Strategic Programming Administration for school units' staffing but also undermines the principle of collegial unity in public schools around the country, which makes the development of a familiar and cooperative climate between teachers and students an extremely challenging endeavor. In fact, such circumstances have shown that they have an adverse impact on students' and teachers' disposition to cooperate and develop creative actions in order to fulfill the school's pedagogical, teaching and administrative goals (Saitis, 1997, 2001; Fykaris, 2002; Darra et al., 2010).

As there is lack of an official induction program for newly hired school teachers (apart from a brief seminar of introductory training), inevitably the role is left in the hands of the school's general culture and climate—mainly the school leader. This lack could be attributed both to school leaders' inadequate professional development in terms of human resource induction and tackling classroom challenges as well as insufficient time owing to a plethora of bureaucratic tasks that must be accomplished (Katsaros, 2008; Saiti and Saitis, 2018). Indeed, recent research (Thanasopoulou, 2019) has suggested that school leaders fail to inform new teachers on issues related to the school climate, the implementation of legislation, etc., nor are they interested in hearing about a new teacher's personal needs and professional goals, even though their proper induction contributes to their emotional stability, thus relieving teachers' professional stress.

At the same time, induction training outside the premises of school units also seems to be insufficient. Based on the legislative framework for newly established training and professional development actors—Regional Centers for Educational Planning (RCEP)—they are called to design the induction training of new teachers (newly hired and substitute teachers) by studying the annual programming and assessment reports of the school units' educational work (Ministerial Decision, 158733/Γ Δ4/27-9-2018). Those reports, however, are not compiled by most schools owing to teachers' reluctance on the ground that they could perhaps constitute the starting point for their own evaluation.

It is also worth stating that the induction training of teachers by RCEP (par.2 article 3 Law, 2018) does not take into consideration the active role that schools, as directly concerned stakeholders, could play. This reasoning deprives schools of the opportunity to train their teachers based on the individual needs and particularities of their school environment (such as the student population's needs, the current knowledge and experience of new teaching staff, school logistics and neighborhood needs, among others). A lack of in-school training could possibly lead central administration to formulate training programs that, instead of being based on scientific research findings, would be prepared in compliance with the experience and skills of available trainers, similar to older models of induction training (Darra et al., 2010).

In sum, the considerations presented above cause us to claim that it is doubtful whether and to what extent the new teaching staff selection process for Greek schools can promote their effective operation, since the fundamental administrative principle of having "the right teacher for the right position" is being ignored.

CONCLUSIONS—RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to examine, upon perusal of pertinent literature and legislation, the current system for school staffing in Greece and to submit proposals for future consideration and improvement of its processes. Our research findings have suggested that, despite the significance of strategic design planning in teaching staff management, the central educational administration in Greece has not accommodated the implementation of a modern selection system that appoints and professionally supports new teachers in the country's public school units. In particular:

✓ Selection criteria for aspirant educators seem to be unclear as no job specification is officially provided to teaching staff.
✓ The assessment of the educational system's staff requirements is not based on strategic management and, as a consequence, the appointment of teachers is not performed in a timely manner.
✓ The rationale behind placing and maintaining new teachers in school units across the country seems to be one-dimensionally oriented toward satisfying the personal needs of the staff and not the school's educational requirements.
✓ A teacher's right to get frequent transfers in a short period of time from the school unit of their initial placement to another school or public service is to the detriment of staff unity while it also has an adverse impact on the school environment.
✓ The lack of assessment in the staffing process of school units in no way helps to ensure that appropriate teachers are selected for the most suitable positions in a timely manner, hence negatively affecting the quality of the educational process in the country's school units.

In order to remedy those inadequacies, the following is proposed:

The Strategic Programming Directorate at the Ministry of Education Central Office should be staffed with specialized and permanent personnel in order to ensure its continuity, regardless of any changes at the Ministry's senior leadership.

The announcement for the appointment of new teachers should be made in May so that newly hired teachers have sufficient time to arrange any family issues or personal affairs and adjust to their new living conditions before the beginning of the new school year.

The current system for teaching staff transfers should be revised in order to better regulate their mobility (e.g., establish a 7-year tenure in the school of their first placement). This way, negative experiences related to the organization and operation of school units (e.g., in terms of cohesion among teachers and convergence toward common, collectively-decided goals, especially in a small population and relatively distant areas) shall be eliminated and personnel unity—a fundamental and long-stipulated administration principle—will be ensured (see Reid, 1995; Mlekanis, 2005).

The spectrum of knowledge/aptitudes/skills for every teaching position should be established so as to provide targeted, well-prepared information for the actual teaching needs of each school whenever there is a vacancy for a permanent post.

Initiate an evaluation system for applicant teachers that will examine their scientific knowledge as well as other parameters such as pedagogical competence, personality and mental health before they are selected. The objective of such an evaluation would be to identify the most suitable teaching staff members based on their qualifications, skills, and personality. The means available for carrying out such an evaluation (interviews, personality tests, etc.), might involve some limitations, such as subjectivity on the part of the examiner, but they could be overcome if carried out by experienced, properly-trained and (above all) conscientious experts who are fully aware of their mission's significance.

Train school leaders on the proper induction of new teaching staff in every school unit. By establishing this practice, new teachers will become familiar with their new workplace (premises, logistics, collegial relationships), will be better informed on pedagogical and teaching practices exercised at their school as well as the learning needs and particularities of students/classes, and will be protected from undertaking grades/classes/courses with students they are not (initially) equipped to handle (see Johnson and Birkeland, 2003; McCann et al., 2005; Watkins, 2005).

Establish in-school training for newly hired teachers who will be provided with counseling by experts (mentors). By taking advantage of the mentorship program, new teachers can easily overcome any difficulties that arise, improve their skills and enhance their own as well as their school's performance (Saitis and Saiti, 2018). Necessary conditions for such an endeavor are considered to be:

- The spontaneous, genuine interest of mentors toward their new colleague
- A disposition to invest time and energy in their peer-peer and teacher-student relations
- The intention to address any needs and initial fears with honest communication and confidentiality but also through sufficient training on knowledge (theory and mentoring models), critical thinking and empathy (reasoning by means of rational criteria, reflection and self-assessment) (Jones and Straker, 2006; Lazaridi-Moyza, 2006; Aspfors and Fransson, 2015).

The present paper and the suggestions herein are not based on empirical data and can therefore be subject to limitations since the lack of scientific data and findings cannot safeguard the validity of the analysis presented. For this reason, field work research could further contribute to the emergence of a more effective staffing process for school units in Greece.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

NA contributed conception and design of the study, wrote the drafts of the manuscript, revised it, and read and approved the submitted version.

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