Separating School Principal's Administrative and Pedagogical Tasks: Views of the Greek Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the views of 100 primary school teachers regarding the proposal of assigning two principals in Greek primary schools, one responsible for managerial duties and one to assume the pedagogical responsibilities. Teachers from the metropolitan area of Athens completed an online self-report questionnaire between February and March 2021. The questionnaire was constructed by the researchers for the needs of the present study based on theory and research on the field. The results showed that there is a positive attitude toward the notion that two principals would be better than one. However, most participants were apprehensive of the possible professionalization of the principal's role. This probably indicates that the Greek educational system is not ready to accept this proposal. Educational policy leaders and academic program planners of higher education institutions could consider the findings of this study when designing educational programs aiming to prepare adequately future school principals.

Keywords: school principal, administrative role, pedagogical role, co-principalship, teacher professionalization, primary school

1. Introduction

1.1 The Proposal of Separating the Administrative Role in Schools

The collaboration of teachers in school administration is promoted by the distributed leadership model (Brookes & Grint, 2010), which is based on democratic and social justice principles (Woods & Roberts, 2016). This leadership model has been associated with the overall progress of schools mostly because it promotes social cohesion and trust among all school agents (Harris, 2013; Zaghmout & Harrison, 2020). The school principal, acting as distributed leader, is no longer considered a 'superhero' (Harris, 2003). In contrast, the principal's role as a leader is to communicate with and support all members of the school community to ensure that they feel comfortable expressing their views and ideas for school improvement (Ketikidou & Saiti, 2022). A network of people is thus created both inside and outside the school, with each individual bringing their own unique skills and capabilities to school life (Harris, 2004; Oplatka & Arrar, 2016). Within this network, the school principal should always be ready to identify the school needs and support school improvement and to proudly and strongly promote the interests and rights of the school community. In addition, within the school network, educational administration involves the management of school operations (e.g., decision making, crisis management, creating a safe and inspirational school space) as well as promoting the school interests and providing support to teaching, pedagogy, and student–teacher communication. In school practice, this means that the principal who is assigned both pedagogical and administrative duties of school administration: *(a)* supervises teaching–learning and ensures the smooth running of the curriculum and *(b)* effectively uses school resources through the core activities of administration: planning, organizing, directing/leading, and controlling/supervision (Lunenburg, 2010; Robbins, 1976).

1.2 Two Principals Together: Separating the Pedagogical and Administrative Tasks

The separation of school administration to pedagogical and general administrative tasks essentially allows two principals to be in several places at the same time covering different needs, thus avoiding exhaustion (Eckman, 2006;

Simon, 2015). The two principals would complement each other within the school's leadership team. Both strive every day to reach a degree of maturity and emotional endurance sufficient to work responsibly and appropriately with parents and students (Drea & O'Brien, 2003). Additionally, when decisions on the progress of the school unit and school climate derive from joint effort, they are valued by both the teachers and students; within such a collaborative environment, teachers consider that they play a role in school leadership, and this has been associated with teacher wellbeing, better student outcomes, satisfaction, and happiness (McCallum, 2017).

Therefore, efforts regarding school modernization should focus on general school administration and on the quality of education provided and permitted by the school context and climate i.e., on school educational administration. Within this form of school organizational politics, teachers themselves experience greater security (Gronn, 2000) mainly because school principals are ready to share their power, cooperate and receive help, and spare the teaching staff from excessive demands (McCallum, 2022; Mulford, 2003). Moreover, such administration will aid in the effective implementation of educational policies and the organization of school material, with the leadership defining the vision and values of the social structure.

Notably, these two tasks of the school principal (pedagogical and general administrative) are equally important and unique; therefore, they cannot be compared. This discrimination though is useful for the school administration to be explained as a whole with regard to teamwork and possible school effectiveness. Although the co-principalship model seems to be rather unusual and despite its previous critique (see Brown, 1984; Döös, 2018; Starr, 2010) regarding role conflict, the benefit is that the actual working time of the principals is limited to the pedagogical or general administrative role.   Moreover, as individuals have different interests, they present respectively a variety of interests in a way that they exercise their power (Wexler Eckman, 2006). School's tasks can be shared among the group of leaders in each school to be carried out successfully (Institute of Educational Leadership, 2000). People coming from the business sector are an alternative model for school administration with experience in administrative policy, but experience as an educator is a prerequisite for integration into the school community. The school principal must therefore be an educational leader (Elzami et al., 2021). The results of improving this educational change are interpreted at both the individual and the group level through the cooperation of the two principals. Moreover, when interest moves away from the achievements of the principal's school unit, attention can be turned to important issues such as effective and efficient teaching and learning, mentoring and communication (Court, 2003; Notman, 2020).

1.3 The Need to Professionalize the Administrative Role in Greece

It is likely that the professionalization of school principals in Greece will bring about, along with the autonomy rates in the school units, various procedures for finding the appropriate people to take on the pedagogical and general administrative roles (Kalogiannis, 2014). There are no principals with the proper characteristics and readiness required for this role unless they have already been teachers who were interested in their work, and they were accordingly distinguished. Leaders should be open to new perspectives and ideas, ready to leave behind a traditional model of administration, and prepared to pursue policies stemming from the new public administration (Mulford, 2003). Professionalization as a social process officially establishes the license to practice the managerial profession and brings managers to be professionals and act specifically for what customers (students, parents, and the community) do not know (OECD, 2016). As a professional, the principal becomes more cooperative and extroverted and ceases to function autonomously or as a unit. The shift towards the professionalization of the principal's position is intensified and there is the need to acquire skills and be capable of reshaping school units. They should understand the new public administration, as both co-principals will not be provided with solutions through ministerial decisions anymore. The evaluation and accountability of principals will be an integral part of the new educational policies (Kalogiannis, 2015; Fassoulis, 2001).

1.4 The Critical Views of the International Organizations for Contemporary School Administration

The European Union promotes the participatory and ultimately democratic side of the school administration. The management path outlined through the views of the European Union is based on participatory and distributed models where teaching takes precedence. Finally, integrated knowledge, empirical acquisition of pedagogical perception and work in a group are promoted. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Pont et al., 2008) has described in detail the aspects expected by school principals. These are: contribution to the school ethos, acquisition of organizational management skills, contribution and evaluation of teaching and learning, curriculum management, financial and human resources management, openness to the community, trusting relationships with other school leaders, effective decision-making or action. The list is long, and it already seems that a single person cannot fulfill these obligations, as recorded by the OECD (2016). At the same time, however, the OECD proposes

systemic leadership, a combination of individuals to improve the school unit, but also to improve all schools in a country through a consortium process. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (EFA Global Monitoring Report Team, 2015; UNESCO, 2016) has recommended participatory leadership so that taking on the role does not only burden one person. Indeed, the separation and, at the same time, the cooperation of the two co-principals democratizes school and supports its sustainability (Chirichello, 2011; Duignan & Cannon, 2011). It is a proposal that leads individuals to take up the position on their own initiative and acts as a model for members and future generations to learn to work together even when serving in such crucial roles.

1.5 The Significance and Aim of the Study

Due to the significance of the principal's role in contemporary school, the scarcity, and the ambivalence of the research results regarding co-principalship (Lacey & Anderson, 2009; Masters, 2013) this study aimed to analyze the idea of having dual principals in school administration, which has already been proposed and applied in different educational systems (e.g., USA, New Zealand, Norway, The Netherlands, and Scotland). In addition, the current study aimed to examine Greek teachers' views regarding the separation of the administrative authority into pedagogical and general administrative duties.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The sample of this study was a sample of convenience. Its collection process was based on the initiative of the participants, as there was a degree of freedom for individuals to either respond or skip the survey. Therefore, the sample is not representative, thus, restricting the generalization of the research findings. One hundred primary school teachers from the metropolitan area of Athens participated in the research project, 81 (81%) of whom were women and 19 (19%) were men. Moreover, 14 (14%) of them have taken up principal duties in the past, while 86 (86%) of them were schoolteachers.

2.2 Instrumentation-The Questionnaire

An online self-report questionnaire was constructed from the research team for the needs of the present study, based on the theory (e.g., Anderson et al. 2005; Hardman, 2011) and the research on the field (Döös et al., 2018; Ross, 2020). Its questions were solidified after a pilot survey (reliability analysis) was applied to a small sample (42 teachers) and after taking into consideration individual remarks made by participants. The final questionnaire included 30 questions which can be grouped into three distinct categories.

The first section of questions concerned the demographic traits of the sample and contained six closed-ended questions. These considered gender, age, level of studies, years of educational experience, occupation in an administrative role, and the possibility of simultaneously taking on educational and general administrative duties. The second section could be divided into three main subsections. The first referred to the administrative responsibilities of school principals. The second referred to the professional and pedagogical relationships developed between teachers and the principal of each school. The last subsection referred to those cases that limit the effectiveness of the administrative role. These questions included 22 closed-ended questions in which principals and mainly teachers had to declare their agreement or disagreement or state the degree of frequency of restrictions encountered by the principal in their educational and professional course. The questions in this subsection were based on the five-tier Likert scale. The third section of the questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions, where teachers had the freedom to express their opinion, on both the proposal of separating the administrative authority into pedagogical and general administrative and the proposal of professionalizing the position of the school principal in Greece, without a word limit.

3. Results

Among the final three grades as aggregated, the highest relates to questions on the administrative role (Administrative role mean=3.54). Although the questionnaire was mainly addressed to teachers and not to principals, participants seemed to be interested and having formed views on administrative issues as well. Teachers commented on the administrative side of a school principal, as the various decisions about the school affect themselves. Questions about the pedagogical identity of a principal had a high final degree (Pedagogical role mean=3.41). The degree to this factor was expected to be high, as the pedagogical role of a school principal includes relationships and proper and effective communication with the teaching staff. The school principal checks and coordinates pedagogical

issues as well as the details of the teaching process provided by the school. The third column of the diagram below summarizes the final grade as formed by the frequency grades identified by some limitations on the school principal's general work. The final grade in this case is the lowest compared to the other two (Restrictions Mean=3.13). Possibly, teachers responded more modestly, as the restrictions concerned managerial work rather than their own work. All three final factors showed averages without major differences. Primary teachers were asked for their views on a multifaceted issue, management work, administrative and pedagogical role seem to be roughly in line with the proposals contained in the questionnaire on how their role is shaped through incidents and cases in the school unit. In conclusion, the limitations encountered by a school principal in his daily work were answered more modestly, as they are filtered through teacher observations (Figure 1).
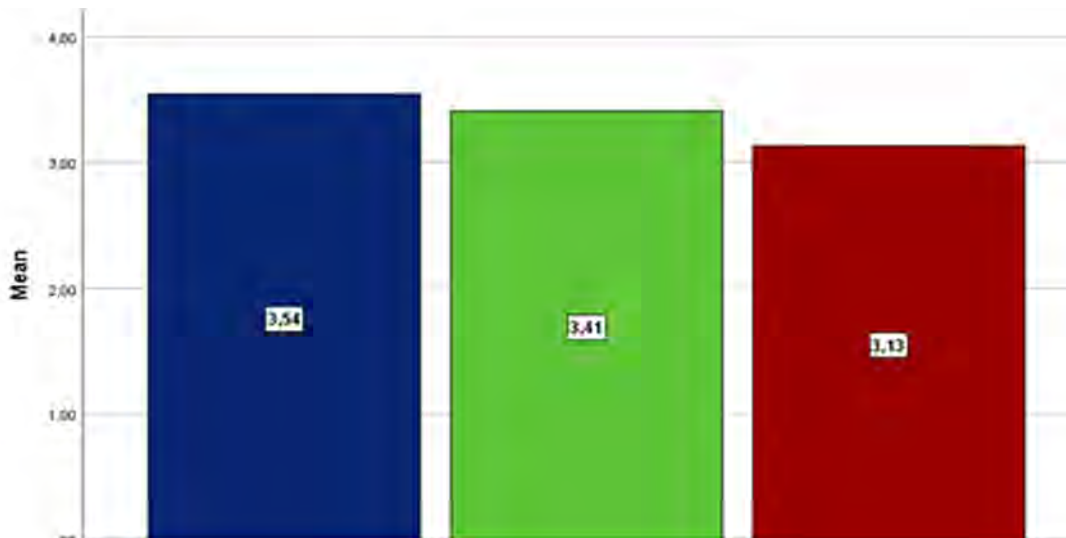

Figure 1. The Three Factors Aggregated (Administrative role, Pedagogical role, Restrictions)

Following the analysis, an attempt was made to investigate whether teachers' responses depend on their demographic characteristics (gender, experience, etc.), using the Independent Samples t-tests method. The following Tables (1–5) present the results of the five t-tests (gender, age, education, experience, managerial position) and will examine whether there are statistically significant effects on teacher responses (p-value<0.05), which will be marked with *. Degrees of freedom are df=98 for all t-tests.

To argue that there are statistically significant results regarding whether variables of gender, age, etc. affect teachers' responses, the p-value field must be lower than 0.05. However, as presented in Table 1, the gender of the teachers who took part in the survey does not appear to have affected their responses in any way. The p-value values are 0.218 for the Administrative role, 0.660 for the Pedagogical role, and 0.983 for the Restrictions, and, therefore, not statistically significant.

Table 1. Gender T- test

Independent Samples t-test 1 (Gender)	Men			Women			t	df	p-value
	N	Mean	St. Dev	N	Mean	St. Dev			
Administrative role	19	3,3825	-1,239	81	3,5802	0,6276	-1,239	98	0,218
Pedagogical role	19	3,4773	0,441	81	3,3891	0,7937	0,441	98	0,660
Restrictions	19	3,1268	-0,021	81	3,1308	0,7817	-0,021	98	0,983

The p-values reported are 0.077, 0.331, and 0.863 respectively in the three sectors (Table 2). Age may possibly influence the responses in terms of the administrative role (p-value=0,077); however, the p-value is greater than 0.05. In any case, it is closer than the other values.

Table 2. Age T-test

Independent Samples t-test 2 (Age)	22-40			41-51+			t	df	p-value
	N	Mean	St. Dev	N	Mean	St. Dev			
Administrative role	43	3,4147	0,5313	57	3,6392	0,6805	-1,790	98	0,077
Pedagogical role	43	3,3178	0,6877	57	3,4722	0,8463	-0,977	98	0,331
Restrictions	43	3,1451	0,7098	57	3,1187	0,7858	0,173	98	0,863

In Table 3, the administrative role has a value of 0.551, the Pedagogical role has 0.461, and the Restrictions have 0.110. With the possible exception of the value for Restrictions (0.110), the other two categories appear to be in no way dependent on the level of education. Therefore, the level of academic education of primary teachers did not have a significant impact on their responses either.

Table 3. Level of Education T-test

Independent Samples t-test 3 (Level of Education)	University Degree, 2nd University Degree			Master's Degree, Ph. D.			t	df	p-value
	N	Mean	St. Dev	N	Mean	St. Dev			
Managerial role	48	3,5035	0,5612	52	3,5788	0,6871	-0,598	98	0,551
Pedagogical role	48	3,3455	0,8448	52	3,4615	0,7232	-0,740	98	0,461
Restrictions	48	3,0050	0,7482	52	3,2455	0,7410	-1,614	98	0,110

Questions about managerial role formed the p-value of 0.075 (Table 4). The administrative role was close to the value of 0.05. Similarly, to the questions of the pedagogical role, the p-value value is 0.171 and in the questions about restrictions in the managerial work the value is 0.595. Therefore, neither can present effects depending on the working experience. Although we expected the years of experience to have a significant impact on administrative and pedagogical responses, as the years of experience of the two groups have a large deviation, the experience of the participants did not affect the results of the survey.

Table 4. Working Experience T-test

Independent Samples t-test 4 (Working experience)	1-15 working years			16-26+ working years			t	df	p-value
	N	Mean	St. Dev	N	Mean	St. Dev			
Managerial role	49	3,4286	0,5292	51	3,6523	0,6975	-1,801	98	0,075
Pedagogical role	49	3,2962	0,7002	51	3,5112	0,8470	-1,380	98	0,171
Restrictions	49	3,1710	0,6877	51	3,0907	0,8112	0,533	98	0,595

Contrary to the results presented in Tables 1–4, the date presented in Table 5 introduce a statistically significant impact on teachers' responses to the administrative role. Specifically, the p-value for the administrative role is **0.017**, which is much lower than the 0.05 threshold. In the questions concerning the Pedagogical role and the Restrictions, however, no statistically significant result was observed, as their values are 0.094 and 0.238 respectively. Based on the results of the last t-test, it is considered reasonable that teachers' responses to the administrative role depend on the participants taking up a managerial position, as teachers who have been principals have more experience and a different perspective regarding the administration of a school.

Table 5. Principal's Position T-test

Independent Samples t-test (Principal's Position)	Yes			No			t	df	p-value
	N	Mean	St. Dev	N	Mean	St. Dev			
Managerial role	14	3,9119	0,7937	86	3,4826	0,5802	2,431	98	0,017*
Pedagogical role	14	3,7302	0,7064	86	3,3530	0,7849	1,689	98	0,094
Restrictions	14	2,9099	0,7355	86	3,1659	0,7510	-1,186	98	0,238

Open Questions- School Teachers' actual views

Proposal for the coexistence of the two principals

In an attempt to make a more practical outline of the division of the managing authority into an administrative and pedagogical one, it was proposed that a principal with basic administrative tasks should cooperate with a director who will mainly assume pedagogical responsibilities. The commentary to be developed, aimed at the discussion of the proposal with the aim of better understanding and insight of the managerial role in Greece. Overall, teachers viewed positively a possible scenario of School Principals' coexistence, judging by their experience and service in schools. The majority of teachers who expressed their positive attitude, claimed that in a possible realization of the proposal in Greece, requirements need to be set for its normal function. These requirements and the appropriate conditions which had been stated through the importance of time, stressing both a general change and the maturation of the Greek education system before processes such an implementation as the coexistence of the two Principals. Some examples of the exact words of the participants in this study are as follows:

"The proposal is extremely interesting but requires excellent cooperation between both school principals."

"[this project can succeed] if and when they are both primarily teachers, educators, knowledgeable of school reality."

"It can solve many organizational problems that arise"

However, many school teachers were negative towards the proposal of two different principals in Greek school units, as they recognize a pedagogical authenticity to the current principals and the delivery of the system. They declared their dissatisfaction in the case of a predominance of administrative preparation and culture. Also, in addition to the fear of cold administrative and formal school management both teachers as well as the present research are in favor of pedagogical prevalence. This responsibility undoubtedly leads to the improvement of student performance, which is the ultimate goal as it is certain that a bureaucratic and petrified administrative school model lacks the philosophy and means of improving student behavior and performance.

"I don't think it's going to be easy. Education cannot be separated; it should be treated as a whole entity."

Proposal for the Principal's role professionalization

The proposal for the professionalization of the administrative role was then examined as a need for the Greek educational data to strengthen the role in order to ultimately emerge as a leader. The most closed and centralized educational systems limit the professional autonomy of principals. On the contrary, the process of professionalization is capable of releasing principals from continuous control and repeated restrictions. When the director's position becomes more autonomous and independent, a culture of independence is cultivated and as a result, school units become more autonomous. In addition, the professionalization is the way to specialization and scientific training of school principals. The proposal to professionalize the post of the school principal was negatively judged by the majority of participants. Teachers showed their strong desire for the school principal to be mainly pedagogical and the anxiety of a possible overthrow of the pedagogical role and consolidation of administrative professionalization.

"Principals should take on their duties after many years of experience as teachers. No form of degree compares to teaching and real practice. I do not agree with this proposal at all."

"I completely disagree; the principal should not be a manager."

4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate Greek Teachers' view on the coexistence of two principals in Greek schools, one of whom will be responsible for general administrative duties and the other will assume pedagogical responsibilities. The results initially showed that a future principal originates fairly from the body of teachers, has pedagogical experience, and does not prevail in the role of a general administrator. In addition, this study, similarly to previous ones (e.g., Döös et al, 2018), showed that principals of Greek schools, despite the general administrative tasks, solve most problems through pedagogical creativity (Stamatis & Chatzinikolaou, 2020). Regarding the separation of the administrative duties into general administrative and pedagogical ones, the present study examined the scenario of coexistence of two principals in Greek schools. According to the research results and in agreement with previous ones, the majority of teachers who participated in the survey was positive about this idea, setting though#three conditions: *(a)* The partners at the principal of the school to have several years of educational experience *(b)* to be appointed by an appropriate committee and be prepared through specialized school administration programs *(c)* to promote democratic and moral dimensions in school life. The results of the study also

indicated, similarly to previous studies (e.g. Tobin, 2014), mentoring procedures, coaching, and the use of case studies as the most appropriate training programs for future principals. It was concluded that all programs should be actualized through the principles of adult education.

As far as the process of professionalization is concerned, this study showed that it refers to relieving the principals from continuous checks and restrictions. The teachers involved in the survey were also found to be negative towards the prospect of professionalization and expressed concern about a possible reversal of the pedagogical role and the exclusive consolidation of the general administrative role.

Moreover, this study found no statistically significant differences between the teachers' views about the co-existence of two school principals at school (one for its general administration and one for handling its pedagogical issues) and most of the sociodemographic characteristics of the study population.

The survey results are consistent with the findings of previous European surveys of similar interest. In Spain, 36% of a school principals' time is consumed by issues of a general administrative nature which highlights and the importance of this role (European Commission, 2012). Most teachers coming from various European education systems admit that professional opportunities of development for which they are informed by the school principal have a positive influence on their teaching approaches. Additionally, in cases where school principals cooperate with teachers, self-improvement and greater professional satisfaction was noted (Brezicha et al., 2020).

However, it seemed that in the Greek educational reality, there are no suitable conditions to achieve the connection of the school administration with the coexistence of two school principals or with the professionalization of their role. Those who were in favor of the coexistence of principals with different tasks assigned to them, consider it a positive proposal but stressed that radical changes are required for its realization. Those who were neutral towards the proposal, consider that it can be highly dysfunctional and harm the education system and the educational culture that has been established in the country. As mentioned before, a tiny percentage of teachers expressed a positive attitude towards the proposal of professionalization of the administrative role, as all teachers cannot understand in the same way the process of professionalization in a position as important as that held by the principal. Also, this proposal seems to be more implausible regarding the Greek educational community, as it stems from completely different educational systems that already apply the process of professionalization. The Anglo-Saxon and the American educational systems constitute characteristic examples. Finally, the present study provided an opportunity for a review of the administrative process, people, and roles in Greek schools.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The reconstruction of the Greek educational system through proposals to improve the managerial role is essential in order to gradually subside its centralized nature as well as the realization of greater autonomy and independence of school principals in Greece. The establishment of programs for the preparation of principals to enhance administrative knowledge and the establishment of academic school administration programs by the universities' pedagogical departments of the country are among the necessary plans to be undertaken. This paper studied the views of teachers on two proposals that would constitute a change in the Greek school administration. Teachers' views on the separation of the management authority into administrative and pedagogical and on the professionalization of the school leadership role are a reliable source of information and the final study of the two proposals can lead to a possible future implementation. However, no change in education will be successful in its implementation unless school principals and teachers are properly prepared, and school's autonomy is enacted.

The present study is subject to limitations primarily owing to its restricted sample. Therefore, future studies could include teachers from additional regions of Greece in their sample to examine potential differences among urban, semi-urban, and rural areas; education levels; and types of schools (e.g., art schools and multicultural schools) and to compare teacher views in concentrated and autonomous systems of educational administration. Furthermore, it would be useful for future studies to investigate the views of the educational leaders themselves (especially those of school principals) regarding the co-principal model of school administration.

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