

Selecting School Principals in Greece in the Last Fifteen Years-A Theoretical Approach

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Abstract

In this paper an attempt is made to analyze and outline the legislative framework regulating the selection of school principals in primary and secondary education since 2002. The aim of this study is to accurately depict the laws restricting the selection of school principals, so as to feature problems and difficulties, and point out the obstacles in selecting and employing them on a merit-based system, with the goal and wish to focus on achievements and on an effective performance in their administrative and pedagogical role.

Keywords: School principal, selection of school principal, educational policy, executives in education, selection criteria, educational legislation.

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INTRODUCTION

It is well established and commonly known that the work of school principals [1], irrespective of the level of education, both in our country and internationally [2], concerns all involved in these levels, as it plays an important role in the development of students both in the duration of their schooling and later in their adult life, as well as in the professional development of teachers serving in their school unit, with various actions, such as the implementation of in-school training [3], the regular and systematic meetings with teachers, parents, and the various actors of society local or not, etc. This entails that principals contribute, on the one hand, to their school unit's quality upgrading, and, on the other hand, to the raising of the teachers' educational level, of education and of the educational system in general. This is achieved by the actions outlined above, by the creation of a good school climate [4], by the collaboration between principals and the other members of the Teachers' Association [2], parents and students [5, 6], between principals and the Parents' and Guardians' Association [7], the School Board [8], among the management and educational executives [9]. All the above are primarily a school principal's case and matters [10].

All these have been discussed so far were, among others, one of the many reasons we decided to engage in this short paper with the school principals' selection rather than the selection of other educational

executives, of directors for education and school counselors [11], who are the current coordinators of educational work [12] or even of regional director for primary and secondary education [13]. The prominence of a school principal's work for the quality improvement of his/her school and for school education in general, is first and foremost evident by the importance that political parties attach to the principals' selection both with the actions they take to select and place capable people and due to the fact that the laws regarding the selection of school principals, and not only of other educational executives (directors for education, school counselors, etc.), are many, different and several times in many sub regulations conflicting. This can be easily seen by the fact that every time national elections are held in our country and even every time the Minister of Education of the same government is changed, new laws are voted and applied, new presidential decrees are released and new ministerial decisions for the selection of educational executives, on the pretext of departisanization of public education.

In this way, one could argue that a principal does not appear to remain in the same school unit for a long time [14], without implying that there are no exceptions. However, when principals take over the management of a school other than the one they served before the new selections made creates disruption and problems, at least in the beginning, in the proper

functioning of both the school they take over and the ones they leave. That is to say, our country in this field, in comparison with other countries, is not only original, but also an example to be avoided.

However, one cannot fail to mention, as it has already been pointed out, that some actions that were taken by the State either to attract qualified people to apply for the principal's position or because the State recognizes the importance of the work that principals provide to society and the importance of school unit as the core of the educational process or because the State wants to downgrade the institution of the school counselor and to abolish it, as already did. Namely, the State increased the school principals' allowance in proportion to what they had received till then, and reduced the school counselors' allowance, and as a consequence these two categories of executives were equated in the pay grade. This measure displeased the then-serving school counselors of primary and secondary education who came to receive a lower salary than that of the director for education and provoked their reaction, so the governing political party as a compromise movement returned them to their previous remuneration [15].

Concerning now the approach taken for the analysis of the issue, it is considered appropriate to point out that emphasis is given mainly on the analysis of the relevant laws of this 15-year period, since much of what has been done in the previous period, from the post-2002 to the present, has been presented and discussed, both theoretically and empirically, in our dissertation [10] and in our other work [16].

Therefore, for the exploration of this research objective, we used almost the same methodology as the one applied in our above work, that is to say, we mainly based on the analysis of the relevant laws, but we took into account, where necessary, the most important in our opinion, related literature. With regard to the relevant work previously published by us [10], it is appropriate to note here that the discussion about school principal and his/her work has particularly boiled over since 2000 and onwards, with the creation of programs for postgraduate studies in management of educational executives by many Greek universities, with the assignment and preparation of doctoral dissertations and master theses investigating aspects of his/her work and bringing to light the intense concern about the profile of school principals in our country, the State's intentions regarding their selection and preparation and their own perceptions about the work they are called to assume as leaders of the school unit as well. For the proper functioning and effectiveness of schools in the era of globalization, technological explosion and crisis (economic, cultural, moral, and social crisis), the role of a school principal has been, is and will always be decisive in the evolution of society's citizens.

This particular way of presenting our work was, therefore, chosen, among others, to show whether and to what extent there were changes or not to the philosophy of school principals' selection; namely, if the laws that were passed and have been implemented over the last 15 years –given that every time that a government succeeds the other there are changes in legislation, with the ultimate goal of changing things for the better – contributing both to the change of the political parties' attitude and mentality and to the accomplishment of the much debated and cherished meritocracy in school principals' selection of public primary and secondary education.

Critical presentation and discussion of school principals' selection in the last 15 years

It is well known in the educational community, but also in those involved in education that all categories of educational executives have been selected and they are still selected by specialized councils, either at the regional (PYSPE, APYSPE, PYSDE, APYSDE) or central level (KYSPE, KYSDE); the latter measure was formerly applied. It is clarified that school principals are selected today, as before, with the exception of only the first years of the 1980s, by regional councils [6]. These councils, since the August of 2018, have been entitled to also select directors for Education in primary and secondary level education and the school counselors of these two educational levels, too.

Almost all of the councils were and usually are consisted of seven members, in which were and are participated *ex officio* two electives as representatives of the educational community, as well as five other members; these five members have been, at least until now, appointed by regional director for education, which thus gives the impression of a decentralized action and act of the Ministry of Education, while basically, also in these cases, they are approved by the Minister of Education, given that almost all a regional director's for education actions and acts are under inspection by the Ministry of Education. The highest educational executives (directors for education, school counselors) who were selected until 2018 by the central councils (the council selecting directors for primary education, the council selecting directors for secondary education, the council selecting school counselors of primary education, the council selecting school counselors of secondary education,) had been appointed by each Minister of Education, asking simultaneously, for the sake of impressing and less for the sake of ensuring meritocracy in the appointment, and the opinions of various bodies (of the former pedagogical institute and now the institute of educational research, of the university's Public Administration Faculty).

Especially regarding the school principals' selection, to which a partial mention has already been made, one can add the following:

- They have been selected, as it has been pointed out, for over thirty years by the regional councils ((A)PYSPE and (A)PYSDE) set up in each region. These councils are formally composed by the director of each regional directorate (in fact, however, by the Minister of Education) and consist of five members; two of them are the two representatives of the educational community (the electives) who are voted by the educators of each prefecture and the other three members are appointed by the director of each regional directorate, in other words by the State. The president of the council is usually the regional director or the director for primary education in case that a school principal from primary education is selected, or the regional director and the director for secondary education in the case that a school principal from secondary education is selected. The other two members are currently mainly school principals, but may also be other educational executives, former school counselors, the current coordinators of educational work (this measure had been applied for the school principals been selected before 2015). The status of these three members is not permanent, but it is changed according to the political party undertaking each time the country's governance and its philosophy for education. Nevertheless, the number of members, remains constant, and is not changed, at least until today, no matter which political party or parties govern the country. The number of two representatives of the educational community, who are elected by the teachers of each prefecture with a secret ballot, remains unchanged as well. However, these two representatives of the educational community, the electives, are basically militant politician or great friends of a political party, regardless of whether the names of all candidates for being electives are included in a single ballot paper. The same is also true for the respective representatives in the central councils of primary education (KYSPE) and of secondary education (KYSDE).
- School principals are selected, as well as the other educational executives, on the basis of specific criteria, job status (second bachelor's degree, postgraduate and doctoral studies, foreign language skills, etc.), educational and teaching experience, scientific and pedagogical training (dossier details), as well as the personality and overall composition of the candidate; the points of the latter criteria are given by the board members through the interview.
- Is capable of undertaking constructive initiatives for a school to be distinguished and upgraded,
- To prevent and resolve problems arising in a school unit, to overcome the difficulties that may arise during the management of school, to create a good school pedagogical and psychological climate which is suitable for cooperation and communication with the State and local authorities, with teachers, with parents of students in a school unit, with students,
- To have elements and traits inspiring confidence in teachers of the school, in parents, in pupils, etc. and,
- To positively contribute during his/her duties to the proper functioning of the school in which he/she serves as principal.

In summary, the school principals' selection is made according with both objectively scored and other considering points, but often their choice is mainly determined by the latter. There were, and there is, therefore, many cases in which the accomplished principals' selection was depended on the number of scores the candidate received from the interview, the points given from the interview range from 14 to 20, which is a fact that is not at all palatable for a school principal's selection (Nomos (Law) 2986/2002; Nomos (Law) 3467/2006; Nomos (Law) 4327/2015; Nomos (Law) 4547/2018). And here one really has to ask whether the council members in a short interview of 10 to 15 minutes are able to distinguish the candidate's abilities and skills as well as the mental health of the candidate, and moreover, whether all of its members have the appropriate knowledge and training needed in these cases. However, are there at least a few instances where the most qualified school principals are dismissed, owing to both the inadequate training and lack of qualifications of the council members entitled to selection and the frequent interference of political parties to the council members? By this position we do not impugn at all the council members' qualifications, but we merely pose a question for thought, reflection and improvement of the selection procedures by the formal educational policy makers.

Both the objectively scored and the other considering/subjective criteria play an important role in a school principals' selection. In this fifteen-year period in which we draw our analysis and during of which the various school principals selections were made (Nomos (Law) 2986/2002; Nomos (Law)3467/2006; Nomos (Law) 4327/2015; Nomos (Law) 4547/2018), it is clear to which of the many choices having been made so far the objective or the subjective criteria have had an important role. There were, for example, selections where the subjective criteria prevented the selection of candidates who had increased objective qualifications, because on the one hand, the interview was, as it has

Specifically, with the interview an attempt is made to be determined if the candidate:

already been pointed out, subsidized with many points (Nomos (Law) 2986/2002; Nomos (Law) 3467/2006; Nomos (Law) 4327/2015; Nomos (Law) 4547/2018), and on the other hand, there were a large number of candidates who were excluded from the selection process, either because they did not meet the requirements required to apply, or because they barely met the requirements (these concern the teachers' teaching years and not the educational service). Thus, while they had, for example, increased qualifications (second bachelor, master and doctoral degrees and other such qualifications), they were not selected because of the importance of the candidate's job status (attending service councils, having many years of teaching and non educational years of experience) as well as of the interview. From this phenomenon hardly any political party to the so-called "democratic arc" that ruled and has ruled the country until today is excluded.

Regarding the weight given to the selection procedures of the educational executives, in this case of school principals, the political parties, N.D. and the until previously government of SYRIZA-AN.EL. have the first word for the teaching and not the educational experience. Here one has to ask how the two ideologically opposite political parties can coincide with this arrangement. However, with regard to the many points given in the interview, no political party that has ruled the country to date has been excluded. All parties (PASOK, ND, DIMAR, SYRIZA, AN.EL.) appear to have strongly supported the interview premium over the objective criteria. The reason, as one might suppose, is obvious. They wanted and still want to select those candidates who were members of their party or who friendly attached to it; that is, all political parties act with almost the same rationale.

Another measure implemented by the two political parties having ruled the country for many years, namely the ND and PASOK, concerning school principal, was their different opinion about whether the school principal's position had to be permanent or not. For example, by the Law 2043/1992 voted under New Democracy's government school principals were elected permanently, but after two years by the Law 2188/1994 under PASOK's government, the previous Law was abolished, and the four-year term tenure of school principals returned. This attitude of the political parties illustrates their position, philosophy and ideology regarding the school principals' selection as well as the way the achievement of a qualitative upgrade of school units' work with regard to the principal [17].

In addition, another two measures having an important, if not a determining, role to school principals' selection were the tape recording of the interview of each candidate for the school principal's position (Nomos (Law) 3848/2010) and teachers' voting for their selection (Nomos (Law) 4327/2015).

One of these measures, the interview, has been applied until today, and in our opinion, this is good, (has already been applied in three selections, in 2011, in 2015, and in 2017) [18], while the second measure was applied only once, in 2015, given that one year later it was declared unconstitutional by the Council of State, and therefore the procedures for selecting school principals had to be repeated, which was the case in 2017 [19]. It is noted that the tape recording was also applied to the selection of other educational executives, the directors for education (2010, 2015 and 2017), school counselors (2013), and in August 2018 to the selection of the coordinators of educational work, former school counselors (see Nomos (Law) 4547/2018; Nomos (Law) 4559/2018). At this point, one has to point out that the tape recording was introduced under the government of PASOK by Law 3848/2010, while the measure of teachers' vote in the election of school principals under the government of SYRIZA and ANEL by Law 4347/2015. Whether or not these measures have contributed positively to the selection of appropriate and capable educational executives is a matter that needs to be explored, but we would agree with the position of Emeritus Professor Dimitris Chatzidimou who argues that, despite any disadvantages of teacher voting, it is a measure that would contribute positively provided that schools would be fully autonomous and that education remains a public good. As far as the recording of the interview was concerned, it was well implemented and is implemented, as this might possibly minimize inappropriate (antipedagogical, authoritarian) behaviors by council members that might have been possible if there were no tape recordings in the selection procedures of school principals [12].

The criteria for selecting school principals in most choices could be argued to favor to a large extent the candidates who had participated in various types of service councils, namely trade unionists [20]. This implies that trade unions, irrespective of what they themselves support, appear to play an important role in the educational activities of school units and in education in general, since, despite their opposing views, they belong to political parties [12]. At this point, however, one might ask, as it has already pointed out, what about those candidates who do not belong to any political party, but still have high academical, etc., qualifications and are held by democratic principles and values [12, 21, 22]. After all, all teachers as civil servants are required by the Constitution to abide by the laws of the state, to behave democratically, etc., so they cannot be marginalized and do not have the opportunity to take over the positions of responsibility to prove their knowledge and skills in practice [12].

CONCLUSION

Concluding this brief theoretical study, it is strongly pointed out that almost all the political parties

that have taken over the country's governance in recent years that have been referred to in the present work appear to be moving in the same context and for the same purpose. That is, they try to elect as principals, if not their party executives in the strict sense of the word, people who are friends with them, so they (the political parties) make frequent relevant legislative changes as they serve them. Furthermore, it seems that in the school principals' selection an important role have those participated in service councils, that is to say, the trade unions of the educational community as they participate in almost all of the selections. It can also be argued that a large number of them (the unionists) occupy the position of school principal [6]. In addition, research has also shown that men are the majority as school principals, compared to women who are unfortunately a minority [23, 24] despite their high numbers in education and despite the announcements and declarations being usually done by all political parties, regardless of their ideological orientation. Regarding a meritocratic choice of school principals and generally of all educational executives, one could end up at the institution of regional exams, despite the rigor of the institution, while without being neglected the objective criteria of the candidates [12].

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