

Moving towards school based management and effective headship: views of Cypriot head teachers and teachers

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In the past decades it became evident in many nations that the existing bureaucratic systems failed to improve performance because their structure had to do with a centralised government authority that controlled every decision. As a result there has been a decentralisation movement that intended to transfer authority from the higher level of government to a lower organisational level. In this way, schools have undergone many changes in the way they are expected to be led, managed and operated. All these changes in the structure of educational systems and particularly the move towards a school based management had a major impact on the roles and responsibilities of head teachers who require changes in skills and capacities so as to respond to their roles.

Despite the constant global educational reform the educational system in Cyprus is still bureaucratic and highly centralised. Its structure keeps the schools under the control of the central authority, which is the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), while the head teachers are restricted to limited power. That kind of structure shapes a strict hierarchy that makes the current educational system unable to bring about effectiveness and quality in education. More particularly, a total educational reform is essential in order to adjust the content and teaching methods of our education in a world that keeps changing.

Firstly, it is important to mention that the term 'Educational Management' that is being used in this project has to do with the training of head teachers so as to develop skills in order to be able to play a vital role in the development of primary education. The project also focuses on 'school based management' as the medium for decentralisation of decision making authority to the school site, where the head teacher functions as the change agent within his workplace.

Taking into consideration my area of interest, the project aimed to discuss changes and innovations in the educational system of Cyprus that will lead to decentralisation. Furthermore, the report is a review of the head teachers' roles according to the views of Cypriot teachers and head teachers.

More particularly, the project aimed to describe the Educational System in Cyprus and then to trace the characteristics of effective head teachers. In addition it aimed to discuss factors that influence school effectiveness and also make suggestions for school improvement in Cyprus.

As a result, the research questions focused on the characteristics of the Cyprus Educational System and also on the factors that influence school effectiveness. Moreover, they focused on the elements that make a head teacher effective by examining the views of teachers and head teachers. In addition, the significance of these elements was scaled and the possible differences between the views of the participants according to their gender, level of education or age were also examined.

Then, the review suggested innovations that are important in order to improve education leadership in Cyprus.

In order to meet the requirements of the aims/objectives and research questions of my project, I have used the survey as an approach and the questionnaire as a main data collection technique. However, for triangulation reasons and in order to increase confidence in my results I used the interview as a complementary data collection technique, thus combining quantitative and qualitative research families.

For the purposes of the qualitative part a total of three head teachers (2 female and 1 male), working in local schools were interviewed. Concerning the purposes of the survey the sample population was 114 teachers and deputy head teachers working in local primary schools.

In detail, the interviews were semi-structured so as to give the possibility to the interviewer to probe responses in order to gather rich information. Moreover, the questionnaires were given in order to find out the views of teachers concerning the effectiveness of the head teachers and helped to enhance validity.

For the purposes of the study I had to obtain inside knowledge from the participants remaining at the same time objective and distant. That kind of role made it possible for some of the participants to be cautious in sharing opinions especially when part of the investigated area had to do with their head teachers. Furthermore the awareness of how the school functions and the role of the hierarchical structure of the organisation made me realise that those who have the power might not be supportive and willing to consider my recommendations and conclusions.

Another problem I had to face was that some of the teachers were not willing to complete the questionnaires. In spite of the amount of data I had to correlate and analyse, I have gained knowledge relevant with research methods and techniques and also I have become familiar with the structure of educational systems in different countries.

My project findings in the area of school effectiveness revealed that the participants consider educational leadership as the most important element that influences effectiveness in schools. As a result, they demand for a more complicated role of a head teacher who should develop new skills. On the contrary, they feel that parents and community interference in the operation of the school is an element of less importance.

Concerning the characteristics of the Cyprus Educational System the project revealed the existence of centralisation and conservatism in our educational system. There is also lack of autonomy which leads to the need for changes.

Other project findings related to the characteristics of effective headship:

More particularly in the area of curriculum development the teachers pointed out that most improvement is needed in the integration of the Programmes for children with special educational needs in the whole school curriculum whereas less importance is

needed in cooperating with the Ministry in order to facilitate the school's current needs.

In the area of school climate most need for improvement is found in developing a climate of recognition and support among staff and students. The analysis also revealed that teachers are not quite satisfied with their participation in decision making.

In the area of organisation and administration, teachers marked the need for most improvement in the head teacher's capability to guide the school and facilitate the fulfillment of school aims, whereas less importance is given in following the policies and instructions of the Ministry.

Concerning the area of collaboration with staff, the participants state the importance of cooperation between staff and their encouragement to follow a clear policy in organising and managing the classroom. They specified the significance of the frequent meetings with staff and also the fact that they dislike the evaluator role of the head teacher.

Finally, in the area of community and parents involvement, improvement is needed in the advice and guidance given to students in order to have a clear picture of the vision and objectives of the school.

The project conclusions were that:

- The item that demands the most improvement refers to the development of a climate of support and recognition among staff and students.
- An urgent issue is the integration of programmes for children with special educational needs in the mainstream curriculum.
- The teachers state that there is no need for further improvement in the cooperation with the Ministry.
- The current educational system is highly bureaucratic and there is no need to improve issues of organising the school because the current system already puts particular emphasis on this.

The project recommendations are:

- The power of central authority should be transferred to local communities and schools
- It is very useful and of high priority to conduct research concerning the educational issues in Cyprus
- Another important step should be the further training of head teachers
- There must be special attention paid to current problems of our daily society such as special education and multicultural education
- The key to real educational reform will become when we move to the improvement of a shared decision making process in schools