

## The Evaluation of the School Unit: Teachers' Perceptions

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**Abstract:** The evaluation of school units is particularly important, as it improves the performance and development of teachers and education in general and as a function affects the school climate in the school community. However, despite its importance, it has been a field of intense controversy in Greece, among the actors involved in education. The purpose of this thesis is the study, research and analytical presentation of the perceptions and attitudes of Greek teachers regarding the evaluation of educational units. Over a period of two months in 2023, the method involved quantitative analysis of data from the use of a questionnaire as a research tool and the sample consisted of 107 primary and secondary school teachers. Once collected, the data was statistically analyzed using SPSS. The results showed that teachers' willingness to have evaluation was generally expressed, but there were no positive perceptions of evaluation and it was believed that more problems can be caused by it than benefits, due to the fact that it cannot be conducted in an objective and non-discriminatory way. In addition, it was found that teachers want an active role in the evaluation process and that they place particular emphasis on their training on it, as a prerequisite for its conduct. Thus, it is imperative to train and inform teachers about evaluation and as institutional support of the school climate, actions to carry out fair and objective evaluation, the training of evaluators and the active participation of teachers in it, both in its design and implementation. Still, practical testing of the assessment can highlight strengths and weaknesses of it. Further emphasis on future research on the role played by socio-demographic factors, views on school unit evaluation and education in general, as well as the search for new perspectives on its influence on school climate, can highlight findings found in the bibliogue.

**Key words:** evaluation of school units, teacher perceptions, education, primary-secondary teachers, Greece

### 1. Introduction

The 2000s were a period when systematic evaluation of school units began, in order to upgrade and improve school reality (Kolymbari & Hadjikostantis, 2016). Evaluation is a process of determining the suitability, functionality and outcome of teaching practice, but also of education in general, in an effective, valid, reliable and objective way (Karagianni, 2020).

School evaluation is an inevitable consequence of planning and planning (Karafyllis, 2010), as it contributes to monitoring performance and ensuring the best possible achievement of the goals of each type of unit. It also improves teachers' performance and helps them develop professionally. However, its process involves additional workload, poor treatment and non-acceptance by the educational staff, incorrect implementation and lack of

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adequate information (Kolymbari & Hadjikostantis, 2016).

## **2. Summary Description of the Research Study**

The decision to conduct the research was made because of a research gap in the literature, conflicting findings between the surveys or the need for more recent knowledge and in each case consisted of specific stages to be followed. These stages are the formulation of the purpose of the research and the research questions, then the appropriate research approach was chosen, followed by the collection, analysis of the data and interpretation of the results of the analysis (Zafeiropoulos, 2015; Bryman, 2017).

In the collection of primary data, the data were collected directly by the researcher from the field of research and not from any other source, which was considered more appropriate for this case (Rabianski, 2003). And since quantitative approximations investigate a phenomenon in the sense of “how much”, the data here were encoded in numerical form and analyzed with statistics. The advantages were the facilitation of the process, the saving of resources and time, and the ability to collect data from large samples and wider geographical areas (Mujs, 2011).

Synchronic design was chosen, where the phenomenon is studied at a specific moment without taking into account history. Attitudes, perceptions, opinions, feelings and experiences of a specific population were investigated, while the research tool was the structured questionnaire (Bryman, 2017), based on the purpose of the research and the research questions formulated. In addition, it was possible to collect data from a large sample of a wider geographical area.

## **3. Necessity of the Research Study**

The evaluation of the school unit is a field of intense controversy in Greece, between the actors involved in education (Papakonstantinou & Kolymbari, 2017). Positive perceptions of it include the potential improvement of teachers' professional competence, the opportunity for feedback, motivation and enhancement of their self-esteem. Regarding teachers' negative perceptions, they are skeptical about the person who will undertake the assessment, the evaluation criteria, but also the way in which the results will be used. There is also the concern of abuse of assessment to control and restrict freedom in teaching, but also the fear that it will be a reason for dismissal (Moustaka, 2018).

However, despite its importance for education, as well as the number of conflicting views among teachers, there is no recent research activity on their views on school unit evaluation. This research gap was the reason for conducting this research, through which the strengths and weaknesses of evaluation will be highlighted, providing modern data in the literature and showing appropriate assessment practices that will lead to improved education and make evaluation acceptable to teachers.

## **4. Brief Literature Review of Previous Research**

### **4.1 International Research**

Internationally, McNamara et al. (2021), investigated teachers' and school principals' perceptions of the school self-assessment process in Ireland. This study used two data collection methods, semi-structured interviews and focus groups, and the sample consisted of 6 principals, 4 deputy headteachers and 30 teachers from six

primary and post-primary schools in Ireland. According to the results, participants were fully aware of the support services. And while it seems that principals find the process useful and believe that if it is not mandatory, teachers may not fully engage with it, on the other hand, teachers were less supportive, referring to the weaknesses they identified in the system preventing them from fully participating in the process.

Drvodelić & Domović (2016) conducted research to investigate preschool teachers' attitudes about self-assessment. This is a quantitative survey, where the questionnaire was used as a research tool and the sample consisted of 170 teachers from pre-school institutions in Croatia. According to the results obtained, it was found that there is a great willingness on their part to actively participate in quality assurance teams as part of the self-assessment process in kindergartens and that their opinions and attitudes are positive only when they possess relevant knowledge.

Hopkins et al. (2016), conducted research to investigate teachers' views on school self-assessment and evaluation related to external accountability, i.e., inspector evaluation. For the collection of the data of the qualitative study, the interview was used, with the participation of teachers from 25 Primary and Secondary schools in England. According to the findings obtained, participants expressed negative experiences of external evaluation (inspection).

#### **4.2 Research in Greece**

Similarly, at the Greek level, Pios (2013) conducted a quantitative survey involving 195 people working in primary education units in the region of Magnesia and the questionnaires were used as a research tool. According to the results, it seems that although participants want evaluation, they highlight the lack of an evaluation culture and that they do not know which type of evaluation they want most.

Kiamou (2017) conducted qualitative research to investigate the views of 20 preschool teachers, which used the semi-structured interview to collect the data. From these, it emerged that self-evaluation is important and that it must have specific characteristics in order to be effective, such as clear goals, organized execution and objective judgment. However, they expressed the fear and insecurity they experience, due to the sloppy organization and information about the process, reasons that they said implied its failure.

Mizis (2019) conducted research to investigate the extent to which teachers believe that self-evaluation is a process that acts as a catalyst to ensure the effective functioning of the school. For the collection of data, the questionnaire as a research tool and the group interview were used to enhance the credibility and validity of the survey. Regarding the survey sample, 150 public school teachers from Heraklion, Crete participated. Based on the results of the survey, participants had from negative to indifferent attitudes about the effectiveness of self-assessment at school. In this context, the results showed that it is important to emphasize the acquisition of appropriate theoretical as well as practical knowledge on school self-evaluation issues by teachers. The researcher concludes that it is necessary to take steps through which teachers will have an active role in the decision-making process as well as in the implementation of innovations in school.

Patsili (2021), conducted a quantitative survey with the participation of 130 teachers — PE 70 in order to explore their views on the legislative framework governing evaluation. The structured questionnaire was used as a research tool. According to the results obtained, participants are dissatisfied about the educational work provided in schools and changes are needed to achieve its improvement, as they believe that self-evaluation can enhance the quality of education. It was also found that the evaluation of the work produced by the Teachers' Associations is important to take place every year. An important finding concerns teachers' concern that self-assessment may

contribute to the comparison between schools and that effective information to teachers on the legislative framework is of major importance.

Barbariotti (2022), conducted a survey in order to examine the views of teachers of both primary and secondary education regarding the evaluation of school units. This is a quantitative survey involving 82 teachers and the questionnaire was used as a research tool. On the basis of the results of the survey obtained, the information on the evaluation is not satisfactory. Moreover, the majority of participants consider the evaluation of the school unit and the individual unit necessary in order to improve weak points. It was also found that the best way to evaluate is the combination between internal and external. Finally, concerns were raised about the creation of a climate of safety and the objectivity of the evaluation process.

## **5. Methodology of the Research Process**

### **5.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of Greek teachers regarding the evaluation of educational units.

### **5.2 Research Questions**

- 1) What is the attitude of teachers towards the evaluation of school units?
- 2) What are the main disadvantages of school unit evaluation, according to teachers in Greece?
- 3) What are the main benefits of school unit evaluation, according to teachers in Greece?
- 4) What do Greek teachers think are the appropriate ways to evaluate the school unit?

### **5.3 Research Tool**

The tool used is the structured questionnaire. In addition to the advantages mentioned above, there was also the ability to collect data in numerical form, making it easier to encode and analyze it. In addition, it provided the possibility of anonymity and the possibility for the researcher not to be present during the completion process, eliminating the possibility of influencing participants' responses (Shaughnessy et al., 2018; Bryman, 2017).

The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher making an effort to make the wording of the questions as clear and short as possible, without altering the meaning of the question, so that the participants can answer exactly what they are asked. In addition, the answers were divided into sections, so as to create a sense of organization.

The introductory cover letter informed about the context in which the research is taking place and its purpose, ensuring ethical issues. In addition, it informed about the importance of their contribution to the research, its anonymous and voluntary nature and the fact that the data will be used exclusively for research purposes.

### **5.4 Sampling and Sampling**

The survey utilized convenience sampling, where the sample was selected based on its availability and easy finding, which facilitates the process in terms of saving time and resources (Shaughnessy et al., 2018).

In the survey, the participant had to be a primary or secondary teacher from all regions of Greece. Based on these criteria, data were collected from 107 people, which constituted the final sample.

### **5.5 Ethical Issues**

During the investigation, all necessary ethical issues were taken into account by the researcher. Initially,

informed consent was respected. The researcher fully informed participants about the purpose and process of the survey, both orally and through the cover letter at the beginning of the questionnaire.

In addition, it was ensured that no type of harm would be experienced by participants in the process. While, it was clear that they could leave it at any time they wished without any consequence whatsoever.

Furthermore, the anonymity of the participants was maintained, while the information they provided was used exclusively for the purpose of the research.

### **5.6 Data Collection Process**

After the questions were selected, the questionnaire was formatted in electronic format using the Google Forms service. The researcher then contacted people in her circle who met the criteria for participation in the survey and after explaining to them about it, forwarded the questionnaire to them via email in order to complete it. They were then asked to do the same for people in their own circle, thus utilizing the avalanche method. In addition, the questionnaire was distributed to social networking groups, of which the researcher is a member.

### **5.7 Data Analysis Process**

The data was downloaded to the researcher's computer in the form of an excel spreadsheet. After being encoded in numerical form, they were introduced into the IBM SPSS Statistics Version 23 statistical program, where their statistical analysis took place.

In the context of descriptive statistics, frequencies (N) and percentages (%) were calculated for categorical variables and descriptive measures of mean (average) and standard deviation (t.a.) for continuous variables.

## **6. Results**

### **6.1 Description of the Sample**

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Sample**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Sex		
Male	33	30.8
Female	74	69.2
Age		
Up to 29 years old	5	4.7
30–39 years old	54	50.5
40–49 years old	36	33.6
50–59 years old	11	10.3
60 years old	1	0.9
Marital status		
Married	53	51.0
Single	47	45.2
Other	4	3.8
Educational attainment		
Second degree	22	21.4
Third degree	1	1.0
First master's degree	65	63.1
Second master's degree	10	9.7
Phd	5	4.9
Years of experience in education		

(Table 1 to be continued)

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(Table 1 continued)

Up to 5	41	38.3
6–10	41	38.3
11–20	18	16.8
21–30	6	5.6
Staff		
Permanent	66	62.9
Alternate	36	34.3
Hourly Wage	3	2.9
Type of training		
General education	60	56.1
Special education	40	37.4
Both	7	6.5

**Table 2 Attitudes of the Sample Towards the Existence of An Evaluation of the School Unit**

Statements	Average	Standard Deviation
Assessment should be compulsory in every school.	3.26	.848
The assessment should be carried out on a voluntary basis.	3.04	.905
The evaluation should be carried out at least once a year.	3.23	.819
The assessment should be carried out after adequate teacher training on it.	4.14	.713
I am willing to have an evaluation.	3.84	.801

**Table 3 Sampled Perceptions of the Disadvantages of School Unit Evaluation**

Statements	Average	Standard Deviation
Lack of a culture of evaluation — self-evaluation	3.67	.700
Identification of evaluation with punitive procedures	3.84	.806
Inadequate information and training of teachers on self-evaluation	3.94	.791
Inability to fully involve teachers in the evaluation process	3.88	.768
High stakes for teachers	3.75	.851
Lack of organization for truly effective and objective evaluation	4.07	.724
There is no real benefit to the educational work	3.76	.887
It requires considerable time that will necessarily be sacrificed by working hours	4.06	.772
Teachers are not familiar with the assessment process	4.13	.651
Causing stress and burnout to teachers, leading to reduced performance	4.13	.809

**Table 4 Sampled Perceptions of the Benefits of School Evaluation**

Statements	Average	Standard Deviation
The evaluation highlights the educational and pedagogical needs of teachers	2.69	.847
The evaluation highlights the need for teacher training	2.95	.896
The evaluation highlights the logistical needs of the school unit (e.g., infrastructure)	2.76	.930
The evaluation highlights the need for the production of innovative educational work	2.67	.854
Assessment strengthens accountability among members of the school community	2.75	.866
Evaluation contributes to improving the quality of the education system and making changes	2.76	.917
Evaluation enhances the quality of education	2.66	.905
Assessment can enhance collaboration between teachers	2.75	.900
Evaluation improves relationships between teachers	2.52	.705
Assessment improves teachers' professional skills	2.66	.829

**Table 5 Results on the Sample's Views on School Evaluation Methods**

Statements	Average	Standard Deviation
The evaluation must be carried out by a body outside the school unit.	3.25	.792
The evaluation must be carried out internally within the school unit.	3.27	.834
The evaluation must be carried out externally as well as internally.	3.00	.686
Assessment should be done individually for each teacher.	2.79	.918
The teachers' association should have a central role in the evaluation of the school unit.	3.94	.782
The parents' association should have a central role in the evaluation of the school unit.	2.56	.726
The school principal should have a central role in the evaluation of the school unit.	2.78	.739
The evaluation of the unit should be a collective task of the members of the school unit.	3.28	.825

## 6.2 Debate

The research sample of 107 teachers consisted mainly of women, aged 30–39, who were married. Most of the sample, in terms of educational attainment, held a first master's degree. In terms of work-related characteristics in the sample, most participants had up to 10 years of experience and were permanent staff in mainly general education schools.

Regarding the first research question, the results of the analysis showed that the sample ranges in neutrality, both for compulsory and voluntary assessment in schools, but also for the frequency of its implementation at least once a year. Participants tend to be positive about the implementation of the assessment after adequate training on it. This supports the results of Drvodelić and Domović (2016), who found that teachers' training and knowledge contribute to them being more positive towards assessment. Their willingness to evaluate is consistent with Pius' (2013) research. In the Kiamou survey (2017), teachers consider the existence of compulsory assessment important.

The fact that there are conflicting results in the literature highlights the complexity of the issue. The different results probably arise due to the implementation of the surveys in different places and times, in different sampling methods and criteria for participation in the sample, so they make clear the need to implement systematic reviews and meta-analyses, as with the data so far it is not possible to draw a clear picture or propose future research directions.

Regarding the second research question, the results showed that teachers' unfamiliarity with the assessment process and the resulting stress and burnout can reduce their performance. The lack of organization and the time that can be sacrificed from working hours for its implementation are the next main disadvantages. This is followed, in descending order of ownership, by the lack of information and training of teachers, their inability to fully participate in evaluation, its identification with punishment, the lack of substantial benefit from the evaluation process, the high stakes for teachers and the lack of an evaluation culture in Greece. Reducing the stakes can empower teachers and make them more positive about assessment (Hopkins et al., 2016), which shows the importance of this trait for the effectiveness of assessment and for making appropriate decisions.

In addition, the findings of the present study reinforce the findings of other studies conducted in Greece that showed significant disadvantages of school unit evaluation. In particular, the view of the lack of a culture of evaluation in Greece (Pios, 2013), the lack of information and training of teachers, the lack of organization and objectivity (Kiamou, 2017), the absence of substantial improvement (Patsili, 2021), the absence of a climate of security in the context of evaluation and the sense of punishment and fear that may be underlying it, as well as the

required time that will have to be sacrificed from working hours, is reinforced, but also the stress and burnout that can result.

All the above, problems and disadvantages highlighted in previous studies, are further reinforced by the present one and should be taken into account by the competent bodies, so as to improve every aspect of evaluation and form a more positive attitude by teachers about it, contributing to the effectiveness and improvement of education and not the other way around, creating further problems.

As regards the third research question, the results show a very negative attitude of the sample, as none of the advantages listed in the questionnaire could be agreed. On the contrary, they all recorded an average of neutrality and even lower than 3.00, suggesting that the sample tends rather towards the disagreement of their existence. The benefit with the lowest average was the improvement of relations between teachers, while the benefit with the highest was the highlighting of the need for teacher training. These results contradict the findings of other studies that have shown significant benefits for education through evaluation, according to teachers' own perceptions, such as improving the quality of the school unit, the educational process and education in general (Patsili, 2021; Kiamou, 2017; Drvodelić & Domović, 2016), improving teachers' professional skills, as well as improving relations between them and strengthening their cooperation.

These data taken together, combined with the results mentioned above, lead to the conclusion that teachers generally find evaluation useful but do not believe that it can be conducted in an appropriate way to provide benefits. In the present study, participants were completely opposed and not at all optimistic about the positive contribution of evaluation and these findings should be of particular concern. It is necessary to identify the factors that lead to the view that no benefit will result from the evaluation process and to take appropriate action so that teachers themselves agree that it will indeed bring advantages. In addition, further investigation is needed to understand whether the views of these teachers are truly objective and based on negative experiences or simply arise due to prejudice, bias, fear, ideology and influence from external factors that are against evaluation.

The fourth and final research question that was asked showed as the main result that the central role of the teachers' association in the process tends to be very high in the appropriate means of evaluation. This can be combined with findings from other research that are similar. Patsili (2021), showed that teachers disagree with the view that only the Ministry of Education should formulate the thematic axes of evaluation programming. This shows the importance that teachers themselves attach to their active participation in the evaluation process.

It was also noted that the participation of students and parents in the process of school self-evaluation is not necessary, as it seems that the participating teachers support the evaluation based on their own participation in it and their own strong role in the process. Furthermore, all other methods range in neutrality, including the collegiality of the members of the school unit in the process, internal evaluation and evaluation by an external body, which concerns both the general culture and individual characteristics of teachers and evaluators. Further research is needed to determine the factors.

## **7. Conclusions**

Initially, it seems that teachers maintain willingness towards the existence of school evaluation, showing a good first basis for its implementation. However, they pay special attention to their training on it and rather consider their information and knowledge a prerequisite for carrying it out. In addition, their attitudes towards frequent, mandatory or voluntary evaluation range from neutrality. It is clear that through their training this



attitude can be improved.

In addition, it was found that teachers as a whole argue that evaluation hides a series of disadvantages for both the evaluation process and the educational process, which may not benefit education at all or even burden it. Their views show that they do not believe that there is an appropriate basis for proper, objective and effective evaluation, but rather that it is carried out in a way that works negatively for them, rather than improves. In fact, the problems reported have been found in previous studies, which increase their potency.

In terms of benefits, the responses were neutral and rather negative for each of those reported in the questionnaire. It was the need for teacher training on which the highest agreement was reached. As these are benefits derived from findings from other research, the results of this quantitative study show that teachers do not consider and do not expect any benefit from the evaluation process.

Regarding the preferred way of evaluation, it seems that teachers want to have an active role in the evaluation process and not depend solely on external factors. These results can reveal mistrust and feelings of insecurity towards existing evaluation methods. The other evaluation modes mentioned in the questionnaire received negative replies.

Finally, they agreed much less that evaluation should be carried out by a body outside the school unit. It is also worth mentioning that substitute teachers were the only ones who disagreed that evaluation can enhance cooperation between teachers and this deserves to be a starting point regarding the perceptions of permanent and substitute teachers and the relationships between them. In any case, the results suggest that type of employment plays a role in teachers' perceptions of assessment, but with these data it is not clear how.

## **8. Proposals**

First of all, it is more than clear that there is a need for teacher training and information on evaluation. This could be done both as part of their basic education and throughout life, both at school and with programmes available for non-currently appointed teachers. Thus, they will know more about the evaluation and will be able to cope with it, while feelings of mistrust and insecurity will be replaced with feelings of self-confidence and willingness to try.

Still, it seems that specific methods should be implemented to avoid bias. This can be achieved both through thorough effort in the context of evaluation design, measures to ensure the objectivity of evaluation, training of evaluators, assurance of meritocracy and control of evaluation results.

In addition, it is clear that evaluation should be a motivating tool for teachers and perceived as a means of improving education, rather than a means of punishing, consequential and causing fear and stress. In this context, it is initially proposed that the design of the evaluation process includes, in addition to the other members, teachers, who know firsthand that the methods to be followed are fully objective.

Finally, it seems that teachers want to play an important and active role in the evaluation of the school unit. In this way, methods must be found which will make this possible, without at the same time losing the objectivity of the process. However, it is clear that external factors cannot be eliminated, nor can evaluation be done solely by teachers. On the contrary, a good balance should be maintained between the two.

## **9. Future Research**

Initially, it could be proposed to repeat the survey with a larger sample, which would lead to safer

conclusions (removal of restriction), as well as to find participants with known probability sampling, in order to ensure representation of the sample and make it more appropriate to generalize the results to the wider population.

In addition, systematic reviews and meta-analysis are proposed to further investigate the issue. In the literature can be identified empirical research, qualitative and quantitative, which studies the issue of evaluating school groups from the perspective of teachers. Synthesis of the results of empirical studies will reveal trends and divergences of research data in a way that will show strengths and weaknesses, propose appropriate future directions and practical applications.

Finally, it is proposed to test different evaluation methods in practice, before formalizing its design in any particular way. The tests in specific school units will highlight in practice the strengths and weaknesses of the evaluation methods, the practices that need to be followed and the weaknesses that need to be addressed in order for the evaluation of the school unit to have the role it deserves.

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