



Primary Education Teachers towards the Institution of Assessment: the Case of Greece

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Abstract

Research presents the attitudes and perceptions of Greek primary education teachers, towards the institution of a system of assessment, the members, its aims and content. This institution is centrally designed in Greece, namely by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs. Teachers evaluate the conditions under which assessment can be effective, beneficial, functional and objective, define the characteristics desirable for the individual they believe suitable to carry out assessment and also express their personal opinion on assessment.

Aims of research are: the investigation of teachers' views on a controversial issue with political implications, b) the evaluation and upgrading of the education system. Evaluation of the education system has social and economic dimensions and is related to labor force and economic development, c) the development of teachers as professionals.

The research for the investigation into the attitude of teachers of Primary education assessment came from ideas of INSET teachers in the Didaskalio (INSET College) Alexander Delmouzos institution in Rhodes, during the subject "Methodology of Educational Research". A questionnaire was formulated which was distributed and codified by the teachers themselves. To these initial questionnaires another third were added to create a sample of 942 teachers from different areas of Greece.

Research findings show that the majority (74%) of teachers give priority to assessment which contributes to self-knowledge and self-esteem. A percentage over 73% maintains that "assessment can be effective, useful or functional when assessors have full pedagogical and scientific training". Over 69% accept the counseling character of assessment, more than 67% associate assessment with "well organized training". More than 77% associate teachers' assessment with the educational function and express the expectation that "assessment will contribute to the improvement in quality of educational function". A majority of 83% that an assessor's personality plays important role in assessment. 50.85% relate the acceptance of assessment to possible vocational promotion and 34.40% to salary increase. Finally, as it clears from the given answers, the sampled teachers in this present research do not reject assessment in any way.

Keywords: Primary teachers, Assessment, Attitudes, Education system

1. Necessity of research

Over the period 1950-1998 at least ten reports from experts on Public Administration detailed the Greek reality, locating contemporary needs at a European and international level and highlights suggestions for reforms (Report of Experts on Public Administration 1950-1998). As regards education and the workforce, expert's reports referred to the following: a) the level and quality of education provided at all levels as well as to the large scale production of higher education graduates lacking in vocational qualities and skills corresponding to typical criteria; b) the need for an

upgrade of the workforce through the reformation of the education system, vocational training and information c) the humanitarian nature of education at all levels d) The need for recognition of the importance of science and technology, as well as the modernization of school programmes e) the need for sufficient vocational training for teachers, plus continuous in-service training and education not only on issues related to their science but also on issues of contemporary technology and other such areas; f) the necessity of adopting an action agreement regarding the research and control of outcomes in the wider sector of public organizations, including educational institutions g) the need for the establishment of an incentive scheme to increase of effectiveness of civil servants as well as teachers.

In the field of education results are important in two main areas a) the first refers to its function as a public mechanism, which must implement concrete administrative tasks related to structure, organization and function b) the second concerns program, their targets, teaching methods and results aiming at future improvements and the effective utilization of the country's workforce.

Forms of assessment change from era to era. During the period of mass education, educational assessment concerned individual achievement and student potential, control and assessment was of the quality of educational processes, educational institutions and the teachers' work. It included public examination of students, which reflected the quality of teaching; periodical assessment by inspectors who reported their records to the Ministry; reports from supervisory councils, which controlled the materials infrastructure as well as the appearance and teacher's attribution in order to implement a control system (including disciplinary punishments, transfers, dismissals and so on) (Lefas 1942). The mechanisms of assessment that were implemented from the beginning of the 19th century in Greece, as well as in industrially developed European countries, differed: in the position they held in the administration hierarchy (for example, they belonged to the community, the municipality, the prefecture, the central authority); in the composition of members (for example, simple civilians, mayors, judiciaries, teachers of secondary or tertiary education), in the selection process and the duration of members' service (for example elected, appointed, permanent, temporary); in the possibility of appeal and the defense of people involved in assessment (Lefas 1942, Dimaras 1973).

Over the last fifteen years efforts have been made internationally regarding the construction and reformation of the teachers' assessment processes (OECD 1991, 1994, OECD-CERI 1994). After 1982 there was a change from control methods to counselling intervention and the development of incentives for improvements in the quality of educational function. In 1995 in Greece the Center of Educational Research was established and in the same year the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs entrusted a special team with construction of a study – an assessment of the Greek education system. This study entitled *A Review of Greek Education – Report for OECD* was submitted to the OECD and a complete evaluation report on the Greek education system was requested from the organization.

Contemporary education as far as structure, organization, programmes content and the teachers involved are concerned, is under pressure for change in the current model of function. Under conditions of competition and the maximization of outcome of every activity, assessment plays a role (Usher and Edwards 1994). Contemporary political orientation regarding evaluation of the Greek education system began in 1996 with debates on teaching assessment, school units and students. In 1996 the Department of Assessment at the Pedagogical Institute began work on the elaboration of propositions for the assessment of educational task and the assessment of teachers. The following year an examination was implemented for the appointment of teachers in primary and secondary education. Law 2525/97 on a "United Lyceum" included the institution of processes for the assessment of teaching in primary and secondary education in order to evaluate "teacher adequacy", "the effectiveness of school units" as well as the general "effectiveness of the system".

Regulations concerning the assessment of educational task and of teachers were then specialized under the Law 2986/2002, the assessment of the educational task of school units was entrusted to the Center of Educational Research, while the Pedagogical Institute undertook the assessment of educational function and teachers. According to article 4 of Law 2986/2002 1. The aim of the assessment of educational function is the improvement and qualitative upgrade of all people involved in the education process and the continuous improvement of pedagogical communication and relations with students. The assessment of educational function aims for: the continuous development of teaching practice in the classroom, the qualitative development of school life, a precipitation in the formation of educational programs, a reduction in inequality in the functioning of school units, the identification of weaknesses of the education system, the appraisal of the efforts and activities of all members of the educational process in order to improve the overall educational result [...].

According to article 5 of the same law: The aim of teacher assessment is: a) the reinforcement of self-awareness regarding their scientific knowledge, their pedagogical education and their teaching ability; b) the formation of a funded overall picture about the rendering of their work; c) an effort to improve their service to the student by apply the assessors' observations and instructions; d) an indication of their weaknesses in the provision of their teaching work and an attempt to eliminate them; e) teacher satisfaction through the recognition of their work and the provision of incentives to people that want to be promoted and work in top positions in the educational field; f) the assessment of their training needs and a definition of the content of this training g) the cultivation of a climate of mutual respect and trust.

2. The sample identity

Gender: The questionnaire was completed by 318 men (33.76%) and 620 women (65.82%). 4 teachers (0.42%) did not answer the question on gender

Age: 19.00% is up to 30 years old, 30.47% is 31-40 years old, 41.61% 41-50 years old, 8.49% over 50 years old, 0.42% did not answer the question on their age.

Working placement: The majority of teachers that responded to research were serving in primary schools (872 teachers, 92.57% of the sample), 54 teachers served in nursery schools, while 16 did not answer the question on working placement. 10.19% of schools were small schools, 16.14% were 6/seated (schools with six teachers), 71.44% were large schools while 2.23% of respondents did not answer this question.

Teaching experience: 392 teachers (41.61%) have teaching experience up to 10 years, 154 teachers (16.35%) 11-15 years of experience, 152 teachers (16.14%) 16-20 years, 234 teachers (24.84%) over 20 years. 10 teachers (1.06%) did not answer. As far as their working status was concerned, 842 teachers (89.38%) were permanent, 72 teachers were supply teachers (7.64%), 20 teachers were hourly waged (2.12%) and 7 teachers (0.74%) did not answer the question.

Undergraduate studies of teachers: 344 teachers (36.52%) had attended a university department of primary education or pre-school education and 327 teachers (34.71%) had graduated from Pedagogical Academies in addition to their university studies. 83 teachers (8.81%) had attended other university departments and studied a special field. 146 teachers (15.50%) are graduates of Pedagogical Academies.

Further studies: 18.58% of teachers (175 individuals) had completed Didaskalio (INSET College) in addition to their undergraduate studies, 13.06% (123 teachers) had completed a postgraduate degree, 9.66% (91 people) had attended another university department, 5.52% (52 teachers) had finished from a university department and 3.18% (30 teachers) a higher technological institute.

3. Research findings

A set of seven questions aim at presenting the teachers' opinions on assessment (tables 1-7) and four supplement questions on assessment process (tables 8-11):

Assessment can be effective, useful functional when it contributes to self-knowledge and self-esteem: 74.84% of teachers (n 705) agree and completely agree, 14.23% partly agree (n 134), 9.56% (n 90) disagree and completely disagree, 13 teachers (1.38%) did not answer.

Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when assessors have full pedagogical and scientific training: 73.15% (n 689) agree and completely agree, 16.35% (n 154) partly agree, 9.02% (n 85) disagree and completely disagree, 14 teachers (1.49%) did not answer.

Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when the "rules of the game" are clear: 71.12% (n 670) agree and completely agree, 16.88% (n 159) partly agree, 9.44% (n 89) disagree and completely disagree and 2.55% (n 24) did not answer.

Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when the counseling character dominates: 69.42% (654 teachers) agree and completely agree, 19.21% (181 teachers) partly agree, 9.92% (91 teachers) disagree and completely disagree 1.70% (16 teachers) did not answer.

Assessment can be effective, useful and functional in case there is INSET and is organized correctly: 67.62% (n 637) agree and completely agree, 19.64% (n 185) partly agree, 11.04% (n 104) disagree and completely disagree 1.70% (n 16) did not answer.

Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when it is connected with vocational development: 50.85% (479 teachers) agree and completely agree, 23.25% (219 teachers) partly agree, 24.10% (227 teachers) disagree and completely disagree, 17 teachers (1.80%) did not answer.

Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when in case of positive assessment it is connected with salary increase: 34.40% (324 individuals) agree and completely agree, 21.76% partly agree (205 teachers), 42.36% (399 teachers) disagree and completely disagree, 1.49% (14 people) did not answer.

Who would be the right assessor (multiple answers possible): More than half of the teachers indicated the school counselor (55.41%), followed by the teachers association (35.03%, 330 teachers), the school's head-teacher (30.68%, 289 teachers), students (28.13%, 265 teachers), teacher colleagues (18.79% 177 teachers), the Director of the Office (17.54% 137 teachers), the parent association (7.11% 67 teachers) and school committee (3.82% 36 teachers)

In which cases does assessment have a role; (multiple answers possible): The teachers accept assessment when this contributes to the improvement of the educational function and the better function of school unit (77.60% and 53.61%

respectively) and to a lower degree (24.84%) when it does not have consequences on the salary and progress through the hierarchy.

Which factors could influence the objectivity of assessment? (multiple answers possible) The assessor's personality is declared (83.65%) as the most important factor for an objective assessment and then the number of students in the classroom of the assessed teacher (51.59%), the area of the school (43.21%), the well function of the school (37.90%) and the total number of students at school (20.06%).

Which is your personal attitude towards assessment? (multiple answers possible): Finally, teachers, at 54.41% are positive to the idea of self-assessment and of 51.75% of inner-assessment. A little over of one fifth of teachers (20.49%) declare that would prefer assessment did not exist and 6.79% to have a form of assessment by other school units.

The questionnaire also included the question to what degree teachers knew the questionnaire for assessment. Answers were: *not at all* (27.18%), *little* (43.21%), *sufficient* (22.19%), *very well* (6.26%). Those not answering this question amounted to 1.17%.

4. The classification of teachers

Individual characteristics and the way they answered the questions is reflected in the sample of 942 teachers. The answers are related to a high or low degree. The commonality of answers may lead to a proposition of classification of teachers that form the sample.

Methods of multi-variable statistical analysis are able to correlate all variables. In particular the methods of Analysis of Givens can help in the formulation of criteria for differentiation or classification of the individuals of a given sample and the classified grouping of individuals accordingly, in both cases, the commonality of characteristics, and in this case in the commonality of answers. For the criteria of differentiation or classification the method of Multiple Analysis of Correspondence (Correspondence Analysis) and the method of Hierarchical Classification (Cluster Analysis) of the SPAD software have been used.

4.1 Results of the Multiple Analysis of Correspondence

Of primary hierarchical importance is the criteria of differentiation (the first factorial axis according to the terminology of Analysis of Givens) which is based on the contradiction of statements *completely agree* and *agree* with the declarations *disagree completely* and *disagree* on the assessment questionnaire.

Of secondary hierarchical importance is the criteria of differentiation (the second factorial axis) which reflects the opposition of declarations that are expressed in an absolute way (*completely agree* and *completely disagree*) with the statements expressed in a less absolute way (*agree*, *partly agree* and *disagree*).

Of tertiary hierarchical importance is the criteria of differentiation (the third factorial axis) which expresses opposition, in relation to the way of answering a series of questions, for example an older, experienced male teacher working in a primary school compared to a younger, less-experienced female-teacher who working in a nursery school.

4.2 The results of Hierarchical Classification

The Hierarchical Classification led to the creation of seven groups of data which are split as in the diagram (1) placed at the end of the paper, extracted using the software. Along with each group the corresponding number and corresponding percentage of teachers are presented. The teachers' common characteristics in each group are as follows:

Group 1: 222 teachers (23.57% of sample)

Teachers in this group are male, over 40 years old, who work in large primary schools serving areas of 10.000-30.000 inhabitants and they have a working experience of over 15 years. They are graduates of Pedagogy Academies, and programs but some have attended supplementary training programs. They declare that they agree with all the suggestions referred to in the questionnaire in order for the assessment to become effective, useful or functional.

Group 2: 177 teachers (18.79% of the sample)

In this group teachers declare that they completely agree with the suggestions in order for the assessment to be effective, useful and functional. Teachers in this group are males who have graduated from Pedagogy Academies and programs of supplementary training, in most cases by INSET colleges (Didaskalia). Some of them have an additional university degree. In most cases they are 40-50 years old and they have been working for over 10 years. Their schools serve areas of 10.000-30.000 inhabitants. They believe that assessment should have the form of inner-assessment primarily and secondarily the form of assessment by other school units. Appropriate assessors would be, hierarchically, the head teacher, the teachers' association, the school counsellor, the Directorate of Office and colleagues. Assessment should take place when it directly contributes to the improvement of teacher's work and when it aids the development of the function of the school unit. They believe that objective assessment can be influenced, hierarchically, by the area of the school, the number of students in the classroom and the assessor's personality. This group claims to have a good knowledge of the legislation on assessment.

Group 3: 142 teachers (15.07% of the sample)

The common element of teachers in this group is that they declare that they *agree partly* with the suggestions we presented in tables 1 to 7, but they *disagree completely* with the possibility of likely salary increase and probable positive assessment. They demonstrate a preference for non-assessment to exist. This group consists of teachers of 30-40 years old, the majority of which work in large schools which serve areas of 10.000-30.000 inhabitants and have over 10 years work experience.

Group 4: 287 teachers (30.47% of the sample)

This is the broadest group of all. It includes female teachers up to the age of 40 years old that have not worked for over 10 years; they mainly serve areas of up to 5.000 inhabitants. They have university training and they are either University graduates (Department of Primary Education) or they are educated in departments of their specialization and are complementary to primary education teaching staff. This group consists of hourly-paid teachers and teachers who declare that they are not aware of legislation on assessment at all. They declare that they *completely agree* with assessment since this contributes to self-knowledge and self-esteem and is implemented by individuals with complete pedagogical and scientific training (for the latter the teachers simply *agree*). They *agree* with the suggestions for an effectively organized assessment related to training, and also related to financial and vocational incentives (regarding the second point there are also cases of teachers *who partly agree*), and during which the “rules of the game” are clear.

Group 5: 36 teachers (3.82% of the sample)

The common element of teachers in this group is that they *disagree with all suggestions that can make assessment effective, useful or functional and they believe that assessment should not exist*.

Group 6: 50 teachers (5.31% of the sample)

This group consists of female teachers who work in nursery schools and believe in the necessity of assessment since it is related to training and it is appropriately organized.

Group 7: 28 teachers (2.97% of the sample)

This final group is the smallest in size and includes all teachers who *disagree completely* with all propositions that would make assessment effective, useful or functional and believe that assessment should not exist.

We observe that both Group 7 and Group 6, where objection to all proposition is expressed, are extracted from the body of the rest of groups. Group 5 includes the nursery teachers of the sample. Group 4 includes exclusively female teachers. Finally, the first four groups consist of those who agree, to a differing degree, with propositions that can give reliability to assessment.

5. Conclusions

-74% of teachers give priority to assessment which contributes to self-knowledge and self-esteem revealing in this way that they have undertaken the responsibility of the educational duty personally.

-It is also assumed that teachers are particularly sensitive towards the person that is going to conduct the assessment and thus a percentage over 73% maintains that “assessment can be effective, useful or functional when assessors have full pedagogical and scientific training” posing in this way the issue of specialization and scientific adequacy.

-A high percentage of the people surveyed (over 69%) accept the counseling character of assessment, rejecting in this way the inspectorate character which dominated in old forms of assessment. This is obvious from the fact that the first preference of teachers regarding the “right assessor” is the school counselor who might lead them out of likely deadlocks. More than 67% associate assessment with “well organized training”

-More than 77% associate teachers’ assessment with the educational function and express the expectation that “assessment will contribute to the improvement in quality of educational function”.

-Their reservation towards the assessor is expressed by a majority of 83% that an assessor’s personality plays important role in assessment.

-It is interesting to note that the percentages with which teachers relate the acceptance of assessment to possible vocational promotion (50.85%) and salary increase (34.40%) are not high, a fact that highlights their other attitudes.

-Finally, as it clears from the givens answers, the sampled teachers in this present research do not reject assessment in any way (10%).

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Table 1. Assessment can be effective, useful and functional when it contributes to self-knowledge and self-esteem

	n	%		n	%
Completely agree	312	33.12	Agree and Completely agree	705	74.84
Agree	393	41.72			
Partly agree	134	14.23	Partly agree	134	14.23
Disagree	58	6.16	Disagree and Completely disagree	90	9.56
Completely disagree	32	3.40			
No answer	13	1.38	No answer	13	1.38
TOTAL	942	100.00	TOTAL	942	100.00

Table 2. Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when assessors have full pedagogical and scientific training

	n	%		n	%
Completely agree	428	45.44	Agree and Completely agree	689	73.15
Agree	261	27.71			
Partly agree	154	16.35	Partly agree	154	16.35
Disagree	49	5.20	Disagree and Completely disagree	85	9.02
Completely disagree	36	3.82			
No answer	14	1.49	No answer	14	1.49
TOTAL	942	100.00	TOTAL	942	100.00

Table 3. Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when the “rules of the game” are clear

	n	%		n	%
Completely agree	309	32.80	Agree and Completely agree	670	71.12
Agree	361	38.32			
Partly agree	159	16.88	Partly agree	159	16.88
Disagree	56	5.94	Disagree and Completely disagree	89	9.44
Completely disagree	33	3.50			
No answer	24	2.55	No answer	24	2.55
TOTAL	942	100.00	TOTAL	942	100.00

Table 4. Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when the counseling character dominates

	n	%		n	%
Completely agree	273	28.98	Agree and Completely agree	654	69.42
Agree	381	40.45			
Partly agree	181	19.21	Partly agree	181	19.21
Disagree	63	6.96	Disagree and Completely disagree	91	9.92
Completely disagree	28	2.96			
No answer	16	1.70	No answer	16	1.70
TOTAL	942	100.00	TOTAL	942	100.00

Table 5. Assessment can be effective, useful and functional in case there is INSET and is organized correctly

	n	%		n	%
Completely Agree	270	28.66	Agree and Completely agree	637	67.62
Agree	367	38.96			
Partly Agree	185	19.64	Partly Agree	185	19.64
Disagree	67	7.11	Disagree and Completely disagree	104	11.04
Completely disagree	37	3.93			
No answer	16	1.70	No answer	16	1.70
TOTAL	942	100.00	TOTAL	942	100.00

Table 6. Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when it is connected with vocational development

	n	%		n	%
Completely agree	161	17.09	Agree and Completely agree	479	50.85
Agree	318	33.76			
Partly agree	219	23.25	Partly agree	219	23.25
Disagree	157	16.67	Disagree and Completely disagree	227	24.10
Completely disagree	70	7.43			
No answer	17	1.80	No answer	17	1.80
TOTAL	942	100.00	TOTAL	942	100.00

Table 7. Assessment can be effective, useful or functional when in case of positive assessment it is connected with salary increase

	n	%		n	%
Completely Agree	123	13.06	Agree and Completely agree	324	34.40
Agree	201	21.34			
Partly agree	205	21.76	Partly agree	205	21.76
Disagree	250	26.54	Disagree and Completely disagree	399	42.36
Completely disagree	149	15.82			
No answer	14	1.49	No answer	14	1.49
TOTAL	942	100.00	TOTAL	942	100.00

Table 8. Who would be the right assessor (multiple answers possible)

	n	%
1 School counselors	522	55.41
2 Teachers' association	330	35.03
3 School head teacher	289	30.68
4 Students	265	28.13
5 Our colleagues	177	18.79
6 The Director of the Office	137	17.54
7 Parent Association	67	7.11
8 School Committee	36	3.82

Table 9. In which cases does assessment have a role; (multiple answers possible)

1	When it contributes to the improvement of educational function	77.60%
2	When it contributes to the better function of the school unit	53.61%
3	When it is not connected with economic and vocational development	24.84%

Table 10. Which factors could influence the objectivity of assessment? (multiple answers possible)

1	Assessor’s personality	83.65%
2	The total number of students of a classroom	51.59%
3	The area of the school	43.21%
4	The well function of the school	37.90%
5	The total number of students at school	20.06%

Table 11. Which is your personal attitude towards assessment? (multiple answers possible)

1	To have a form of self-assessment	54.41%
2	To have a form of inner-assessment of the school unit	51.75%
3	Not to exist	20.49%
4	To have a form of assessment by other school units	6.79%

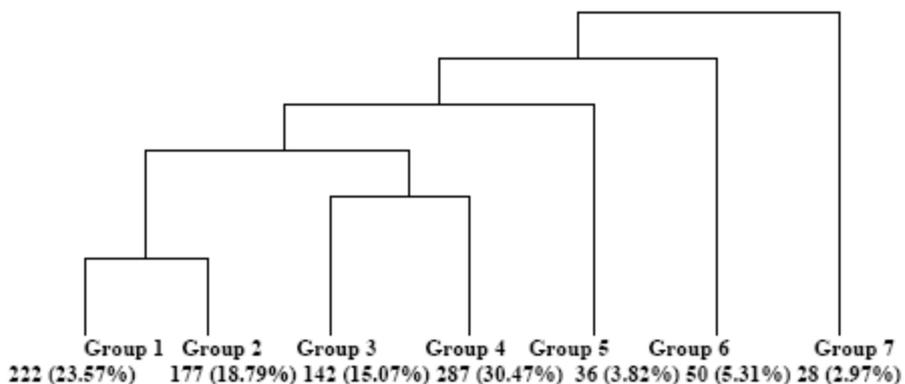


Diagram 1. Diagram of the Hierarchical Distribution of the sample of teachers