An investigation of the attitudes of infant and Primary School teachers regarding their pupils' participation rights

STATHIS BALIAS, MAGDALINI MICHALOPOULOU

Department of Educational Sciences
and Early Childhood Education
University of Patras
Greece
balias@upatras.gr
mamixalopoulou@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) separates the rights of the child into categories (the rights to survive and development, protection and participation). However, participation rights have been overshadowed to a large degree by the other categories of rights of the child since they were not included in previous international treaties. The children's participation rights include particular articles which aim to strengthen active participation, freedom of expression of opinion as the child seeks, receives and imparts views and ideas, the right to a private life, the freedom of conscience, thought and religion, the rights to a cultural life, and to a name, and nationality. Gradually, in the 1990s, the child becomes a political and social entity and can take part in social, political and school machinations, and even decision making process, especially on issues that concern her directly. This article presents a small-scale quantitative survey review which examines the points of view and practices of 101 infant and primary school teachers in the regions of Egio and Patras in Greece. The results lead us to the conclusion that the participants displayed positive views and practices which promoted the children's participation rights. As a consequence of the aforementioned, we conclude that the participants in the research had positive attitudes towards their pupils' participation rights and believed that the curricula reinforce their political rights within the space of the school. In addition, proposals for further investigation of the topic by future researchers are presented.

KEYWORDS
Views, attitudes, practices, children's participation rights

RÉSUMÉ
Les articles de la Convention des droits de l'enfant (1989) peuvent être regroupés en quatre catégories de droits (les droits à la survie et au développement, le droit d'être protégé et le droit de participer). Toutefois, les droits de participation ont été négligés dans une large mesure par rapport aux autres catégories, puisqu'ils n'étaient pas compris dans les précédents traités internationaux. Les droits de participation de l'enfant comprennent des articles particuliers visant le renforcement de la participation active, de la liberté d'expression de l'opinion, de la liberté de recherche, de la réception et de la diffusion des opinions et des idées, du droit à la vie privée, de la liberté de conscience, de pensée et de religion, des droits à la vie culturelle, à un nom, à la nationalité et à la citoyenneté. Graduellement, dans la décennie de 1990, l'enfant

acquiert une identité politique et sociale et peut participer dans des affaires sociales, politiques et scolaires, et même dans des processus de prise des décisions qui le concernent directement. Cet article présente une recherche-revue quantitative à petite échelle qui examine les points de vue et les pratiques de 101 des enseignants du préscolaire et du primaire dans les villes de Egion et de Patras en Grèce. Selon ses résultats, nous concluons que les participants ont des points de vue positifs et suivent des pratiques qui font avancer les droits de participation des enfants. À partir de ce constat, nous concluons aussi qu'ils ont des attitudes positives envers les droits de participation de leurs élèves et croient que les programmes analytiques d'études renforcent leurs droits politiques dans l'école. Enfin, nous présentons des propositions pour des recherches éventuelles futures sur ce sujet.

MOTS-CLÉS
Points de vue, attitudes, pratiques, droits de l'enfant à la participation

INTRODUCTION

Participation rights, which constitute a distinct category in the rights of the child, have been downgraded compared with the other categories (the rights to development, and to the provision of care and protection) and they were ignored for quite a few decades, especially in the field of education. However, from the 1990s, when the manual on human rights education was published by International Amnesty (1996), the children's participation rights had already begun to be promoted more, through a child-centered, liberal pedagogy, even though the foundations had been laid by the Children's Rights Movement at the beginning of the 20th century (Wall, 2008). In this paper we will investigate the views and practices of infant and primary school teachers concerning their pupils' participation rights, in order to ascertain the degree to which they adopt attitudes and practices which promote these rights in the school classroom.

Recent research (Athanasakis, 2006; Asiegbor et al., 2001) has shown that primary school teachers are well-informed and have a fairly high degree of relevant knowledge on the children's participation rights, but they don't apply it in practice. On the other hand, other primary school teachers state that pupils' participation rights are applied in the school classroom, and more broadly within the space of the school, but they don't recognize the child as the holder of political rights (Waldron et al., 2011). In the field we study, published research mainly investigated the views and practices of primary school teachers in terms of the children's participation rights, while only one piece of research referred to infant school teachers (Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009). The strengthening of discussion in Greece on the views and practices of infant and primary school teachers regarding the children's participation rights is imperative, not only because so far in Greece there has only been one piece of published research on this topic (Athanasakis, 2006), but mainly because the appropriate and effective incorporation of these rights into the school timetable is important for the education of the democratic citizen of today. As far as the conclusions which emerged from our research are concerned, it appeared that the teachers' attitudes were positive about their pupils' participation rights, coinciding absolutely with their views and practices, which strengthened their pupils' exercise of these particular rights.

In this research, an attempt is made at a study of attitudes through the investigation of the views and practices of the participating teachers. The term "attitude" contains views, opinions,

ways of acting and behaving in relation to an event, situation, phenomenon, individual, sector, social practices or even abstract ideas (Atkinson et al., 2004, p. 538; Filipou & Christou, 2001, p. 31 in Theodorakopoulou, 2004, p. 26; Thurstone & Chave, 1956 in Giasemis, 2011, p. 55). Consequently, through the investigation of the views and practices we study the attitudes of the participants in the research in depth, since views and practices are contained within the concept of "attitudes".

THE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION RIGHTS

The rights of participation which are included in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) are: the children's right to freely express his/her views (article 12), the children's right to freedom of expression, which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart, either orally or in writing, opinions, ideas, information (article 13), the children's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (article 14), the children's right to freedom of association and to freedom of peaceful assembly (article 15), the right of the child to a private life (article 16), the right of the child to access to information (article 17),the right of the child to a name, to acquire a nationality and to preserve his or her identity, and the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents (articles 7 & 8), and the right of the child (indigenous or member of a minority) to enjoy his own culture, to practice his or her own religion and to use his or her own language (article 30). (*The Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 1989, p. 12-13 & 15-17*;* Wall, 2008, p. 535; *The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Participation Rights: having an active voice;* Smith, 2007, p. 3; Te One, 2011, p. 46).

A question arises out of the fact that the children's right to a private life constitutes a participation right, since the element of privacy doesn't fit with that of citizenship and active participation. Nevertheless, behind this particular right the opportunity for the child to make a two-fold choice lies hidden, concerning whether he or she desires to reveal information pertaining to his/her private life, and to whom, allowing him or her to be in full control and autonomous (Davis, 2001, p. 246-247).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Sociology of Childhood radically changed adults' perception of children and childhood, since: (1) children are now considered competent subjects (and not incompletely developed objects) and actors who are socially active and build knowledge with which they comprehend the world around them, and who contribute to society as individuals with a political and moral being, (2) the children's social action depends on the social structures that frame their daily life, (3) the children's personal desires and needs are to a great extent related to the creation and holistic application of policies and practices which directly concern them, (4) the erroneous view of the child as inferior in relation to adults has changed, (5) there are many "childhoods" existing simultaneously and they are intimately connected to the factors of nationality, social class, sex and culture, something that stands in opposition to the contemporary globalized version of a "unified childhood" as it is presented in the International Convention of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child, 6) emphasis is placed on the image of the child as an individual, different to others in terms of sex, nationality, disability and so on, and not as an individuality that belongs

to one socially homogenous group (Mayall, 2000, p. 248; Freeman, 1998, p. 434, 436, 438, 439; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2013, p. 122).

According to Childhood Studies, beyond the fact that childhood is socially defined and children should be recognized as social agents, the adult world ought to appreciate the views, the previous experiences and the participation of children so that their participation rights can be strengthened (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008, in Tisdall, Kay & Punch, 2012, p. 251).

Sociocultural Theory claims that (1) children cannot express their views and be heard if a suitably shaped space for them to do so does not exist, that is, a framework of support and opportunities for them to develop their skills in expressing themselves and using arguments (Smith, 2002, p. 78), (2) children can cultivate their communication, critical and creative thinking skills, and cooperation, but they can also reach a greater degree of autonomy and knowledge through guided participation and interaction with more experienced colleagues (for example, older children and adults) in activities from which they will gain techniques for the internalization of intellectual tools in a social context which will bring them closer to the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978, in Smith, 2007, p. 6; Daiute, 2008, p. 706; Dockett & Perry, 1996, in Tzuo, 2007, p. 35; Seifert, 1993, p. 18, in Edwards, 2005, p. 39; Edwards, 2003, p. 256). The more experienced individual helps the child, giving him or her the opportunity to link the present stage of his/her development with the expected stage of development so that the child can do the task by himself without the assistance of the adults or older children (Vygotsky, 1978, in Tisdall, Kay & Punch, 2012, p. 253). The children can participate in discussions on issues that concern them, such as the social exclusion of children from political rights (Daiute, as above).

According to the approach of Ladder of Participation theory, as we ascend Hart's (1995) "steps", the degree of the children's involvement and assumption of responsibilities increases correspondingly, always with the assistance and cooperation of adults. A part from the fact that the children gradually come to realize that they are capable of carrying out a task responsibly and autonomously, the adults, in our case the infant and primary school teachers, can also change their views on the children's ability, or lack of ability, to participate actively, and they support them accordingly. However, Hart himself believes that children need to know, and in this be supported by adults, that it is possible for them to have access to the highest degrees of participation on the "ladder", whenever they wish (Hart, 2008, p. 24). In addition, Hart (2008) vigorously claims that the greatest degree of the children's citizenship doesn't just include the greatest degree of participation in issues that concern them, bringing about changes which are in their interest, but also includes the recognition and respect of the rights of others (adults and children) to express themselves and participate, allowing them the space to act as fellow citizens and holders of identical and equal rights with them.

According to the Pathways to Participation, there are five levels of participation (Shier, 2001, p. 110-115): 1. "The opinions of children are "heard" 2. The children's ability to express their opinion is supported 3. The children's opinions are taken into consideration 4. The children are involved in decision making processes 5. The children share in common power and responsibilities in the decision making process". At every level of participation there are three stages of commitment, accompanied by corresponding questions which help in ascertaining the progress of the individual as far as his degree of participation which are as follows:

1. **Openings**: When an individual is bound to work, based on the level of participation each time – Question: "Do you feel ready, for instance, to listen to the children?".

2. **Opportunities**: The individuals' needs are met (reference sources and knowledge, skills through an educational seminar, optimization and consolidation of new pedagogical approaches, the staff's available time) so that the individual can work effectively at the level of participation each time – Question: "Do you feel that you have the ability to listen to the children?".
3. **Obligations**: The obligations are part of the practiced policy of an institution or work environment where the workers must observe them – Question: "Do you feel that you are obliged to listen to the children?" (Shier, 2001, p. 110 & 116). Then, the children start to express their views and to take part in the decision making process since the teachers are aware of the pupils' participation rights and they integrate them into commonly accepted policies of school units.

The curricula of infant and primary schools, through their pedagogical objectives, promote the pupils' participation rights although to differing degrees (Cross-thematic Unified Curriculum Framework for Primary School, 2003; Infant School Curriculum, 2011). More specifically, the organization of learning in the infant school differs from that of the primary school. Primary school pupils don't have as many opportunities for active participation and cooperation in groups – apart from in the lesson referred to as the 'Flexible Zone'[i], and in project work – but are more involved in individual activities, mainly in the weighty school lessons (see, Language, Maths and so on), while infant school pupils, in addition to the organized activities, quite often participate in processes of spontaneous or organized games, "routines" (every day and repeated activities), everyday, topical happenings and investigations (project work and research).

Research objective

The objective of research was to investigate the attitudes of infant and primary school teachers regarding their pupils' participation rights. Through this research we aimed, on the one hand to depict the views and the practices of infant and primary school teachers concerning their pupils' participation rights in order to study their attitudes and, on the other hand, to check for any differentiation between primary and infant school teachers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology followed for this research belongs in the category of quantitative methods. More specifically we used the most frequently used descriptive method in educational research, the survey, and more precisely, the small scale survey. In order to record the views and practices of those questioned, a questionnaire, consisting of 28 open and closed type questions was used as a research tool. We drew the questionnaire from Athanasakis (2006), Turnšek & Pekkarinen (2009), Asiegbor, et al., (2001), and also from sociological theories, theoretical approaches to participation, from the survey of the infant and primary school curricula, but we also reconstructed it in line with our research, in order to meet our research needs. The recording, processing and analysis of quantitative research data was carried out through the statistical analysis package SPSS. The choice of sample was based on the snowball method.

Research Sample

The research was carried out in 15 state infant schools and 8 primary schools in the regions of Egio and Patras in Greece. The research sample was made up of 59 (58.4%) primary school

teachers and 42 (41.6%) teachers (a total of 101 participants). 17 (16.8%) of the participants were men and 84 (83.2%) were women. Regarding their age, 36 (35.6%) were between 31 and 40 years old and 43 (42.6%) were between 41 and 50 years old. As far as their years of service were concerned, 45 (44.6%) had been working for between 6 and 15 years, 25 (24.8%) for between 16 and 25 years and 22 (21.8%), for 25 years or more. 69 teachers (68.3%) stated that they had a university level degree, 30 (29.7%) stated that they had a degree from the pedagogical academy, 14 (13.9%) stated that they had a degree from an infant teacher training School (the Schools for infant school teachers were replaced by the university teaching departments for infant school teachers during the 1980s), 14 (13.9%) had participated in in-service training and 4 (4%) held postgraduate study titles. Regarding the area of the school unit in which those questioned worked, 21 participants (20.8%) stated that they worked in state primary schools in rural areas (up to 2,000 inhabitants), 19 (18.8%) stated that they worked in semi-urban areas (from 2.001 to 10.000 inhabitants), 48 (47.5%) in urban areas (from 10.001 to 50.000 inhabitants) and 13 (12.9%) in a big city (more than 50.000 inhabitants).

Variables

In the present research an attempt was made at a quantitative methodological approach which emerged from the subject of the research as much as from the aim of investigating the relationships of the independent variables (sex, age, specialization, studies, years of service, region of the school unit) with the dependent variables (views and practices) of participating teachers.

RESULTS

The vast majority of participants (72.3%) stated that they knew about the children's participation rights and more broadly about the rights of the child, mainly through Mass Media (84.9%), a fact which leads to the conclusion that the state doesn't aspire to any great degree to implement activities for the updating of infant and primary school teachers on the issue in question. The views of participants showed a significant statistical differentiation in terms of specialization (x^2=8.219, df=1, p=0.004). In other words, the primary school teachers had been informed to a greater extent (83.1%) than the infant school teachers (57.1%).

Most of the teachers (69.3%) have not taken part in programmes or project work on the rights of the child. The teachers' views showed statistically significant differentiation in terms of sex (x^2=5.915, df=1, p=0.015). In other words, men tended to answer negatively to a greater degree (94.1%) in relation to their female colleagues (64.3%).

The majority of teachers (71.3%) stated that the curricula promote the pupils' participation rights. The participants' responses showed statistically significant differentiation in terms of specialization (x^2=7.311, df=1, p=0.007). In other words, the infant school teachers answered positively to a greater degree (85.7%) as opposed to the primary school teachers (61%). This was to be expected since the primary school curriculum (2003) doesn't give the pupils many opportunities to exercise their participation rights during the lessons, usually only when they participate in project work, special events and certain lessons like theatre and arts studies, in contrast to infant school which allows greater scope for spontaneous activities and investigations, something which is confirmed by a survey of the curriculums that we performed.

Most teachers stated that the most suitable age periods are the following: 4-6 years old and 7-8 years old for a child to be able to learn about his or her participation rights. As far as the specialization is concerned, infant school teacher had a tendency to state that a pre-school age child can learn about this specific category of children's rights (61.9%), and the primary school teachers (35.6%) tended to state to a greater degree that pupils in the first years of primary school should be aware of the rights in question.

Most teachers (48.5%) seemed to have reservations about recognizing their pupils' capacity for autonomy and taking the initiative and taking on duties, due to their immaturity and their incomplete development. In addition, quite a lot of participants (34.7%) declared reservations regarding whether pupils could have a private life that they wanted to protect, since they considered that children are, by nature, kindly and innocent, something which doesn't allow for them to be left unprotected and exposed in a society with phenomena of child abuse of a physical, psychic or work nature, as well as social phenomena which negatively affect the children's psychosomatic development (parental divorce, the death of a relative and so on). The infant school teachers were more cautious and categorical as compared with the primary school teachers (x^2=21.804, df=4, p=0.000) who were more positively disposed to a greater degree (45.8% as opposed to just 9.5% of the infant school teachers). As far as level of education is concerned, those in possession of a university degree had a tendency to be more negatively inclined, while their colleagues with study titles from pedagogical academies and infant teacher training schools tended to be more cautious (x^2=9.526, df=4, p=0.000).

Most teachers (42.6%) were hesitant to give a clear answer concerning whether their pupils were capable of critical thinking, placing in doubt an issue related to the learning process. In addition, most teachers (33.7%) were cautious about giving a clear answer concerning the pupils' ability to assemble and take part in team work with the ultimate object being discussion and the attempt to solve problematic situations that concern them.

Pre- and primary school pupils possess their participation rights, are active agents and subjects, as the majority of the research sample claimed. According to Hart (1992) and Shier (2001), the greatest degree of participation allows children to share power with the adults (teachers) and their peers and assume the corresponding duties and responsibilities but also participate in group decision making processes in the space of the school, which was confirmed by the research.

In particular, the majority of participants were favourably disposed regarding the capacity of the children at school (1) to seek, receive and impart information and ideas (45.5%) (2) to freely express their views, ideas and questions on issues which concern them (69.3%). In terms of specialization and years of service, those in possession of a university degree and those with up to 15 years of service tended to a greater extent to be favorably inclined in comparison with graduates of the pedagogical academies and infant teacher training schools, as well as in comparison with those who had been working for more than 15 years.

33.7% of the participants stated that their pupils at the school could gather in groups to have discussions and to give possible solutions to a problem that concerns them. The teachers' views showed statistically significant differentiation in terms of specialization (x^2=13.541, df=4, p=0.009). Primary school teachers tended to range from unfavorably inclined (40.7%), and cautious (20.3%) to favorably inclined (39.0%), while the infant school teachers had a tendency to be more cautious (52.4%) and to a lesser degree, unfavorably inclined (21.4%) and favorably inclined (26.2%).

Most primary teachers (42.6%) were favorably inclined concerning the pupils' capability to access sources of information in whatever form using every means available within the school, although a number were cautious over this particular right of the child (39.6%), and so they confirmed the teaching aims of the curricula of the infant school (2011) and the primary school (2003).

The majority of the participants (45.5%) were favorably inclined regarding the free exercise of their pupils' cultural rights, and the promoting of their particular cultural features, incorporating them into learning activities.

We observe that there is a marginal predominance of the views of the participants (39.6%) that were favorably disposed in relation to those who were hesitant to accept, or not, the possibility of group decisions, division of power and assumption of responsibilities by the pupils (36.6%). There was statistically significant differentiation in the responses in terms of the area the school unit was in (x^2=11.089, df=4, p=0.026). More specifically, the teachers that worked in rural and semi-urban areas had a tendency to be favorably inclined (45%), while the participants who worked in urban areas and cities tended to be more cautious (44.3%).

The majority of the teachers (67.3%) were favorably inclined concerning whether their pupils had differing learning needs, pace of learning, interests and former experiences. The holders of diplomas from the pedagogical academies and infant teacher training schools were unfavorably inclined to a greater degree in relation to their colleagues with university level study titles (x^2=9.293, df=3, p=0.026).

The vast majority of participants agreed that they incorporate participation rights into their practices, thus strengthening them. According to Childhood Studies, promotion of participation rights is supported by educational policies and practices, as well as by suitable social structures and building infrastructures, something that our research confirmed. In addition, most of the participants appeared to respect the needs, desires and former experiences of their pupils and to take them into serious consideration.

The research showed that the vast majority of the participants believe that even the highest degree of participation on the part of the child in issues that concern him/her, with the ultimate aim being securing his/her own best interest, is not enough; the child also needs to recognize and respect the rights of others (adults and children) so that they express their opinions, participate freely and act as fellow citizens and holders of equal and equal rights with him, as Hart claims too (2008).

Almost all the participants (94.1%) agreed that they incorporate differentiated teaching based on the different learning needs, choices and previous experiences of their pupils, but the younger (x^2=6.416, df=2, p=0.040), and holders of university degrees they were (x^2=9.678, df=2, p=0.008), the bigger the proportion of them who were in agreement with the issue in question.

Almost all the participants (86.1%) agreed that their school classroom was organized taking into account the pupils' rights, even though the male teachers (x^2=7.882, df=3, p=0.049) and the primary school teachers (x^2=8.414, df=3, p=0.038) did so to a greater degree when compared with their female colleagues and infant school teachers, respectively.

The majority of the teachers in the research (58.4%) said that they agreed that the school's facilities provide their pupils with the opportunity to act independently. In addition, most teachers (58.4%) said they agreed that their pupils participate and cooperate actively in the choice and planning of educational activities/school lessons.

Most of the participants (89.1%) agreed that they provide their pupils with knowledge through activities designed to help them understand and demand their rights. Almost all the

participants (96.1%) agreed that they encourage their pupils to reflect on whether they acted correctly or mistakenly in the case where others' rights are violated, although the younger ones (x^2=9.933, df=2, p= 0.007), the holders of university level study titles (x^2=10.734, df=2, p= 0.005) and those with fewer years of service (x^2=7.593, df=2, p=0.022) stated their agreement on this particular question, to a greater degree.

The vast majority (98.0%) of the participants said they agreed that they support the children's rights to express themselves freely and to make decisions giving them opportunities to do so, and taking his/her views into consideration. The opportunity for the children to freely express their opinions was promoted as a practice of active participation, which appears to be supported and taken into consideration by most participating teachers.

Limitations of the research

The participation of primary school teachers chiefly, in the research, presented problems. More specifically, many of the teachers refused to participate in the research. Many of them mentioned the plethora of research which recently has sought their participation and at the same time they expressed complaints about the results of the research in which they participate, since they claimed that these results are not used for the improvement of educational provision.

DISCUSSION

Along general lines, those questioned recognized children as holders of participation rights, but displayed some hesitation in giving clear responses concerning whether infant children are mature enough to act autonomously, to practice good judgment, to have a private life and to cooperate in team work, although in their practices they said they reinforce them to a great degree. At this point a question emerges: "Why do infant school and primary school teachers incorporate their pupils' participation rights in their teaching practices, according to their responses, while at the same time they themselves believe that certain rights of participation cannot be exercised so well by pre-school and primary school pupils?". At the same time, the same teachers have stated that the pre- and early primary school years (from 4 to 7 years old) constitute the most suitable age period for a child to come into contact with and learn about the rights in question.

The above results coincided with the research of Waldron et al. (2011), according to which the participating primary school teachers believed that the most suitable age period was from 4 to 7 years old but they have a tendency to link participation rights more with adults than with children. In contrast, Asiegbor et al. (2001), stated that participants recognized the children's participation rights but didn't integrate them into their practices. On the other hand, Turnšek & Pekkarinen (2009) participating teachers had favorable attitudes towards their pupils' participation rights, incorporating them into their practices.

However, this differentiation stems from the fact that teachers believe that their pupils have not developed fully enough on a moral-spiritual and psychosomatic level so as to function to any great degree with autonomy, maturity, responsibility, critical reasoning and in a team-cooperative manner, being as they are completely dependent on their urges. Despite this, the participants don't cease to believe that their pupils need to come into contact with and exercise their participation rights through teaching practices throughout the school year, with the ultimate

goal of promoting active and responsible citizens who need to be interested in and occupied with public affairs from the pre-school age.

SUGGESTIONS

The research findings could be used and could constitute a spark for the carrying out of future research concerning the degree of incorporation of the children's participation rights into the space of the school, as much by the teachers as by the pupils. More specifically, the carrying out of research with primary and secondary school pupils, on their participation rights, constitutes an important opportunity for the further investigation of their views, mainly within Greece, due to lack of research. This research could be extended – beyond infant and primary school teachers – to secondary school teachers and to primary school teachers in special education.

However, a comparative study of the attitudes of primary and secondary school teachers concerning the degree of exercise, incorporation and promotion of pupils' participation rights within the space of the school units needs to be carried out too, so that it can be ascertained whether their views converge or diverge. In addition, research with pre-school teachers needs to be carried out because pre-school education constitutes the first organized school structure pupils come into contact with, and using the triangulation method (questionnaires, interviews and observation) in order for their attitudes regarding the children's participation rights, and the extent to which they incorporate them in their practices, to be studied thoroughly and in depth.

Finally, the present research needs to be carried out with a larger research sample and with a larger range of the population, using the questionnaire and interview as research tools, so that the research results can either be confirmed or rejected by future researches.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of the sample were favorably disposed concerning the pupils' ability to exercise their participation rights to a large degree, such as in freedom of opinion, free access to sources of information, the freedom to seek, receive and impart ideas and information, group decision making and division of responsibilities, the exercise of cultural rights as well as concerning the different learning profile and previous experiences of the pupils. In this way, Childhood Studies were confirmed since most participants considered children to be active and responsible subjects with the capacity for powerful action particularly on issues that directly concerned them. The element of the pupils' differentness regarding cultural background, learning capabilities and their experiences was present since the teachers showed willingness to promote and respect it, as they have fully adapted to the demands of the contemporary multicultural societies, which are obliged to show acceptance of and respect for the singularities of their citizens.

The majority of the participating infant and primary school teachers agreed that they incorporated practices that promoted their pupils' participation rights and stated that they had been informed about the issue in question through the mass media, although most participants hadn't taken part in programmes or project work on the rights of the child. In addition, most of those questioned stated that the pre-school and first school years period are considered to be the most suitable for the pupils to come into contact with and learn about their participation rights, and the infant and primary school curriculum similarly promote it, according to their responses.

However a tendency towards skepticism is apparent in the opinions of those questioned, regarding the maturity required to act independently, have privacy, critical thought and team cooperation in pre-school and primary school children, which is in contrast with their statements claiming that they promote their pupils' participation rights through their teaching practices.

More specifically, differentiations in the views and practices of the participants regarding their pupils' participation rights are observed, mainly, in terms of specialization. Infant teachers, in contrast to primary school teachers:

- Stated that they were informed to a lesser degree.
- Stated that they were favorably disposed to a greater degree to the claim that the curriculum promotes their pupils' participation rights.
- Stated that the most suitable age for a child to come into contact with and learn about his or her participation rights, is the pre-school age (4-6 years old), while primary school teachers stated that it was the period from 7 to 8 years of age.
- Stated that they had reservations to a greater degree regarding their pupils' ability to have a private life that they wish to protect, while the teachers were more favorably disposed to this.
- Stated that they were reluctant to give a clear response regarding whether their pupils can gather in groups so as to discuss and propose possible solutions to problematic situations that concern them, while the primary school teachers were more either unfavorably or favorably inclined.
- Stated to a lesser degree that the children's rights in today's world defined the organization of their classroom.

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[i] The 'Flexible Zone of Cross-thematic and Creative Activities' is regarded as a part of Greek primary school timetable which includes at least two hours a week. Through this initiative, primary school pupils have the opportunity to learn in a cross-thematic teaching way connecting not only the school unit with family and local community but also the interests and realistic situations with learning motives. In addition, critical and creative skills are cultivated and promoted leading to the students' autonomy, debate with justified arguments, respect and inclusion of differentness and energetic participation in the social life as forthcoming citizens. The 'traditional' structure of primary school subjects in which they are divided into two categories -of minor and major importance subjects- is gradually substituted by the correlation of distinctive learning areas in the 'Flexible Zone'(Primary School Teacher Guide for the Flexible Zone, 2001, p. 10-11). Infant and secondary school have the potential to apply it in practice.