

## School leadership in Greece. Autonomy trends and limitations

ELENI A. KATSIKIANNI, AMALIA A. IFANTI

Department of Educational Sciences  
and Early Childhood Education  
University of Patras  
Greece  
ekatsigianni@upatras.gr  
ifanti@upatras.gr

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of secondary school principal in Greece during the period 1981-2018. The aim is not only to identify the limitations but also to reveal possible autonomy trends that have transformed the Greek school principal's role. In developing our theoretical perspective, we drew on New Public Management (NPM) and school principal's role discourse. We then examined the relevant legislative documents following documentary analysis and qualitative content analysis. Our findings firstly support the view that secondary school principal's role in Greece was transformed to some extent at the legislative level, reflecting this way the impact of NPM practices on the Greek educational policy. Secondly, they show that there might also be some room for school principal's initiatives that would benefit the students, especially school principal's participation in teachers' professional development. Thirdly, the overall legislative initiatives on the Greek school administration, could be considered as a part of its gradual modernization process aiming at devolving authority to the school principal, the teachers' council and the school board.*

### KEYWORDS

*Role, school principal, Greece, NPM, autonomy*

### RÉSUMÉ

*Cette étude examine le rôle du directeur de l'école secondaire en Grèce au cours de la période 1981-2018. L'objectif n'est pas seulement d'identifier les limites, mais aussi de révéler les éventuelles tendances à l'autonomie qui a transformé le rôle du directeur de l'école secondaire en Grèce. Pour développer notre perspective théorique, nous nous sommes appuyés sur le discours du nouveau management public (NMP) et du rôle du directeur de l'école. Nous avons ensuite examiné les documents législatifs pertinents après l'analyse documentaire et analyse qualitative de contenu. Nos conclusions soutiennent tout d'abord l'idée que le rôle du directeur de l'école en Grèce a été transformé dans une certaine mesure au niveau législatif, reflétant ainsi l'impact des pratiques de NMP sur la politique éducative grecque. Deuxièmement, elles montrent qu'il pourrait également y avoir une certaine place pour les initiatives du directeur qui profiteraient aux élèves, en particulier sa participation au développement professionnel des enseignants. Troisièmement, les initiatives législatives globales sur l'administration scolaire grecque pourraient être considérées comme faisant partie de son processus de modernisation progressive visant à déléguer l'autorité au directeur d'école, au conseil des enseignants et à la commission scolaire.*

**MOTS-CLÉS**

*Rôle, directeur de l'école, Grèce, NMP, autonomie*

**INTRODUCTION**

Most studies on school principal's role in Greece underline the limitations posed by the centralized and bureaucratic Greek educational system. On the other hand, it seems that any renewal trends that may coexist are not often referred to. For this reason, this study explores the role of school principals in Greece in the light of the international trends that contributed to the transformation of the school principal's role.

In order to illuminate this issue, we begin by presenting key points of the relevant Greek literature, which set the framework for the Greek school principal's role discourse and help us to clearly state the problem. As it is generally accepted that after the emergence of NPM (from the late 1970s) educational reforms were more or less affected by its core principles (Dempster, 2001; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2009; Tolofari, 2005; Van der Sluis, Reezigt, & Borghans, 2017), we develop our theoretical perspective by drawing on the NPM model along with research findings covering main aspects of the school principal's role shaped under the influence of these trends. Our aim is to set the framework in which we shall examine the Greek secondary school principal's role, in order to reveal possible links between the NPM practices and the Greek state policies on the issue under examination.

After presenting our methodological framework, we then study our data through this lens. By focusing on the legislative initiatives concerning the role of secondary school principal<sup>1</sup> in the period 1981-2018, we aim to explore the impact of the international trends on the school principal's role in Greece. With the overall examination of the legal framework we seek to provide a comprehensive account of the issue and to identify not only the limitations but also any renewal trends that might show whether and to what extent the Greek school principal's role was transformed.

**THE GREEK SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S ROLE**

Most studies on the role of school principal in Greece - both those that took place before and after the specific determination of his/her duties and responsibilities (2002) - paint a less optimistic picture. In the first one, the Greek school principal is outlined as a bureaucrat with limited responsibilities, detached from the wider social context (Ifanti & Katsigianni, 2014; Mavroskoufis, 1992; Saitis & Eliophotou Menon, 2004; Saitis, 1997, 2002, in Saitis, Tsiamasi, & Chatzi, 1997).

Limited autonomy, as well as the multiplicity of their duties, ambiguity of their role and the lack of administrative training (Saitis & Eliophotou Menon, 2004; Saitis et al., 1997), infrastructure shortcomings and the reluctance of school principals themselves to take initiatives (Stravakou, 2003) have been considered as impediments to their effectiveness.

This picture appears to be essentially unchanged after 2002. In Tsimirika's small-scale qualitative study (2007), the Greek school principal's role is that of an administrator with limited potential to introduce innovations into schools. In the study of Athanasoula-Reppa and Lazaridou (2008, pp. 79-80), in a small sample size, Greek school principals consider the "incessant flow of changes", the "lack of clear goals" and the "bureaucratization" as the main impediments to their effectiveness in a list of nine factors.

Yet, even later, Dimopoulos, Dalkavouki and Koulaidis (2015, p. 219) found that: “School administration, school organization and internal relationships are the most important areas of the principals’ activities. (...) A school’s technical core which consists of educational-pedagogic issues constitutes only a marginal area of the principals’ activities”. In the same as well as in other studies, the neglect of the educational/pedagogical aspect of the principal's role has been attributed to the centralized and bureaucratic nature of the Greek educational system (Dimopoulos et al., 2015; Kaparou & Bush, 2015). In addition, Kaparou & Bush (2016, p. 894) found that in the Greek outstanding secondary schools “(...) principals operate as administrative rather than instructional leaders, while an unofficial instructional ‘teacher leadership’ culture suggests potential for reconsidering leadership in Greek state schools”.

Moreover, the research of Gkolia, Koustelios and Belias (2018) highlights the absence of two key features of transformational leadership (i.e. common school vision, intellectual stimulation of teachers) from the practices of participating primary and secondary school principals. Finally, some scholars point out the fact that the legal framework missed to describe the role of the Greek school principal in modern terms (Argyriou, Andreadou, & Typas, 2015), while others have pointed out the renewal of the role but not its radical transformation (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2016a, 2016b).

More recent studies support the above findings. For example, Tsaroucha’s (2017) small-scale qualitative study reveals the burden of the day-to-day school principal responsibilities and his/her limited opportunities for independent action. Similarly, according to the school principals’ views, as found in the small-scale qualitative study of Tektonopoulou (2019), the centralized and bureaucratic nature of the Greek educational system along with rigidity and clientelism are key impediments to school leadership. In another qualitative study of Tektonopoulou (2018, p. 138) was found that the majority of the ten participants have adopted the “democratic style”, while in terms of leadership models, it was shown that they focused on different aspects of leadership (Tektonopoulou, 2018).

According to the above, school principals in Greece appear to be trapped in a bureaucratic and centralized system that does not provide them the opportunities, the means and motivation to take on a leading role and bring about school improvement. It is therefore interesting to examine the relevant legal framework in the light of international trends in order to reveal not only the limitations but also the autonomy trends that might exist.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The school principal’s role discourse at the international level may be considered as a part of the wider context of public sector reforms. These reforms have been summarized under the term NPM (Tolofari, 2005). NPM origins are found in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the United Kingdom and in the municipal governments in the United States, while this model has been gradually adopted by the member states of the OECD and beyond (Gruening, 2001).

The emergence of the NPM signalled the gradual decline of earlier administrative models (OECD, 2009), such as the bureaucratic, and the spread of decentralized forms of governance (Murphy, 2013). The main aim of NPM policies is to eliminate the distinction between the public and the private sector, in order that the public sector responds to the demands of citizens as consumers of public goods and services (Van der Sluis et al., 2017).

As noted, in the field of education the influence of the NPM was manifested in the form of two widespread features: a. output-oriented governance model (i.e. setting goals and performance

measures in line with the vision at the central level - use of output data as a basis for decision-making on allocation of resources, for the development of policy programs and the information of stakeholders), b. governmental deregulation (i.e. granting autonomy to schools in order to meet the needs of students (Van der Sluis et al., 2017).

It seems, therefore, that granting autonomy to schools (*school autonomy, school-based management*) was one of the prerequisites for these reforms. According to the following definition: “school autonomy is a form of school management in which schools are given decision-making authority over their operations, including the hiring and firing of personnel, and the assessment of teachers and pedagogical practices” (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009; Di Gropello 2004, 2006, in Arcia et al., 2011, p. 2).

As pointed out, regarding the person (i.e. principal, teachers, parents, jointly parents and teachers) and the responsibilities granted according to the relevant political and administrative context, the level of school autonomy varies to such extent that makes each such reform unique (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). According to Barrera-Osorio et al. (2009, p. 4), in its “weak” form (limited autonomy), these decisions usually concern the instructional methods or the planning for school improvement. In more “strong” forms of school-based management, school councils have been granted the responsibility for hiring and firing teachers and principals and/or for setting curricula (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009, p. 4). “Strong” forms also include educational systems in which the control is handed over to parents and the decisions concerning the management of schools are taken by the school council or school administrators (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009, p. 4). As noted though, “a blend of the four models” of the school-based management is usually adopted in practice, where one school council/school management committee, consisting of the principal, the teachers and the community representatives, makes decisions (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009, p. 5)<sup>2</sup>.

Under the influence of these reforms the school principal’s role was reshaped. The “implementer of imported solutions” (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992, p. 81), taken the form of the bureaucrat, was replaced by the concept of leader “(...) with a vision and mission to bring about school improvement” (Gunter, 2004, p.28). Consequently, the priority granted on the school principal responsibilities was rearranged. High priority was no longer given to administrative tasks, but to the duty of improving teaching and learning, showing commitment to this goal and to the professional development of all school members (European Union, 2009).

In more detail, Katsigianni & Ifanti (2018) have examined three international studies (i.e. Barber, Whelan & Clark, 2010; Day & Sammons, 2013; Schleicher, 2012) and showed that the highest priority aspects of the school principal’s role are the following:

- a. common vision - strategic planning (i.e. implementation of an action plan to put this vision in place)
- b. focusing on teaching and learning (i.e. improving the conditions for teaching and learning, improving the curriculum, monitoring student performance, introduction of innovative instructional methods)
- c. professional development of teachers (i.e. in-school training in accordance with the needs of teachers and the school, supporting collaborative school culture, coaching teachers and assessing teaching practices)
- d. distributing leadership (i.e. establishing effective teachers’ teams, distributing leadership roles to the teachers)
- e. building relationships/collaboration with school community (i.e. teachers, students)
- f. management of resources (i.e. making important decisions for the management of human and material resources of the school)

g. school networking - system leadership (i.e. building relationships/collaboration with parents, external administrators, other schools, the wider community – taking on larger system-level roles).

To meet the above, granting of autonomy was considered as a prerequisite for the school principal to make important decisions and take on a leading role. As noted, though, this autonomy is also accompanied by greater pressure for accountability (Bush, 2019).

From a different perspective, Brauckmann & Pashiardis (2011), drawing on the empirical findings of the Leadership Improvement for Student Achievement (LISA) project in seven European educational systems with varying degrees of autonomy and accountability (Greece was not included), suggest that in practice a hybrid leadership style emerges, the “edupreneurial style”, which is irrespective of the NPM accountability and autonomy policies (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2019). As they explain:

“Thus, depending on their (1) personality characteristics, (2) education and training in school leadership, coupled with (3) experience and common sense, maybe school leaders can opt to become edupreneurs, therefore exercising their own freedoms in implementing the Entrepreneurial leadership style alongside the Pedagogical leadership style. In this way, edupreneurial leadership emerges as the new state of being” (p. 493).

Considering all the above, it could be noted that at the rhetoric and political level, the school principals’ role has been reconceptualized in order to respond to the NPM policies. It seems that one of the key features of this reconceptualization is the granting of autonomy to school principals. This practice, however, does not always imply independent action, since it frequently goes hand in hand with the exercise of new forms of control. Nevertheless, what school principals do in order to deal with the local-level demands does not always correspond to this political agenda.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

In order to find out to what extent the Greek school principal’s role was transformed over time, we focus on the legislative initiatives in Greece during the period 1981-2018.<sup>3</sup> Our starting point is 1981 since following the elections of that year, the Greek education system entered a new phase (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2016b).

The material of our study consists of the legislative documents related to the role of secondary education state school principals. The selection of these primary sources (i.e. one Circular, eight Decisions, three Decrees, five Laws) was based on the fact that in the centralized Greek educational system, control is mainly exercised through legislation (OECD, 1982, p. 41, in Ifanti, 1995, p. 272). Therefore, it can be deemed that legislation reflects quite clearly the planning and the political aims at the central level. The aforementioned documents were classified into seven periods, according to the governmental changes that occurred in Greece (Table 1).

The study of these documents was conducted by the method of documentary analysis and their evaluation was based on the principles of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, meaning (Fitzgerald, 2012). The Laws, Decisions and Decrees were drawn from the National Printing House’s website ([www.et.gr](http://www.et.gr)), except for Decision 6492/11-1-1983, which was drawn from a personal archive. Circular 123948/D2/6-9-2013 was drawn from the website of the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers (OLME) (<http://olme-attik.att.sch.gr>).

**TABLE 1**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Legislative documents</b>
<b>1981-1989 (PASOK Government)</b>	1. Decision 6492/11-1-1983 2. Law 1566 (167/A/30-9-1985)
<b>1989-1990/1990-1993 (1989-1990: Tzanetakis Government - National Unity Government/1990- 1993: New Democracy Government)</b>	3. Decree 320 (138/A/25-8-1993)
<b>1993-2004 (PASOK Government)</b>	4. Law 2525 (188/A/23-9-1997) 5. Decision D2/1938 (189/B/27-2-1998) 6. Decree 140 (107/A/20-5-1998) 7. Law 2986 (24/A/13-2-2002) 8. Decision Φ.353.1/324/105657/D1 (1340/B/16-10-2002)
<b>2004-2009 (New Democracy Government)</b>	
<b>2009-2012 (PASOK Government/PASOK - New Democracy - LAOS Coalition Government)</b>	9. Law 3848 (71/A/19-5-2010) 10. Decision 84172/IB (1180/B/6-8-2010) 11. Decision 8440 (318/B/25-2- 2011)
<b>2012-(January) 2015 (New Democracy-PASOK- Democratic Left Coalition Government)</b>	12. Circular 123948/D2/6-9-2013 13. Decision Φ.353.1/28/126721/D1 (2341/B/20-9-2013) 14. Decree 152 (240/A/5-11-2013) 15. Decision Φ.353.1/26/153324/D1(2648/B/7-10-2014)
<b>2015-2018 (SYRIZA - ANEL Government)</b>	16. Decision 1940 (310/B/2-2-2018) 17. Law 4547 (102/A/12-6-2018)

As regards reliability, a documentary analysis method, it has been pointed out that: “reliability is easier to address when the approach is based on content analysis” (Bush, 2012, p. 80). Moreover, considering that the main aim of the analysis is to record any change related to the institutional role of the school principal, the selected methodology tool was qualitative content analysis (Vamvoukas, 2010). Recording unit of the qualitative content analysis was the general topic (Kyriazi, 2011).

Nevertheless, we should acknowledge the limitations of a single-method approach. Therefore, in order to limit the subjectivity of the legislative documents, which express the official policy view, we also draw on other primary along with secondary sources, so as a limited triangulation to be attained (McCulloch, 2004). Further triangulation could be achieved by interviewing relevant respondents (e.g. secondary school principals or/and teachers) (McCulloch, 2004), but it is outside the purpose of this study. Other limitations of our study are the subjectivity stemming from the analyst itself (Duverger, 1990) as well as difficulties in identifying, accessing or classifying/recording documents (Fitzgerald, 2012).

## THE GREEK SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S ROLE (1981-2018)

In general terms, the administration of the Greek secondary school is assigned to the school principal, the vice principal and the teachers' council (i.e. the teachers of the school) (Law 1566/1985, article 11). According to the legislative documents of the first period (1981-1989) (i.e. Decision 6492/1983, Law 1566/1985), the school principal is required to act as a coordinator, administrator and assessor. His/her key responsibility is the implementation of the legislation and the decisions of the teachers' council. Furthermore, the school principal has teaching duties and participates in collective bodies (i.e. school board, school committee).<sup>4</sup> Despite the relevant provision of the Law 1566/1985 (article 11), the school principal's duties were not specified in detail during this period. In terms of school principal's accountability, the introduction of the renewable term of office was expected to function as an assessment mechanism (Preamble of Bill, 1985, p. 11). However, this provision was not accompanied by the establishment of respective procedures, that is a systematic evaluation of the school principal's contribution to the improvement of the school.

Probably, this was one of the reasons why a turning point of the following period (1989-1990/1990-1993) was the intensification of the assessment measures, as shown by the relevant Decree (320/1993) and the official rhetoric (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2019; Minutes of the Hellenic Parliament, 1992, pp. 6070, 6072, 6088, 6229). The planned assessment procedures of that period reflected the hierarchical structure of the Greek educational system, that is school principals would assess the teaching staff, regarding the professional duties, while school advisors would assess the scientific and pedagogical/teaching competence of teachers (Decree 320/1993). Senior education officials (i.e. school advisors, heads of education directorate) would assess school principals. The assessment criteria for school principals were the following: a. scientific and pedagogical/teaching competence, b. professionalism, c. reliability, d. taking initiatives, e. collaboration - communication with teachers, parents, students, f. self-assessment report of the school principal. The school's evaluation was assigned to the teachers' council (for the above legislative provisions, see: Decree 320/1993). However, these measures were not implemented due to the subsequent change of the government (1993) (Katsikas & Therianos, 2007).

The implementation of assessment in the Greek educational system, however, remained on the political agenda during the next period (1993-2004). A multi-level assessment procedure was then established (Decision D2/1938/1998; Decree 140/1998; Law 2525/1997), that recalled the bureaucratic procedures of the Decree 320/1993. Nevertheless, educational community reacted to these measures and eventually they were not implemented (Katsikas & Therianos, 2007). The subsequent legislative document (Law 2986/2002) introduced a revised version of the assessment procedure, in which the focus was on education officials' selection, whereas the teachers were to be assessed on a voluntary basis by the school principal and the school advisor.

During the same period, the role (i.e. duties and responsibilities) of teachers, teacher's council and education officials was determined in more detail (Decision Φ.353.1/324/105657/D1/2002). According to the relevant document, the school principal is at the top of the school community, is required to be a model and play a dual role, i.e. administrative and scientific-pedagogical. His/her duties and responsibilities in relation to the teachers' council - which he/she chairs - senior education officials, students, school board, parents and others are also defined (for the above, see: Decision Φ.353.1/324/105657/D1/2002).

As it has been indicated (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2018), the systematic association of the aspects of the school principal's role, identified as a high priority at the international level (see: Theoretical Framework), with the secondary school principals' duties and responsibilities in

Greece (i.e. Decision  $\Phi$ .353.1/324/105657/D1/2002, Law 1566/1985) reveals the following convergences:

- a. common vision-strategic planning → guiding the school community and setting high goals in order the vision of a democratic and open school to be realized
- b. focusing on teaching and learning → taking care of the school's infrastructure (in collaboration with the teacher's council) - introduction of educational innovations (in collaboration with the teachers' council and the education officials) - exercise of teaching duties –taking care of students' attendance and teaching hours coverage
- c. professional development of teachers → participation in in-school teachers' training (in collaboration with the teachers' council and the school advisors) – intellectual stimulation and encouragement of teachers' initiatives – monitoring and assessing teachers' performance
- d. distributing leadership → distribution of extra-curricular tasks to teachers (in the form of recommendation to the teachers' council), distribution of duties to vice principals (if more than one)
- e. building relationships/collaboration with school community (i.e. teachers, students) → coordination of teachers' work, collaboration with teachers and maintaining/enhancing coherence of the teachers' council - collaboration with students in order to achieve school goals and organize school life together - promoting positive school climate
- f. management of resources → covering the working hours of teachers and notifying the education directorate of any shortages - management of the available resources for covering operational needs of the school and update of the teachers' council for the school committee work - clearing of salaries (in collaboration with the competent teacher)
- g. school networking – system leadership → collaboration with parents and senior education officials to jointly achieve the school goals, participation in parents' association meetings - chair of the school board.

In addition to the above, the legal framework records several other duties, namely:

- a. implementation of the law, orders of administration officials and teachers' council's decisions
- b. update of the teachers' council on legislation
- c. students' discipline (in collaboration with the teachers' council)
- d. correspondence of the school, keeping of school records (in collaboration with the vice principal, the secretary (where applicable) and the competent teacher)
- e. preparation of the timetable (in collaboration with teachers)
- f. distribution of textbooks (in collaboration with the vice principal and the competent teacher)
- g. distribution of students into classes, enrolments/transfers of students, student examinations (in collaboration with teachers), etc. (see: Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2018).

The above legislative provisions were in force until 2018 with individual amendments. The latter were sometimes focused on reducing powers of the school principal by transferring duties to senior executives (e.g. clearing of teachers' salaries, see: Decision 84172/IB/2010, approval of school timetable, see: Decision  $\Phi$ .353.1/28/126721/D1/2013). On other occasions, the amendments worked towards the opposite direction (specific types of leave granted to teachers by the school principal, see: Decision  $\Phi$ .353.1/26/153324/D1/2014; expanding the participation of school principals in the school committee, see: Decisions 8440/2011, 1940/2018; participation of the school principal in support committees for students, see: Law 4547/2018). Such differences may



be due to the different governmental views and intentions, while others served practical needs [e.g. increase of the teaching hours of school principals and teachers (see: Circular 123948/D2/2013) because of the financial crisis].

Although, the subsequent legislative developments concerned mainly the introduction of assessment measures, at the same time they give more evidence about the political intentions concerning the school principal's role. Key points of these developments are the following. Firstly, the attempt to implement school evaluation (2009-2012) it was based on an output-oriented approach (e.g. disclosure of school performance to parents and students, publication of school performance on the school's website, etc.) (Law 3848/2010). In this framework, school principal would be responsible (in collaboration with the teachers' council and school advisors) for the overall procedure (Law 3848/2010).

Secondly, the more detailed legal framework (Decree 152/2013) that followed focused on the teachers and school principal's assessment [2012 – (January) 2015]. According to the Decree 152/2013, school principals would be mandatorily assessed by senior education officials (i.e. head of education directorate, school advisors). All assessed parties would have the right to assess their assessors. The main criteria for evaluating the work of the school principals, which were detailed in individual categories, were set out as follows:

- a. administrative and organizational duties
- b. supervising and assessment duties
- c. school climate and pedagogy
- d. teaching duties
- e. school principal's scientific and professional development (for the above provisions, see: Decree 152/2013).

At the same time, teachers' assessment, which was re-introduced by the same Decree (152/2013), came under the spotlight, as it was expected to be linked to teachers' promotion (OLME, 2015). In this procedure, the school principal would retain the crucial role already assigned to him/her by previous legislations.

Thirdly, these provisions were abolished in the following period (2015-2018) (Law 4547/2018) due to their "punitive nature" especially for the teachers, as it was mentioned (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2019; Minutes of the Hellenic Parliament, 2015, p. 2499). However, in the new framework, established by the Law 4547/2018, school evaluation and education officials' assessment remained at the forefront. According to this legislation, school principals' assessors (and at the same time, assessed by the school principals) were senior education officials (namely: head of education directorate and the coordinator, who replaced the school advisor under the same Law). The assessment of all education officials was based on the following criteria:

- a. professional relationships - human resources management (namely: collaboration with all stakeholders/communication and negotiation skills - promoting a positive climate, shaping common vision/goals, guidance/support/encouragement of motivation and professional development of human resources, etc.)
- b. effective implementation of educational management and pedagogical guidance (namely: strategic planning, coordination, supervision, guidance and feedback of human resources, distribution of tasks, implementation of participative models, use of innovative methods, objective assessment, prevention and resolution of problems and conflicts, etc.)
- c. effectiveness and performance (namely: smooth operation of the school unit, effective implementation of educational policy – target achievement through participative processes, performance assessment in relation to targets, meeting the expectations of the staff, informing

stakeholders, respect for diversity, etc.). Moreover, the consulting interview of the assessed party was introduced, while school principals' assessment included the participation of the teaching staff. Finally, the school evaluation was assigned to the teachers' council in collaboration with the school board (for the above provisions, see: Law 4547/2018).

## DISCUSSION

After the presentation of data, we turn our attention to the question: what does it all mean for the role of secondary school principals in Greece? In order to address this question, we examined the Greek legislation (i.e. Law 1566/1985 and Decision Φ.353.1/324/105657/D1/2002) under the light of the prevalent school leadership concept, as it was presented in the theoretical framework section. This examination reveals that the following aspects of the Greek school principal's role reflect to some extent the international standards:

- a. realization of the school vision
- b. introduction of educational innovations
- c. teachers' professional development (i.e. training, intellectual stimulation and assessment of teachers)
- d. promoting a climate of collaboration within and outside the school community.

It should be noted that among these aspects, school principals' participation in the professional development of teachers is widely acknowledged as a key aspect of their contribution to student learning (Barber et al., 2010; Robinson, 2019; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). In addition, it is pointed out that in-service teachers in Greece attribute great importance to professionalism and acknowledge the professionalism aspects that are related to their everyday school context (Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017).

Thus, in our view, the above legislative provisions show the expansion of the Greek secondary school principal's role during the period 1981-2018, as they introduced initiatives beyond school principal's administrative/bureaucratic role. In this sense, these role aspects could be considered as renewal trends. We may argue, therefore, that at the legislative level there were attempts in order the Greek educational system to keep pace with the international developments, as also found in other studies (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2016a, 2016b, 2018).

On the other hand, it has been indicated (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2018) that in terms of the international standards, the examination of the legislation reveals gaps at the following role aspects:

- a. strategic planning
- b. curriculum
- c. innovative instructional methods
- d. monitoring of student performance
- e. distribution of leadership roles to teachers
- f. school networking and system leadership

Moreover, the principal's participation in decision-making process is limited, given that the Ministry of Education determines the content of the school vision, of the curriculum, and of the educational innovations. The same applies to the vice principals' and teachers' council duties as well as to the hiring-firing of teachers and the formation of the school budget (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2018). In addition, the key responsibility of teachers' assessment, which could increase school principal's power, remained inactive (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2018).

Furthermore, in the Greek educational system, the principal's power is reduced by other bodies, which either participate in school administration (i.e. teachers' council) or have decisive responsibilities on educational and pedagogical issues (i.e. school advisors up to 2017 and subsequently, coordinators, see: Decision  $\Phi$ .353.1/324/105657/D1/2002, articles 8-13; Law 4547/2018; Vozaitis & Ifanti, 2017). Moreover, as already mentioned, school principals in Greece are also assigned with teaching duties along with a plethora of administrative tasks. Especially the latter makes them administrators rather than leaders. Finally, as identified in a previous study, another limiting factor is linked to shortcomings in schools' infrastructure (Stravakou, 2003). However, given the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis (Clogg, 2015) on Greek education, conditions in this area were deteriorated and thus the school principal's potential to bring about school improvement was further reduced.

To shed more light upon the Greek secondary school principal's role, we should examine the assessment criteria for all education officials of the last legislative document (Law 4547/2018). A comparison of these criteria with the international standards shows the Greek state's willingness to pursue more actively the international trends (see: the legislative provisions presenting guidance/support/encouraging motivation and professional development of human resources, co-creating the vision/goals, strategic planning, etc. as key school principal's duties). The same seems to apply to the emphasis given by the Law 4547/2018 on education officials' assessment, as it reveals the Greek state's intention to render education officials, school principals included, more accountable (see: Bush, 2019). At the same time, though, in the Greek educational system it is not the school principal but the teachers' council, in collaboration with the school board, who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating school performance as a part of the overall school evaluation.

In summary, it can be said that our study has enriched the understanding of the secondary school principal's role in Greece in the light of international developments by the following ways. Firstly, we have shown the coexistence of limitations and renewal trends that characterizes secondary school principal's role evolution in the period 1981-2018. In this respect, our study supports the view that secondary school principal's role was transformed to some extent at the legislative level, reflecting in this way the impact of the NPM practices on the Greek educational policies. Secondly, taking into consideration the findings of the LISA study (Pashiardis & Brauckmann, 2019) as well as the findings of the present study, we suggest that there might also be some room for principal's initiatives that would benefit the students. Among them, in our opinion, an essential aspect is the secondary school principal's participation in the professional development of teachers. As for the school autonomy policies in the Greek context, taking into account the overall legislative initiatives on the Greek school administration mentioned earlier, we would be tempted to say that a gradual modernization process is under way towards granting limited autonomy on the basis of a mixed form of school-based management (see: Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009). According to this process, it seems that authority is devolved to the school principal, the teachers' council and the school board.

## CONCLUSION

Looking at the big picture, it seems that there is more evidence supporting the fact that the Greek educational system has entered a "transition phase" (Dimopoulos et al., 2015, p.219), in which the need for structural reforms is stressed (see for example: European Commission, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017; OECD, 2015). On the other hand, the present study also demonstrates that the reform

attempts made in Greece were often disabled, mainly because of the lack of consensus between the parties involved (e.g. the implementation of assessment), as it has already been pointed out (Ifanti, 2009). In the light of these findings, the question of the school principal's role in Greece could be a challenge for a critical assimilation of the international trends along with the creative expression of the Greek context. As it has already been underlined elsewhere (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2018, 2019), the shaping of a broad shared vision for the Greek school and the principal's role could contribute to this effort.

However, given that the recent Law 4547/2018 has not been tested yet over time as well as the limitations of this study, we would suggest to further investigate this issue, especially from the school principals' and teachers' point of view. In this respect, the present study could provide valuable insights.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The study does not concern special types of secondary education state schools (e.g.: experimental, musical, technical/vocational, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> According to these four models the responsibility for the devolved functions might be given to the school principal, to the teachers, to the parents, jointly to the teachers and the parents (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2009, p.5).

<sup>3</sup> For the period 1981-2017 see also: Ifanti & Katsigianni (2014); Katsigianni (2013); Katsigianni & Ifanti (2016a, 2016b); Katsigianni & Ifanti (2018, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> The school board, operating in every school, consists of the school principal as chairman, the teachers' council, representatives of the parents' association, student and local government representatives, with the main task being the smooth operation of the school. (Law 1566/1985). The school committee operates at a municipal/community level, with the main task of managing funds coming from subsidies granted by municipalities and other sources to address the operational needs of schools. School principals and representatives of the parents' association and students' councils participate in this committee (Decision 8440/2011; Decision 1940/2018; Law 1566/1985).

### DECLARATION OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We have no conflicts of interest. No funding source had a role in the preparation of this paper or in the decision to submit it for publication.

### REFERENCES

- Arcia, G., Macdonald, K., Patrinos, H. A., & Porta, E. (2011). *School autonomy and accountability*. Retrieved from <https://worldbank.org>.
- Argyriou, A., Andreadou, D., & Typas, G. (2015). The views of the candidates headmasters of secondary schools on the legal framework according to which they got elected in the year 2011. A case study in western Attica. *Scientific Educational Journal "educ@tional circle"*, 3(3), 39-67. (In Greek).
- Athanasoula-Reppas, A., & Lazaridou, A. (2008). Requirements, roles and challenges of the principalship in Greece and Cyprus: Newly appointed principals' views. *European Education*, 40(3), 65-88.

Barber, M., Whelan, F., & Clark, M. (2010). *Capturing the leadership premium. How the world's top systems are building leadership capacity for the future*. Retrieved from <http://www.mineduc.cl/usuarios/fde/doc/201202221325220.Informe%20Mckinsey.pdf>.

Barrera-Osorio, F., Fasih, T., Patrinos, H. A., & Santibáñez, L. (2009). *Decentralized decision-making in schools*. Washington DC: The World Bank. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/227831468169753582/Decentralized-decision-making-in-schools-the-theory-and-evidence-on-school-based-management>.

Brauckmann, S., & Pashiardis, P. (2011). A validation study of the leadership styles of a holistic leadership theoretical framework. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 25(1), 11-32.

Bush, T. (2012). Authenticity in research: Reliability, validity and triangulation. In A. R. J. Briggs, M. Coleman & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership & management* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (pp.75-89). Los Angeles London New Delhi Singapore Washington DC: Sage.

Bush, T. (2019). School leaders and accountability: Performance or performativity? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(2), 167-169.

Clogg, R. (2015). *A brief history of Greece. 1770-2013* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Athens: Katoptro. (In Greek).

Day, C., & Sammons, P. (2013). Successful leadership: A review of the international literature. Retrieved from <http://www.files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED546806.pdf>.

Dempster, N. (2001). *The ethical development of school principals*. Griffith University: Centre for Leadership and Management. Retrieved from <http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/content/download/573/4823/dempster-ethics.pdf>.

Dimopoulos, K., Dalkavouki, K., & Koulaidis, V. (2015). Job realities of primary school principals in Greece: Similarities and variations in a highly centralized system. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 18(2), 197-224.

Duverger, M. (1990). *Methods in social sciences*, vol. B'. Athens: National Centre for Social Research. (In Greek).

European Commission (2014). *Education and training monitor 2014*. Greece. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor_en.htm).

European Commission (2015). *Education and training monitor 2015*. Greece. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor_en.htm).

European Commission (2016). *Education and training monitor report 2016*. Greece. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-el\\_el.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-el_el.pdf). (In Greek).

European Commission (2017). *Education and training monitor report 2017*. Greece. Retrieved from: [https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor\\_el](https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/et-monitor_el). (In Greek).

European Union (2009). Council conclusions of 26 November 2009 on the professional development of teachers and school leaders. *Official Journal of the European Union* (2009/C 302/04). Retrieved from <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:302:0006:0009:EN:PDF>.

Fitzgerald, T. (2012). Documents and documentary analysis. In A. R. J. Briggs, M. Coleman & M. Morrison (Eds.), *Research methods in educational leadership & management* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (pp. 296-308). Los Angeles etc.: Sage.

- Fotopoulou, V. S., & Ifanti, A. A. (2017). In-service teachers' perceptions on specific aspects of professionalism in Greece. *Educational Journal of the University of Patras UNESCO Chair*, 4(1), 17-33.
- Gkolia, A., Koustelios, A., & Belias, D. (2018). Exploring the association between transformational leadership and teacher's self-efficacy in Greek education system: A multilevel SEM model. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 21(2), 179-196.
- Gruening, G. (2001). Origin and theoretical basis of New Public Management. *International Public Management Journal*, 4, 1-25.
- Gunter, H. (2004). Labels and labelling in the field of educational leadership. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 25(1), 21-41.
- Ifanti, A. A. (1995). Policy making, politics and administration in education in Greece. *Educational Management and Administration*, 23(4), 271-278.
- Ifanti, A. A. (2009). Attempts to empower schools in the Greek educational system. In A. Nir (Ed.), *Centralization and school empowerment. From rhetoric to practice* (pp.107-119). New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.
- Ifanti, A. A., & Katsigianni, E. (2014). Secondary-school principals in Greece: Non-tenure or tenure for school improvement? *Nea Paideia*, 152, 46-64. (In Greek).
- Kaparou, M., & Bush, T. (2015). Instructional leadership in centralized systems: Evidence from Greek high-performing secondary schools. *School Leadership & Management: Formerly School Organization*, 35(3), 321-345.
- Kaparou, M., & Bush, T. (2016). Instructional leadership in Greek and English outstanding schools. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(6), 894-912.
- Katsigianni, E. A. (2013). *School principal's tenure-non tenure and school effectiveness and empowerment. The case of secondary education school principal in Greece*. Master's Thesis, University of Patras, Greece. (In Greek).
- Katsigianni, E. A., & Ifanti, A. A. (2016a). The institution of secondary education school principals in Greece. Historical review. *Education Sciences*, 3, 158-176. (In Greek).
- Katsigianni, E. A., & Ifanti, A. A. (2016b). Tenured and non-tenured school principals in Greece: A historical approach. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 48(3), 225-242.
- Katsigianni, E. A., & Ifanti, A. A. (2018). School improvement and the role of secondary education school principals in Greece: Studying the discourse of official documents. In *Proceedings of the 11<sup>th</sup> Panhellenic Congress of the Hellenic Educational Society*, vol. B' (pp.130-139). Athens: Hellenic Educational Society. (In Greek).
- Katsigianni, E. A., & Ifanti, A. A. (2019). Educational policies on the school principal's role in school improvement in Greece. *Nea Paideia*, 170, 115-124. (In Greek).
- Katsikas, C., & Therianos, K. N. (2007). *History of modern Greek education. From the founding of the Greek state to 2007*. Athens: Savalas. (In Greek).
- Kyriazi, N. (2011). *Sociological research. Critical review of methods and techniques*. Athens: Pedio. (In Greek).
- McCulloch, G. (2004). *Documentary research in education, history and the social sciences*. London and New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Mavroskoufis, D. K. (1992). Aspects of the appraisal, selection and role of secondary-school principals. *Modern Education*, 64, 22-36. (In Greek).

- Minutes of the Hellenic Parliament. (1992). *Session 122, 7 May 1992* (pp. 6065-6089). Athens: Hellenic Parliament, Parliamentary Library Collections. (In Greek).
- Minutes of the Hellenic Parliament. (2015). *Session 38, 8 May 2015* (pp. 2431-2502). Athens: Hellenic Parliament, Parliamentary Library Collections. (In Greek).
- Murphy, J. (2013). The architecture of school improvement. *Journal of Educational Administration, 51*(3), 252-263.
- Murphy, J., & Hallinger, P. (1992). The principalship in an era of transformation. *Journal of Educational Administration, 30*(3), 77-88.
- OECD. (2009). *Creating effective teaching and learning environments. First results from TALIS*. Retrieved from [www.oecd.org/edu/school/43023606.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/43023606.pdf).
- OECD. (2015). *Education policy outlook 2015: Making reforms happen*. Retrieved from <http://dx.DOI.org/10.1787/9789264225442-en>.
- OLME. (2015). *Statement of the executive board of Greek Federation of Secondary Education Public School Teachers on the emergencies of education and teachers*. Retrieved from <http://olme.attik.att.sch.gr/new/?p=8983>. (In Greek).
- Pashiardis, P., & Brauckmann, S. (2019). New public management in education: A call for the edupreneurial leader? *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 18*(3), 485-499.
- Preamble of Bill. (1985). *Explanatory report of Law 1566/1985*. Athens: Hellenic Parliament, Parliamentary Library Collections. (In Greek).
- Robinson, V. (2019). Excellence in educational leadership: Practices, capabilities and virtues that foster improved student outcomes. In T. Bush, L. Bell & D. Middlewood (Eds.), *Principles of educational leadership and management* (pp.73-92) (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Los Angeles etc.: Sage.
- Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why*. New Zealand: Ministry of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515/60169/60170>.
- Saitis, C., & Eliophotou Menon, M. (2004). Views of future and current teachers on the effectiveness of primary school leadership: Evidence from Greece. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 3*(2), 135-157.
- Saitis, C., Tsiamasi, F., & Chatzi, M. (1997). School principal: Manager-leader or traditional bureaucrat? *Nea Paideia, 83*, 66-77. (In Greek).
- Schleicher, A. (2012) (Ed.), *Preparing teachers and developing school leaders for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Lessons from around the World*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/site/eduistp2012/49850576.pdf>.
- Stravakou, P. A. (2003). *The school principal in primary and secondary education. Theoretical analysis and empirical research*. Thessaloniki: Kyriakidis. (In Greek).
- Tektonopoulou, M. (2018). Style and leadership types-models of school principals in primary level education. *Scientific Educational Journal "educ@tional circle", 6*(2), 137-156. (In Greek).
- Tektonopoulou, M. (2019). Viewpoints and attitudes of school principals in primary level education towards the ability of exercising leadership, based on the current legal framework and the structure of the Greek educational system. *Scientific Educational Journal "educ@tional circle", 7*(1), 149-172. (In Greek).
- Tolofari, S. (2005). New public management and education. *Policy Futures in Education, 3*(1), 75-89.

Tsaroucha, M. (2017). *School leaders' perceptions on their professional role and professional development*. Master's Thesis, University of Macedonia, Greece. (In Greek).

Tsimirika, L. (2007). *The introduction of innovations in the school unit: The school principal's role*. Master's Thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. (In Greek).

Vamvoukas, M. I. (2010). *Introduction to the psychopedagogical research and methodology* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). Athens: Grigoris. (In Greek).

Van der Sluis, M. E., Reezigt, G. J. & Borghans, L. (2017). Implementing New Public Management in educational policy. *Educational Policy*, 31(3), 303-329.

Vozaitis, G. N. & Ifanti, A. A. (2017). Do school advisors contribute to teachers' professional development? A Greek case study. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 7(3), 227-245.