Cooperativeness in Primary Schools: An Exploratory Investigation of Teachers’ Attitudes and Perceptions in Greece

Evangeloula Papadatou, Nikolaos Alexopoulos
National & Kapodistrian University of Athens, Athens, Greece

This paper investigates teachers’ perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the contribution made by school principals and students’ parents to the cooperative operation of primary schools in Greece. Research data was collected by means of quantitative descriptive research. The research tool used was the anonymous questionnaire addressed to primary school teachers. The study entails descriptive analysis, chi-square tests, independent samples t-tests, and one way ANOVA of the data collected. An econometric analysis was also conducted. The results of the study indicated that the cooperation between teachers and school principals lacks fluency and substance. As far as teachers’ cooperation with students’ parents is concerned this study indicated that teachers consider it very important for school’s effective operation and they are to a great extent, satisfied with it. However, this satisfaction was not total but primarily applied to dealing with certain school activities and operation problems. The research results can be taken into account by the members of the school community in order improve the communication/cooperation among them and expand school-family cooperation. In contrast to previous research, this study examines the cooperative climate in schools not by taking into consideration the attitudes and perceptions of school directors, but those of the actors who actually do the teaching work in schools, that is, the teaching staff themselves.

Keywords: school climate, school communication, school effectiveness, interpersonal relationships at school, parents’ role, school principal’s role

Introduction

Nowadays, despite scepticism expressed in recent literature (e.g., Caplan, 2018), school education enjoys wide social recognition while the majority of researchers perceive its value in a positive light (e.g., Bacete, Perrin, Schneider, & Blanchard, 2014; Thijs & Verkuyten, 2014). This is mainly owing to schools’ contribution towards the smooth function and development of society as well as the intellectual, spiritual, and psycho-social growth of students’ maturity, both accomplished through their pedagogical and teaching function. In order for this contribution to materialize, schools have to operate effectively. Although definitions of what constitutes an effective school may vary (Saitis & Saitis, 2012; L. Weller & S. Weller, 2002), a series of relevant studies (e.g., Saitis & Saiti, 2018; Pasiardi & Savidis, 2016; Zepeda, 2013; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012; Everard, Morris, & Wilson, 2004) seem to concur that, firstly, school effectiveness refers to the degree of multifaceted/holistic progress of students (which is hard to define), and secondly, that it depends on a variety of factors.

Evangeloula Papadatou, part time, lecturer, Pedagogical Department of Primary Education, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens.
Nikolaos Alexopoulos (Corresponding author), laboratory teaching staff, Department of Primary Education, National & Kapodistrian University of Athens.
Relevant literature (Green, 2015; Saiti & Saitis, 2012; Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011, Kapsalis, 2005; Hargreaves, 1999; Edmonds, 1979) suggests that a good spirit among teachers, quality leadership in school as well as a regular and genuine collaboration among teaching staff, senior management and parents constitute key elements that govern a school’s effective operation. Lack thereof has been proven to adversely influence teaching staff in their work as, apart from communication and cooperation problems among school community members and the negative impact on students’ learning (e.g., Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2014; Halverson, 2010), it has also been found to increase teaching staff’s stress levels, professional frustration, and burnout (Antoniou, Polychroni, & Vlachakis, 2014; Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; E. Skaalvik & S. Skaalvik, 2009; Antoniou, Polychroni, & Walters, 2000; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995).

The natural and socio-emotional school environment, quality of teaching and learning, opportunities for teaching staff professional development, abidance by regulations and procedures, leadership, but primarily, a consistent and honest cooperation between teaching staff, leadership and parents have all also been identified as preconditions for a conducive school climate (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins, 2013; Cavrini, Chianesea, Boccha, & Dozzaa, 2015; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Litwin & Stringer, 1988).

Nevertheless, despite the importance of cooperation as to the school unit’s effective operation, relevant research, and studies both in the international and Greek school reality (e.g., Rapti & Papadatou, 2018; Volakaki, 2015; Tailahidis, 2014; Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Shah, 2012; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Abdallah, 2009; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Pasiardi, 2001; Saitis, Darra, & Psarri, 1996) indicate that desired cooperative spirit is either missing from schools or is hard to achieve. All too often, a virtual, rather superficial cooperative spirit is exhibited at school units (Barth, 2013; Goldsprink, 2007; Cobourn, 2005), an occurrence which could be attributed to the fact that conflict in the school community is constantly augmenting mainly due to the increased complexity of educational organizations on an international level (Saiti, 2014). In the Greek school reality, researchers (e.g., Papadatou, 2018; Saiti, 2014; Koula, 2011) indicate mainly that: (a) the atmosphere in Greek schools is not amiable; (b) communication within the school community is primarily formal and insubstantial; and (c) conflict among school community members constitutes a common occurrence. Thus, teachers, directors, and parents are hindered from feeling at ease, whilst all too often they act individualistically of their own accord, having a negative bearing on children’s learning.

The Aim and the Objectives of the Study

Within this framework, the present study aims to investigate teachers’ perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the contribution made by directors and parents to the cooperative operation of primary schools in Greece. In contrast to former studies (e.g., Clarke, 2014; Saiti, 2014; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Cosner, 2009; Youngs, 2007; Quong, 2006), the cooperative climate at schools is examined by not taking into consideration the attitudes and perceptions of school directors but of the actual actors who do the teaching work at schools, that is the teaching staff. In addition, while examining the cooperative climate at school, the present study has not only taken into consideration the relationship of the teaching staff with their director but also with their students’ parents.

In order to pursue the present study’s goal comprehensively, the following research objectives were formulated to:
(a) determine the teachers’ levels of satisfaction from their cooperation with the school director/deputy
director and parents of their school unit;
(b) explore the teachers’ views on the importance of cooperation concerning a school’s effective
operation;
(c) examine to what extent teachers believe that their school’s directors possess the appropriate elements
of leadership behaviour necessary for developing strong relationships of cooperation at school;
(d) determine the factors that may have a bearing on teachers’ beliefs regarding the effectiveness of their
cooperation with their school directors and their students’ parents;
(e) provide suggestions for a more effective cooperation among school community members.

Theoretical Framework: Formulating a Cooperative Climate for Effective Schools

Each school constitutes a social system that aims to contribute to the balanced development of the
student’s psyche, body, and intellect through teaching and learning. However, certain prerequisites are needed
in order to accomplish these goals, and thus, ensure the smooth operation of the school system: the availability
of the necessary material and human resources for the school’s operation, communication with the external
environment, and genuine cooperation among its members (Saiti & Saitis, 2012).

The basic actors in the Greek school system who are responsible for the children’s teaching and learning
(Greek Law 1566/1985, Article 11) have been recognised as: (a) the Teachers’ Board (TB), which is comprised
of the entire teaching staff and is in charge of the school’s policy making as well as the resolution of its basic
operational problems in compliance with current legislation; and (b) the school director (together with their
deputy) who oversees the smooth implementation of legislation, circulars, official instructions, and decisions
taken by the board.

In addition, current literature (Babalis, Kirkigianni, & Tsoli, 2015; Sheridan & Kim, 2015; Wilder, 2014),
relevant legislation (e.g., Greek Law No. 1566/1985, Article 51, Par. 5-6; Greek Law 2621/1998, Article 2, Par.
1-14, Ministerial Decision D4/662/23-12-1998) as well as international practice (European Commission,
Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2015; UK Department for International Development, 2015)
illustrate the ever-increasing significance of the role that the students’ families play in helping schools attain
their goals.

Aiming to enhance cooperation among the numerous stakeholders involved in school life in Greece, a
collective management system has been adopted, based on predetermined rules about, e.g., the constitution,
composition, and member quorum for each school collective management body.

Nonetheless, regardless of the constitutional and operational rules governing the collective bodies
involved in the school’s management, they do not suffice and above all are not substantial unless their members
act in a cooperative manner and endorse genuine communication. In the relative literature (e.g., Saitis & Saiti,
2018; Thapa et al., 2013; Babalis, 2009; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Gamage & Pank, 2003), a school climate can be
described as the psychosocial framework (dominant behaviours, attitudes, emotions, and interpersonal
relationships) within and outside the classroom, based on common values, attitudes, views, and expectations of
the school community’s members vis-à-vis their school (e.g., as regards teaching methods, student safety,
cooperation with parents, and the local community). This is a particularly significant parameter, because it
fosters a feeling of “belonging” among all parties involved in the working life of the school. Developing a
cooperative spirit of genuine communication, however, is a difficult parameter to achieve. That is because
school management collective bodies usually contain only a few people, each demonstrating a distinct behaviour that is particularly difficult to predict.

Since a school’s climate is subject to personal views and perceptions but also varies depending on the school community’s composition, it cannot remain static. In addition, according to researchers (e.g., Magen-Nagar & Azuly, 2016; Thapa et al., 2013; Pepper & Thomas, 2002; Gamage & Pank, 2003; Moos, 1979), it constitutes a school hallmark and a parameter of successful teaching and learning with decisive influence on students, teachers, and directors (Babalis, Kirkigianni, & Tsoli, 2015; Babalis et al., 2012).

Among different categories of school climates cited in the relevant literature (Saiti & Saitis, 2012; Kavouri, 1998; Hoy & Feldman, 1999; Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Hoy & Clover, 1986; Halpin & Croft, 1963), both the amenable/cooperative and open/autonomous categories better correspond to a school’s multi-dimensional goals and various operational needs as they ensure internal harmony and broader cooperation (inside and outside the school unit) as well as the collegial relationships required for the successful achievement of its goals (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

For this desirable climate to be achieved, certain conditions have been prescribed by literature (Raptis & Psaras, 2015; Saiti & Saitis, 2012; Gamage & Pank, 2003; Fasoulis, 2001):

1. The identification of a commonly accepted school goal, irrespective of any personal pursuits, geared towards maintaining legality and defending common interests (primarily of students and their parents);

2. The rational distribution of roles and responsibilities that aim to make full use of the TB’s heterogeneity (e.g., in terms of age, teaching experience, skills, and personality traits) as well as ensure the harmonious coexistence of its members to prevent pointless conflict and confrontation;

3. Quality leadership behaviour. The demonstration of leadership behaviour on the director’s part constitutes a vital factor for the effective operation of any social system, such as a school. Whether directors exercise quality leadership (and, by extension, prove to be effective) mainly depends on their approach towards handling the human factor;

4. Maturity of the teaching staff and parents. Any positive disposition for cooperation by the school leadership cannot suffice unless accompanied by a corresponding disposition by the other key players involved in school communication;

5. Genuine and substantial communication, verbal, or non-verbal that will disseminate through either formal or informal channels thoughts, emotions and information among the members of the school community. This communication will ensure that the school community operates with a team spirit, preventing misunderstandings and conflict.

In sum, it could be asserted that collaborative management may constitute the ideal model for an organisation in education, such as a school. Despite any potential weaknesses that this management style may entail (for example, a relatively slow decision-making process) it remains consistent with the democratic character of school education. In addition, by providing valid solutions to the multifaceted school problems while taking into consideration different approaches (Saitis & Saiti, 2018; Schermerhorn, 2011), it can play a decisive role in the school unit’s effectiveness. Its accomplishment requires a sine qua non-climate of fertile communication/cooperation among the school community members and primarily the school director/leader, the members of the TB and the parents. Developing such a climate, however, is hard to achieve and entails factors that were investigated by the present study.
Methodology and Sample

Research data was collected by means of quantitative descriptive research. The research tool used was the anonymous questionnaire which has been employed in a series of similar studies (Rapti & Papadatou, 2018; Saiti, 2014; Babalis et al., 2015; Koula, 2011; Kavouri, 1998). The questionnaire took its final form upon reviewing pertinent literature (e.g., Saitis & Saiti, 2012, 2018; Gamage & Pank, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2005), former relevant research (Rapti & Papadatou, 2018; Saiti, 2014, McNeil et al., 2009; Kavouri, 1998) and by exchanging ideas with primary school teachers in the prefecture of Attica.

The sample was convenient, consisting of 234 teachers the majority of whom were married women, aged 41-50, with seven years of service at the school where the survey was carried out and 15 years of total experience in school education.

As for its content, the questionnaire of the present survey included: (a) five questions regarding the school’s composition and the sample’s demographic characteristics (e.g., age, sex, and years of service); and (b) 18 open and closed questions, requesting participants to express their opinion as to their agreement with a series of sentences categorised into three sections. The sentences in the first section referred to the cooperation of teachers with their directors (e.g., frequency of unanimous decisions made by the TB, majority, or compromise), the second section included statements referring to the attitudes and perceptions of teachers regarding communication between school and family (e.g., to what extent, parents are believed to respond to teachers’ invitations in respect to their children’s progress) and the third section examined the teachers’ views as regards elements of their school director’s behaviour (e.g., whether the director undertakes responsibility for any mishaps related to school events).

The questionnaire data was analysed by use of Statistic Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20) including an assessment of the questionnaire’s internal consistency measured by Cronbach’s $a$, frequency, and relevant percentages tables, an analysis of qualitative variables through contingency tables, an $X^2$ independence compliance review, a $t$-test and one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA), depending on the number of categories. An econometric analysis was further conducted based on accounting model evaluation as well as the multiple linear regression models in order to evaluate the determinants of the views expressed by participants.

Results

At first, the main questionnaire’s internal consistency was assessed, showing that Cronbach’s $a$ was high (over 0.801) for all sections and, by extension, the research results are statistically valid and useful.

As regards the first section of the questionnaire, participants stated in their majority (54.4%) that they “Sometimes” communicate with their director in order to formulate an overview of the agenda to be later discussed at the TB meeting while 28.5% stated that they do not act accordingly.

Regarding the outcomes emerging from fostering dialogue between their directors and teaching staff members prior to the TB meeting, teachers emphasised that the most substantial benefit from the above interaction is the active participation of all teachers in the discussion (36.3%) and, at a lesser extent, the minimised friction (29.7%) and the unanimous decision-making (31.1%).

The teachers participating in the study also stated that the decisions taken by the TB of their school are “Sometimes” unanimous at 43.6%, sometimes compromise (draw lot) at 12.4%, and “Always” by the majority at a percentage of 42.3%.
Pearson’s chi-square test statistic revealed the existence of a statistically significant correlation \((p\text{-value} = 0.001 < 0.5)\) between the cooperation of directors and teachers before the TB meetings and the corresponding decision-making process therein. In particular, the majority among those teachers who stated that decisions at the TB meetings are taken unanimously also stated that the directors “Sometimes” seek to have a private conversation with them prior to the Board’s meeting.

As for developing a more general communication between teachers and directors, the results of the present survey indicated that the views of the teacher sample are divided. That is because 41.5% of the teachers stated that, regardless of sex \((p\text{-value} = 0.063 > 0.05)\) or age group \((p\text{-value} = 0.064 > 0.05)\), directors do not discuss school operation issues with them at a personal level, whereas 42.9% stated just the opposite.

Nonetheless, the irrespective of the directors’ attitude towards personal communication with the school’s teaching staff prior to the TB meetings, teachers consider this type of communication as conducive to reshaping their opinions (79.1%) as well as to strengthening cohesion among school unit members (72.6%).

Informal meetings among members of the school community, both within and outside the school unit, are “Sometimes” pursued by directors according to the majority of the sample (49.6%), regardless of sex \((p\text{-value} = 0.273 > 0.05)\) or age \((p\text{-value} = 0.126 > 0.05)\). It is noteworthy, however, that 26.9% of the teachers pointed out that there are no informal meetings between them and the directors whatsoever. The research results also indicated a statistically significant positive correlation \((p\text{-value} = 0.009 < 0.05)\) between the teachers’ years of service at the same school when the survey was conducted and the frequency with which teachers believe that directors work toward developing informal communication relationships.

As for the consequences of those informal meetings within and outside the school premises, the most popular responses in our study showed that teachers believe that they contribute “Somewhat” (32.9%) or “Very much” (29.5%) to “strengthening the bonds among directors and teachers”, tackling misunderstandings among teachers (“Somewhat” [29.1%] or “Very much” [14.5%]) and tackling misunderstandings between teachers and school principals (“Somewhat” [46.2%] or “Very much” [23.1%]).

As for the relationships between teachers and directors, a sizeable percentage (47.6%) stated that they “Sometimes” address their school’s director in order to resolve personal or work issues, while only 11% of the sample does so “Very often”. In addition, 36% of the teachers reported that their directors “Often” mediate, so as to resolve issues among the school unit’s teachers or between teachers and parents.

As regards the particularly significant cooperation between the school and parents in view of the school’s effective operation, the results showed that the vast majority (98%) of the sample’s school units have an active parent association. Teachers further stated in their majority (47.9%) to be “Somewhat” satisfied with their school’s degree of cooperation with parent while a 9.8% were “Very much” satisfied and a 28.2% were “Neutral”.

Those teachers who stated that they are “Somewhat” or “Very much” satisfied from their cooperation with parents were further requested to identify the areas of their cooperation with parents (see Table 1).

The research findings related to parent-teacher cooperation include the fact that for half of the teachers this cooperation contributes either “Somewhat” or “Very much” to their school’s effective operation (see Figure 1). In addition, there was a statistically significant positive correlation among the teachers’ satisfaction from the level of their cooperation with parents and their belief that this cooperation level contributes to the effective operation of the school unit \((p\text{-value} = 0.032 < 0.05)\).
Table 1

**Frequency Distribution of Cooperation Opportunities Between School and Parents (More Than One Answer) (%)**

| Topics of school-family cooperation                                      | % answers |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Organising pedagogical activities                                      | 21.9      |
| Organising artistic events (e.g., theatrical plays)                    | 47.3      |
| Organising sporting events                                            | 32.9      |
| Environmental initiatives                                              | 22.8      |
| Resolving problems for the school’s operation                          | 41.5      |
| Book exhibitions                                                       | 17.9      |
| Another cooperation occasion                                           | 1.4       |

As regards the way parents respond to school invites in order to be informed about their children’s progress, the majority of teachers stated that parents respond to them “Somewhat” or “Very much” (39.7% and 12.4%, respectively). It is worth noting, however, that 37.2% of the teachers stated that their response was “Neutral”. Also, Pearson testing revealed a significantly positive correlation among the teachers’ opinion regarding the degree of parents’ responsiveness to their invites and their belief that this cooperation level contributes to the school unit’s effective operation ($p$-value = 0.001 < 0.01).

With reference to the reasons behind the good cooperation relationships among the school and students’ families, most teachers identified parents’ interest in their children’s future (44.4%) as the most significant factor (see Table 2).

The results of the present study further revealed teachers’ views on the leadership traits of school directors. In particular, it was determined that what mainly characterises school directors according to the participants (68.4%) is their ability to promptly resolve conflicts between school unit members and parents. It is also worth noting, however, that there is a relatively small percentage of teachers (less than half) who believe that directors lead by example while executing their duties (see Table 3).

Regression analysis was conducted in order to identify factors that statistically influence two of the most significant opinions of teachers as regards their cooperation with directors.
Table 2

*Frequency Distribution of Teachers’ Views on the Reasons Behind the Good Cooperation Between School and Family (More Than One Answer) (%)*

| Teachers’ views                                             | % answers |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Director’s efforts                                         | 24.4      |
| Parents’ education attainment level                        | 29.1      |
| Parents’ interest                                          | 44.4      |
| Teachers’ efforts to reach out to their students’ families  | 31.6      |

Table 3

*Frequency Distribution of Teachers’ Opinions on Directors’ Traits While Executing Their Managerial Duties (More Than One Answer) (%)*

| Teachers’ opinion                                                                 | % answers |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Resolve conflict promptly                                                        | 68.4      |
| Adopt judgemental attitude towards teachers who under-execute orders             | 20.9      |
| Undertake the responsibility for mishaps occurring at school activities          | 35.9      |
| Develop “work groups”                                                            | 55.1      |
| Develop personal contact with school teachers                                   | 50.0      |
| Lead by example                                                                  | 41.9      |
| Show consideration to teachers’ emotions and employ their experience to assist them | 54.7      |

The first opinion refers to the frequency with which a teacher approaches the school director in order to resolve a personal or work issue. The variance of the regression equation revealed that: (a) younger teachers request school directors’ assistance more frequently in order to resolve personal or work issues at school (*p*-value < 0.05); and (b) teachers approach their director more frequently in order to seek help in resolving a personal or work issue if the latter resolves conflicts promptly. This demonstrates an emotional consideration and employs examples from personal experience in order to facilitate teachers’ better understanding of themselves (*p*-value < 0.01).

The second opinion refers to whether teachers believe that one of the directors’ fundamental leadership traits is their ability to promptly resolve conflict before it gets out of proportion and becomes uncontrollable. According to the variance of the regression equation, men (*p*-value < 0.05) and teachers aged over 41 (*p*-value < 0.01) seem more likely to consider the ability of a director to resolve conflict promptly as a distinctive element of leader behaviour.

**Discussion and Conclusions**

In accordance with relevant studies (Rapti & Papadatou, 2018; Volakaki, 2015; Koula, 2011), the results of the study indicated that the cooperation between teachers and directors lacks fluency and substance. This finding leads us to characterise the climate of cooperation at schools examined presently as only partly positive. In particular, the results indicated that teachers, regardless of sex or age, tend not to cooperate with, or feel comfortable communicating with, their school director. For that reason, they avoid communicating with them and ask for guidance on personal/work issues or on the mediation of conflicts with other teachers or parents. However, despite their hesitation, teachers showed that they consider their cooperation with school management to be of particular significance, especially as regards strengthening their professional bonds, resolving misunderstandings, and making unanimous decisions.
The teachers’ hesitant stance may be attributed to the following two research findings:

1. The first refers to the fact that, according to teachers, directors do not communicate regularly with them, for example, prior to the TB meetings. The lack of communication, however, fails to foster adequate conditions for teachers’ active participation in the meeting deliberations and for the fertile exchange of opinions required by the multifaceted character of a school’s operation. This fact seemed to drive its members to resort to decision-making by majority rule more often than not or even reach a compromise decision (one out of three times) by drawing lots, with doubtful consequences for the TB’s cohesion, its cooperative spirit and the validity of its decisions.

2. Our second finding refers to what teachers report as a lack of willingness on the part of directors to exchange views and opinions with them on school life matters and problems at informal meetings notwithstanding the fact that both formal and informal communication is considered by this survey’s participants and relevant literature (Saiti & Saitis, 2012) as a contributory factor for the school unit’s harmonious operation and coherence. A likely explanation for this finding could be attributed to the fact that many directors have not been trained in the field of organisational behaviour and their role is underestimated by central administration (Ministry of Education) as it is restricted to the execution of bureaucratic tasks and processes (Saiti & Saitis, 2012; Saiti, 2012; Raptis, 2009; Fasoulis, 2006).

The present study also aimed to investigate the level of satisfaction with, and the value of, teachers’ cooperation with students’ parents. The research findings indicated, like others (Babalis et al., 2015; Saitis, Feggari, & Voulgaris, 1997) that teachers are to a great extent satisfied with the level of their general cooperation with parents irrespective of their demographics. However, this satisfaction was not total but primarily applied to dealing with school operation problems, organising artistic and sporting events and pedagogical meetings.

Regarding the usefulness of cooperation between the school and the parents’ association, the research indicated that teachers consider it of decisive value for the effective operation of a school unit. This finding is considered positive as regular cooperation between a school’s teaching staff members and the parents’ association fosters collegiality in their relationship, resolves operational problems at school level and leads to high student performance as well as students’ balanced behaviour on its premises (Babalis et al., 2015; Babalis, 2011; Milonakou, 2009; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007).

The value of the above two findings of our research was further underlined by the close positive correlation between the teachers’ satisfaction from their cooperation with parents and their belief that it contributes to the school’s smooth operation (This is probably the reason why those teachers had experienced the positive outcomes from the school-family cooperation).

Taking into consideration that a school’s primary objective is learning, our research focused on the cooperation between teachers and parents concerning the information provided on students’ progress. The results indicated that the majority of parents respond positively to the teachers’ call for cooperation, thus concurring with findings in previous relevant research (Babalis et al., 2015; Ntinidou, 2013; Rekalidou, 2009; Saitis et al., 1997). Nevertheless, one out of three teachers that participated in our survey stated that parents’ responses span around the “neutral” level of cooperation. This is a finding of particular interest that could be attributed to the fact that some parents, especially those of lower socio-economic status, immigrants, or divorced spouses, are not close enough to the school due to lack of time, increased work demands, language obstacles or a lack of information regarding the positive effect that parental involvement can have on a child’s
academic progress (Saitis, 2014; Babalis, 2011). That said, it could be further attributed to the difficulty of Greek schools in attracting parents and integrating them into their community. Relevant studies note that this may be due to the lack of a consistent legislative framework and an organisational management system that would enhance parental involvement in school education, as well as an insufficient background in the field of school-family cooperation. On top of that, attention has been drawn to the fact that parents’ alienation from schools is attributable to the insecurity of some teachers when parents are all too present at school, feeling that their role ought to stop outside the school doors. Such an attitude results in those teachers not providing all the required information to parents regarding their children’s education and conduct at school in a regular, clear and comprehensible manner (see Saitis, 2014; Milonakou-Keke, 2009; Dean, 1995). As explicitly stated in a study conducted by Voudouri, Bouras, and Triantafyllou (2013), even though Greek teachers may deemed cooperation with parents as important, their meetings are nevertheless restricted to once a month, especially in the case when students may be having a particular issue.

Another important finding is the fact that the more positively teachers experience a sense of cooperation with students’ parents, the more they believe that the school-family cooperation benefits their school’s effective operation. Possibly owing to this correlation, teachers believe that school-family cooperation does not only come as a result of parents’ interest in their children, but also stems from their own efforts to reach out to their students’ families.

The present study also aimed at examining whether teachers believe that the school’s management is equipped with the leadership behaviour traits that would allow them to develop a relationship of genuine cooperation in the school community. The results showed that teachers, to a great extent, consider their directors as “leaders” and that is because those particular directors possess and employ their conflict management techniques (avoidance, compromise, mediation, etc.) to a satisfactory level and refrain from maintaining a judgemental attitude towards their peers when they under-execute their orders. Furthermore, an older study (Iordanoglou, 2007) indicated that directors are more likely to demonstrate consideration and understanding towards teachers when the latter express their emotions (empathy).

This finding is extremely positive given the fact that schools constitute an environment where friction is a daily occurrence due to the coexistence of people of a different age, education level, and ideology as well as due to operational problems, such as the accommodation of students when a teacher is absent from school (Saiti, 2014). As a result, understanding, respect, and empathy constitute those elements that could more easily ensure a cooperative spirit and, by extension, teaching and learning effectiveness at school (Saiti & Saitis, 2018; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2014; Iordanoglou, 2007; Fullan, 2001; Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough, 2001).

Despite those positive traits identified in the directors’ leadership conduct, however, teachers would further expect directors to:

1. Lead by example in the school’s creative activities and show greater interest in their work. This finding shows that school directors are not aware of: (a) how important it is for their work to serve as an example; and (b) recent studies proving that school effectiveness (e.g., concerning the success or failure of innovation in education) is directly related to the interest that directors show in teachers’ work (Saiti & Saitis, 2012; Fullan, 2003; Hall & Hord, 1987).

2. Participate in creative activities with teachers’ work groups at school. This shortcoming may be explained by the fact that in large urban centres, such as Athens, school directors have a large amount of
organisational, operational, and administrational issues to handle and may not have adequate time for the development of such groups. At the same time, though it could be attributed to the fact that teachers themselves are less willing to dedicate more time to carrying out such initiatives.

3. Undertake responsibility for any mishaps related to school events. That may be explained by the fact that undertaking responsibility for possible mishaps and exercising leadership constitutes a challenging task for the director as it entails their “ego” and requires self-awareness, boldness, a clear understanding of their role and duties as well as a natural predisposition to self-criticism.

Taking into consideration how important the communication between teachers and directors is this study further assessed the profile of those school life actors who desire more frequent communication. According to the results, younger teachers experience the need to reach out to their director to a greater extent, possibly owing to their inexperience or insecurity regarding their job requirements.

It further revealed that teachers prefer to approach directors who are capable of resolving conflict, showing consideration for their emotions and supporting them in their daily work. A possible explanation for this attitude could be the fact that schools in the Attica region are staffed by a multitude of teachers of different specialisation who do not work together for an extended period of time. As a result, they do not have the time to develop collegial relationships that could mitigate their internal conflicts and consequently feel threatened by them. Another likely reason behind the response of those teachers could be the fact that urban centre schools are attended by a large number of students—a fact which, according to relevant research and studies (Saiti, 2014; Tekos & Iordanidis, 2011; Hekin & Holliman, 2009), further aggravates social pressures and, by extension, potential incidences of conflict between them and the students themselves (in senior classes of primary school) and/or their parents.

Lastly, an important finding emerging from this study concerning communication between teachers and directors is the positive effect that teachers’ long service in the same school unit has on communication. It is a result that affirms the positive effect of staff cohesion to which literature on school management has repeatedly made reference (Saiti & Saitis, 2018; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012; Darra, Ifanti, Prokopiadou, & Saitis, 2010; Somech, 2008).

Suggestions and Limitations of the Study

In view of our research findings, we make the following recommendations:

Firstly, in order to improve communication/cooperation between teachers and their director: (a) rid directors of bureaucratic tasks (through the establishment of a school secretariat, as provisioned by law); and (b) provide training to teachers and current as well as prospective principals in school management, especially in areas related to human resource management and organisational behaviour (e.g., communication, conflict management techniques, fostering emotional intelligence, etc.).

Secondly, expand school-family cooperation into other areas and not limit it to exchanging information on student performance and organising artistic events. These could involve, for example, volunteer work in organising and running the school library, co-training with teaching staff on issues of family planning, social racism, school violence, informal social gatherings, or organised home visits by teachers (see Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). Those actions, along with institutional support in the case of parent schooling, are expected to succeed in shaping a collective identity in the school community and an in-depth cooperation of the individuals and collective bodies that comprise the school community.
Finally, it should be stated that this research is certainly subject to limitations. Consequently, future research could further examine teachers’ views on the cooperative operation of schools in other urban centres other than Attica as well as sub-urban or rural areas and draw pertinent comparisons between their findings. Indeed, a comparison between teachers’ attitudes and perspectives on school cooperation with those of directors and parents, as well as a consideration of the latter’s views, is distinctly lacking in Greek literature.

References

Adeogun, A. A., & Olisaemeka, B. U. (2011). Influence of school Climate on students’ achievement and teachers’ productivity for sustainable development. US-China Education Review, 8(4), 552-557.

Abdallah, J. (2009). Lowering teacher attrition rates through collegiality, academic leadership. The Online Journal, 7(1). Retrieved December 25, 2019, from https://scholars.fhsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1267&context=alj

Antoniou, A. S., Polychroni, F., & Vlachakis, N. (2014). Work stress and professional burnout in primary and secondary education in Greece. In A. S. Antoniou (Ed.), Health psychology and psychosomatic medicine: Vol. C. Promoting Work Well-being Professional Burnout & Occupational Stress (pp. 135-154). Nicosia, Cyprus: Broken Hill Publishers Ltd.

Antoniou, A. S., Polychroni, F., & Walters, B. (2000, July 24-28). Sources of stress and professional burnout of teachers of special educational needs in Greece. In International Conference of Special Education Proceedings, ISEC 2000. Manchester.

Babalis, T. (2011). Children of single-parent families. In Helping in school adaptation (2nd ed.). Athens: Diadraasi. (in Greek)

Babalis, T. (2009). Classroom life. Athens: Atrapos. (in Greek)

Babalis, T., Kirkigianni, F., & Tsoli, K. (2015). School and student families’ communication techniques and relevant practices in a social pedagogical context: Primary school principals’ views in Greece during the economic crisis. International Journal of Social Pedagogy—Special Issue Social Pedagogy in Times of Crisis in Greece, 4(1), 117-136.

Babalis, T., Trilianos, A., Stavrou, N. A., Koutouvela, C., Tsoli, K., & Alexopoulos, N. (2012). Good schooling as the outcome of the interaction between children and teachers in Greek primary school. US-China Education Review B, 6(6), 602-613.

Bacete, G., Perrin, F. J., Schneider, G. M., & Blanchard, B. H. (2014). Effects of school on the well-being of children and adolescents. In A. Ben-Arie, F. Casas, I. Frones and J. Korbis (Eds.), Handbook of child well-being (Vol. 3, pp. 1251-1306). Dordrecht: Springer.

Barth, R. S. (2013). “Risk”. In M. Grogan (Ed.), The Jossey-Bass reader on educational leadership (3rd ed., pp. 287-296). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Caplan, B. (2018). The case against education: Why the education system is a waste of time and money. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cavrini, G., Chianese, G., Bocch, B., & Dozza, L. (2015). School climate: Parents’, students’ and teachers’ perceptions. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 191, 2044-2048.

Christenson, S., & Sheridan, S. (2001). Schools and families: Creating essential connections for learning. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Clarke, C. K. (2014). The identification of successes and barriers in establishing professional learning communities from principals perspectives (Ph.D. dissertation, Mankato, Minnesota, Minnesota State University). Retrieved December 25, 2019, from https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1340&context=etds

Coburn, C. E. (2005). Shaping teacher’s sense making: School leaders and the enactment of reading policy. Educational Policy, 19(3), 476-509.

Collie, R. J., Shapka, J. D., & Perry, N. E. (2012). School climate and social-emotional learning: Predicting teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy. Journal of Educational Psychology, 104(4), 1189-1204.

Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M., Michelli, N. M., & Pickeral, T. (2009). School climate: Research, policy, practice, and teacher education. Teachers College Record, 111(1), 180-213.

Cosner, S. (2009). Building organizational capacity through trust. Educational Administration Quarterly, 45(2), 248-291.

Darra, M., Ifanti, A., Prokopiadou, G., & Saitis, C. (2010). Basic skills, staffing of school units and training of educators. Nea Paideia Journal, 134, 44-68. (in Greek)

Dean, J. (1995). Managing the primary school (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership, 37*(1), 15-24.

European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture. (2015). *Education & Training 2020 Schools Policy: A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving Policy messages*. Retrieved December 24, 2019, from https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/early-leaving-policy_en.pdf

Everard, K. B., Morris, G., & Wilson, I. (2004). *Effective school management* (4th ed.). London: P.C.P.

Fassoulis, K. (2001). Quality in education’s human resource management. *Journal of Educational Research, 4*, 186-197. (in Greek)

Fassoulis, K. (2006). Creative communication as a tool of conflict management in the school environment. In *Critical and creative thought in education: Theory and practice*. Proceedings of the 3rd Greek Conference of the Hellenic Institute of Applied Pedagogy and Education, Athens, 520-525. (in Greek)

Freiber, H. J., & Stein, T. A. (1999). Measuring, improving, and sustaining healthy learning environments. In H. J. Freiber (Ed.), *School climate: Measuring, improving, and sustaining healthy learning environments* (pp. 11-29). London: Flamer Press.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fullan, M. (2003). *Change forces with a vengeance*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Gamage, D. T., & Pank, N. S. K. (2003). *Leadership and management in education*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.

Goldspink, C. (2007). Rethinking educational reform: A loosely coupled and complex systems perspective. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 35*(1), 27-50.

Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2014). *Primal leadership: Realizing the power of emotional intelligence*. Athens: Politeia.

Grayson, J. L., & Alvarez, H. K. (2008). School climate factors relating to teacher burnout: A mediator model. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(5), 1349-1363.

Green, T. L. (2015). Leading for urban school reform and community development. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 51*(5), 679-711.

Hall, G., & Hord, S. (1987). *Change in schools: Facilitating the process*. Albany, NY: Sunny Press.

Halpin, A., & Groft, D. (1963). *The organization climate of schools*. Chicago, IL: Midwest Administration Center of the University of Chicago.

Hargreaves, D. (1999). Helping practitioners explore their school’s culture. In J. Prosser (Ed.), *School culture* (pp. 48-65). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Henkin, A. B., & Holliman, S. L. (2009). Urban teacher commitment: Exploring associations with organizational conflicts, support for innovation and participation. *Urban Education, 44*(2), 160-180.

Hord, S. M., & Sommers, W. A. (2008). *Leading professional learning communities-voices from research and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press & the National Association of Secondary Principals.

Hoy, W. K., & Clover, S. I. R. (1986). Elementary school climate: A revision of the O. C. D. Q. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 22*(1), 93-110.

Hoy, W. K., & Feldman, J. A. (1999). Organizational health profiles for high schools. In H. J. Freiber (Ed.), *School climate: Measuring, Improving, and sustaining healthy learning environments* (pp. 84-102). London: Falmer Press.

Iordanoglou, D. (2007). The teacher as leader: The relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness, commitment, and satisfaction. *Journal of Leadership Studies, 1*(3), 57-66.

Johnson, S. M., Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2012). *How context matters in high need schools: The effects of teachers’ working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students’ achievement*. Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved December 23, 2019, from http://citesearx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.394.4333&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Kapsalis, A. (2005). Characteristics of a good school. In A. Kapsalis (Ed.), *Organisation and administration of school units* (pp. 3-30). Thessaloniki: University of Macedonia Press. (in Greek)

Kavouri, P. (1998). The school climate in primary education: An important factor in the assessment of the effectiveness of the school unit. *Pedagogical Inspection, 27*, 181-201. (in Greek)

Koula, V. (2011). The interpersonal relations between the school principal and educations: The contribution to the effectiveness of the school unit (Ph.D. dissertation, Aristotelio University of Thessaloniki). (in Greek)
Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2013). The effect of negative school climate on academic outcomes for LGBT youth and the role of in-school supports. *Journal of School Violence, 12*(1), 45-63.

Litwin, G. H., & Stringer, R. A. (1988). *Motivation and organizational climate* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Harvard University, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration.

Lunenberg, F., & Ornstein, A. C. (2012). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

MacNeil, A. J., Prater, D. L., & Busch, S. (2009). The effects of school culture and climate on student achievement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 12*(1), 73-84.

Magen-Nagar, N., & Azuly, D. (2016). The contribution of school climate and teaching quality to the improvement of learning achievements, according to an external evaluation system. *Creative Education, 7*(13), 1773-1784.

Milonakou-Keke, I. (2009). *Collaboration among school, family and the community: Theoretical approaches and practical applications*. Athens: Papazisi Publishers. (in Greek)

Moos, R. H. (1979). *Evaluating educational environments*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Ntinidou, C. (2013). Opinions and attitudes of primary school teachers and parents on school-family collaboration (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Ioannina). (in Greek)

Palmer, B., Walls, M., Burgess, Z., & Stough, C. (2001). Emotional intelligence and effective leadership. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 22*(1), 5-10.

Papadatou, E. (2018). Investigation of teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of leadership’s contribution to shaping school climate at All-day Primary Schools with a Restated Unified Educational Program in Greece (Ph.D. dissertation, Harokopio University). (in Greek)

Pas, E. T., Bradshaw, C. P., & Hershfeldt, P. A. (2012). Teacher- and school-level predictors of teacher efficacy and burnout: Identifying potential areas for support. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*(1), 129-145.

Pasiardi, G. (2001). *The school climate: Theoretical analysis and empirical investigation of basic parameters*. Athens: Typothito. (in Greek)

Pasiardi, G., & Savvides, G. (2016). School principal as pedagogical leader*. In A. Petrou and P. Angelides (Eds.), *Educational management administration and leadership: Scientific basis, research approaches and practices* (pp. 341-370). Athens: Diadrassi. (in Greek)

Pepper, K., & Thomas, L. H. (2002). Making a change: The effects of the leadership role on school climate. *Learning Environments Research, 5*(3), 155-166.

Quong, T. (2006). Asking the hard questions: Being a beginning principal in Australia. *Journal of Educational Administration, 44*(4), 376-388.

Rapti, A., & Papadatou, E. (2018). Investigating attitudes and perceptions of primary school directors and teachers in the prefecture of Viotia as regards the establishment of a positive climate*. *Nea Paideia Journal, 165*, 104-131. (in Greek)

Raptis, N., & Psarras, H. (2015). *Cooperative leadership in education*. Athens: Diadrassi. (in Greek)

Raptis, N. (2009). Primary school head teachers’ teaching hours and their effect on educational effectiveness. *Dioikitiki Enimerosi, 50*, 99-112. (in Greek)

Rekalidou, G. (2009). The implementation of cross thematic curriculum framework (DEPPS in Greek) and kindergarten—Family cooperation in rural and urban areas: The perspectives of kindergarten teachers and parents. *Kinitro, 10*, 99-114. (in Greek)

Saiti, A. (2012). Leadership and quality management: An analysis of three key features of the Greek education system. *Quality Assurance in Education, 20*(2), 110-138.

Saiti, A. (2014). Conflicts in schools, conflict management styles and the role of the school leader: A study of Greek primary school educators. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership, 43*(4), 1-28.

Saiti, A., & Saitis, C. (2012). *School principal in a contemporary school*. Athens: Own edition. (in Greek)

Saiti, A., & Saitis, C. (2018). *Organisation and administration of education*. Athens: Ad Libitum. (in Greek)

Saitis, C., & Saiti, A. (2018). *Initiation of educators into educational management secrets*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Saitis, C. (2014). *Organisation and operation of school units*. Athens: Own edition. (in Greek)

Saitis, C., Darra, M., & Psarri, K. (1996). Dysfunction at school units: The organisational framework and organisational support level in relation to conflict. *Nea Paideia Journal, 79*, 126-142. (in Greek)

Saitis, C., Feggari, M., & Voulgaris, D. (1997). Redefining of the role of leadership in modern school. *Dioikitiki Enimerosi, 7*, 99-108. (in Greek)
Schermerhorn, J. R., Jr. (2011). *Introduction to management* (11th ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Shah, M. (2012). The importance and benefits of teacher collegiality in schools: A literature review. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 46*, 1242-1246.

Sheridan, S. M., & Kim E. M. (Eds.). (2015). *Foundational aspects of family-school partnership research: Research on family school partnerships* (Vol. 2). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2009). Does school context matter? Relations with teacher burnout and job satisfaction. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 25*(3), 518-524.

Somech, A. (2008). Managing conflict in school teams: The impact of task and goal interdependence on conflict management and team effectiveness. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(3), 359-390.

Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2014). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing. *Implementation Research, 72*(3), 387-431.

Tailahidis, S. (2014). The contribution of school directors in developing the school climate: Study on primary school teachers and directors’ views in the prefecture of Imathia (Unpublished master’s thesis, Department of Pre-school Education Sciences & Educational Design, Rhodes, University of the Aegean). (in Greek)

Taylor, D. L., & Tashakkori, A. (1995). Decision participation and school climate as predictors of job satisfaction and teachers’ sense of efficacy. *The Journal of Experimental Education, 63*(3), 217-230.

Tekos, G., & Iordanidis, G. (2011). School leadership and conflict management style from the school educators’ perspective. *Pedagogiki Epitheorisi, 51*, 199-217. (in Greek)

Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins, D. A., A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of Educational Research, 83*(3), 357-385.

Thijs, J., & Verkuyten, M. (2014). School ethnic diversity and students’ interethnic relations. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 84*(1), 1-21.

UK Department for International Development. (2015). *2010 to 2015 Government Policy: Education in developing countries*. Department for International Development policy paper. Retrieved December 23, 2019, from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-education-in-developing-countries/2010-to-2015-government-policy-education-in-developing-countries

Volakaki, M. (2015). Attitudes and perceptions of teachers about conflict at primary and secondary schools in the prefecture of Attica (Ph.D. dissertation, Harokopio University). (in Greek)

Voudouri, A., Bouras, A., & Triantafyllou, E. (2013, May 22-26). Perceptions of primary school teachers for their cooperation with the family of their students. In P. Kiprianos (Ed.), Family, school and local societies: Policies and practices about the child. *Proceedings of the 15th AIFRER Network International Conference in Patras* (pp. 51-57). Patras: University of Patras. (in Greek)

Way, N., Reddy, R., & Rhodes, J. (2007). Students’ perceptions of school climate during the middle school years: Associations with trajectories of psychological and behavioral adjustment. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 40*(3), 194-213.

Weller, L. D., & Weller, S. J. (2002). *The assistant principal: Essentials for school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Wilder, S. (2014). Effects of parental involvement on academic achievement: A meta-synthesis. *Educational Review, 66*(3), 377-397.

Youngs, P. (2007). How elementary principals’ beliefs and actions influence new teachers’ experiences. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(1), 101-137.

Zepeda, S. J. (2013). *Instructional leadership for school improvement*. London: Routledge.