

Aikaterini Sklavenitou

Secondary Teachers' Education Programs to Promote a Positive Learning Climate through the Cases of France, Greece, and England: The Planning of a Research

Abstract

This paper presents an ongoing comparative study of secondary teachers' education programs in France, Greece, and England, with a primary focus on strategies aimed at cultivating a positive learning environment in schools. Recent studies have underlined the significance of teachers' pedagogical competence formation as a determinant element which will form their future in the teaching profession. Globalization and technological development being major characteristics of our century have had an undeniable impact on educational thought and practice which imposes the need to acquire new types of knowledge and skills to ensure teachers' capacity to deal with the needs of the new generation. Secondary teachers must implement targeted handlings towards a special age group – adolescence – in combination with the principles of the curriculum. Through interviews and focus groups with secondary teachers of various specialization and teaching experience the aim is to understand their needs and level of preparation for the purpose of entering the classroom equipped to conduct their demanding role and to explore the ways the undergraduate studies of secondary teachers can be enriched both theoretically – and especially – at a practical level.

Keywords: secondary teachers' education, pedagogical competence, school climate

Introduction

The tinder for this study is our postgraduate research, which included secondary school teachers of different specialties and years of experience at schools in Crete, Greece regarding their pedagogical training and ability, and their level of preparation when entering the classroom. The need to enrich the undergraduate studies of teachers who aim to teach both at a theoretical and – indeed above all – at a practical level became apparent. The necessity for assistance and redefining the goals of education from the State's side was also emphasized. We believe that the comparative study of European education systems and the evaluation of the objectives of secondary teachers' education programs in England and France can contribute to identify weaknesses, omissions, or problems and possibly to find proposals for a new training model to give a positive boost to the education of Greek teachers.

We consider the comparative study of the training programs of Greece, England, and France appropriate, because their organizational and ideological differences in terms of the structure of their educational systems can offer useful aspects and directions for the

Greek reality and development. The case of England is particularly interesting, since it is considered a dominant example of neoliberalism in combination with the socio-economic changes that are taking place. On the contrary, France, a country particularly sensitive to education issues, has shown a strong resistance to neoliberal reforms, with an undeniably constant effort to preserve the humanitarian spirit within a demanding framework regarding the effectiveness of the choices made by the central authority.

In the above context, our goal is to, through the comparative evaluation, capture the ways of utilizing new problem-solving methods and to enrich the experiences of organizing and supporting teachers. Undeniably, we do not aim at the sterile adoption of foreign standards, but we believe that Greek secondary education teachers can and should draw experiences from European education systems. In addition, we intend to focus on a dynamic study of concerns, ways of intervening and solving problems always with the aim of promoting the student's interest and the professional satisfaction and development of teachers, given that a strong interaction is observed between these parameters.

The teacher is the basic component of every class and acts as a catalyst in the effectiveness of the educational process. The way in which he perceives his role is inextricably linked to his training and the professional training he has received. Its role and work in the context of the school, but also outside it, have always been an important topic of research both in the field of education and educational policy. The relationship between education and society is now understood in the context of the so-called "knowledge society" and "lifelong learning", while the planning and implementation of educational policy as such is in the perspective of "human resources development" and seems to be emphasized in the tripartite "autonomy-accountability-efficiency" (Karras & Wolhuter, 2014).

Theoretical framework

The future of education in a rapidly changing world with significant challenges for the entire educational community is something that should concern all of society, but especially the educational community. Globally, the OECD report "The future of education and skills: Education 2030" raises fears about the path we are expected to follow and the reality we will be called upon to experience (OECD, 2018). Teachers are therefore called upon to develop new skills and adapt the directions they provide to their students, so that they remain relevant and engaging but at the same time useful and effective during the pedagogical process.

The education policy developed in the European Union varies greatly since it seems to take into account the diversity of national education systems and the right of each member state to draw up and implement the education policy line. However, there exists the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), a form of intergovernmental policymaking originally created in the 1990s as part of an employment policy and was later designated as the Lisbon body. At the same time the European education area (EEA) aims at creating a genuine common European space of learning which will benefit every country. Under Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU contributes to the development of quality education by encouraging and facilitating cooperation between its member states, and by supporting and supplementing their action (OECD, 2018). With a budget of more than EUR 28 billion, the new Erasmus+ program (2021-2027) funds projects on education and training, as well as measures in favor of youth and sport. In addition, the 27 member states and the European Commission are working

towards a wide-ranging improvement of the EU's education and training sector. This shared vision is called the European education area (EEA), and aims at creating a genuine common European space of learning, which will benefit all learners, teachers, and institutions, by 2025, through:

- improving the quality of education and training for all;
- ensuring inclusion and gender equality;
- promoting policies and investments to bring about the green and digital transitions;
- enhancing competence and motivation in the education profession;
- reinforcing higher education institutions;
- promoting lifelong learning and mobility; and
- strengthening the geopolitical dimension of the EEA (OECD, 2020).

A positive school climate – where students feel a sense of safety and belonging and where relational trust prevails – improves academic achievement, test scores, grades, and engagement and helps reduce the negative effects of poverty on academic achievement. To bring about such environments, teachers, paraprofessionals, and school and district leaders must be prepared to create the school and classroom structures that encourage secure relationships. Preservice preparation programs and professional development should cultivate knowledge, skills, and beliefs that build educators' understanding of student needs and their ability to support learning and development. To cultivate learning environments in which strong adult-student relationships can flourish, educators must gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet their students' needs. They need deep knowledge of the individual assets and experiences of the children in their care, the social and emotional skills to cultivate empathy and help students develop those skills, and both the teaching competencies and beliefs that enable students to achieve at high levels (Darling-Hammond & De Paoli, 2020).

Indicators in teacher competence in pedagogical aspects include the ability to master student characteristics, learning theory, learning practice, assessment, and evaluation (Lauermaun & ten Hagen, 2021). Teachers are also asked to be able to develop the potential of students, take advantage of the results of assessments and evaluations in improving learning, and reflect in further efforts to improve the quality of education. Professional competence is more emphasized on the ability of teachers in terms of mastery of the material, structure, concepts, and material development as well as creative (Prasetyono et al., 2021). Social competence includes elements of objectivity, non-discrimination, inclusiveness, communicativeness, and being able to adapt to the existing socio-cultural diversity (Abdullah, 2021).

Literature review

Livingston and Flores (2017) found recurring topics of investigation from the 1970s through to the 2000s. These included, among others, the relationship between theory and practice, collaboration between universities and schools, and mentoring/supervising arrangements during school placements.

In the last two decades, debates on the efficiency of the educational systems have intensified in the countries of the European Union. The results of the repeated international study PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), which are not satisfactory for some European countries, contributed to this. In this direction, the

important social changes and scientific and technological developments that took place during this period also largely contributed, which have the following main characteristics:

- a) multiculturalism of societies and pluralism of beliefs and values;
- b) globalization in the economy and in many other sectors of society.

As a result, interdependence relationships have been formed between the various countries with the simultaneous diffusion of international standards and practices in the economic, social, and educational fields. A third key feature of modern societies is their demographic evolution, which affects the structural and quantitative dimensions in educational programming as well as the essential aspects of education. The latest scientific and technological developments, especially in the fields of Genetics, New Technologies and Computer Science and Digital Systems, which justify the often-used description of the “fourth industrial revolution” also play a crucial role and proved to significantly strengthen in the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. The special health conditions created by Covid-19 is perhaps an opportunity to compensate for the educational needs of the teachers themselves, but also to reorganize the policies that will support educators and the school space. A January 2021 survey of 2,000 UK teachers about the impact of the pandemic on their work came to this conclusion, among others (Fullard, 2021).

Recent research in Finland and Norway highlights the fact that high-quality teaching is the most important factor in raising student achievement, while making it clear that successful teacher education depends on the motivation and commitment of teacher educators to do their best for the learning and intellectual development of future teachers. However, there is an inconsistency between the commitment to learning shown by teacher education students and their commitment to continue practicing the teaching profession, which is interpreted as a clear need to revise the theoretical framework of teacher education (Elstad et al., 2021).

Research over the past five years by the London Institute of Education of a sample of 3,500 teachers explored what motivated them to teach in the first place, and the reasons why they left or might consider leaving the profession in the future. The research emphasizes the motivations that initially prompted young people to pursue the teaching profession and their thoughts on the challenges they thought they would face. The data of the analysis of the findings reveal that the reality of teaching is far in terms of difficulties and challenges from the theoretical and practical education they have received at the University. Intensification, loss of autonomy, monitoring and evaluation, limited participation in decision-making and lack of personal development seem to be ignored. As a result, a frustration of their goals is quickly observed and the workload in relation to their life balance is such that they often push them to quit, so it is necessary to emphasize the creativity of the teacher’s work and the promotion of good practice in the implementation of teaching, so that the teacher is not considered merely a learning resource and his personality or meaningful communication with his students is sidelined (Perryman, 2022).

The prevalence of intentional career change has been recognized as a persistent and significant problem worldwide. Research on Finnish teachers (Räsänen et al., 2020) regarding the investigation of reasons behind these intentions show that many factors seem to interact with the school system, such as the challenges of modern developments, workload, ongoing educational reforms – which clearly aim to further develop a

relatively well-performing education system (OECD, 2019) – but require new professional training to ensure readiness to manage difficulties and increase the pressure on teachers, whose main concern is their performance and effectiveness in relation to their classroom and students (Räsänen et al., 2020).

In Greece initial secondary teachers' education typically lasts 4 years and as is the case in almost all OECD countries, a tertiary degree is awarded to prospective teachers of all levels of education upon completion of their initial teacher training (OECD, 2018). Research is oriented to the behavior of students and the relationships between the teachers' and the school's leadership. A new law established recently gives the opportunity in each higher educational institution to form a special pedagogic and teaching proficiency study program which will be operated by decision of the Senate, the successful completion of which leads to the granting of a certificate of pedagogic proficiency (OECD, 2020). Reforms are expected to be announced in the end of the academic year 2024 concerning the acquirement of a pedagogical competence certificate.

The purposes of the French initial teacher education system mainly focus on the selection procedures for teachers and civil servants (Escalié et al., 2023). To improve the attractiveness of the profession, the Ministry of Education is studying several recruitment reform hypotheses, particularly the positioning of bac + 3 competitions. The challenge of the reform is also that of improving initial teacher education. The Society of Aggregates sent an open letter to Gabriel Attal, in which it is underlined that “many undergraduate students have not, at this stage of their studies, acquired a sufficient level of knowledge or methods to guarantee that they will be able to master their discipline later”. In an open letter that became a petition, more than two hundred academics opposed, for the same reasons, a perspective for secondary education. Announcements are expected in early 2024.

England chose a decentralized teacher education model that emphasized apprenticeship in schools. Since 2010, the role of universities in teacher education has been further marginalized (Menter, 2019). The English government has yet decided that there are issues of quality with initial teacher education programs and therefore set in place a ‘Market Review’ led by a group of experts (Ofsted, 2022). The aim of a market review arrangement (with delivery from 2024) is to make well-informed, evidence-based recommendations on how to make sure all trainees receive high-quality training.

Aims

The general objective of this research is, through a comparative study of educational policies and the corresponding configuration of the educational systems of England, France, and Greece, to determine the degree of readiness of secondary education teachers, who teach in public schools, to face behavioral issues, but also classroom management, to maintain a positive learning climate.

After studying the literature and the available sources, the research questions that are formed as a framework are the following:

- Which are the theoretical and operational differences of the three educational systems under study in terms of preparing teachers to face the demands of teaching?
- Is the teacher influenced by the educational policies in the studied systems?

- Does the educational material and the existing curriculum contribute to maintaining a positive learning climate?
- What problems do teachers face in the three countries under study regarding school climate and learning outcomes?
- What is the opinion of teachers about the effectiveness of education programs and how is this affected by age or years of experience in the three countries under investigation?
- How are the educational needs of teachers affected in relation to their studies, the schools they serve and the often-changing conditions due to particularities in each of the countries under consideration?
- Is the contact and exchange of opinions and practices between the teaching colleagues of different countries promoted in the three systems under study?
- Do the recent educational reforms contribute to the pedagogical competence and preparedness of teachers?
- What are the main (structural and functional) factors for the effective education of teachers and, consequently, for the formation of a positive learning climate?

Methodology

The method that will be used to study secondary teachers' education in the three educational systems is the comparative analysis. It will highlight the target position of each country. In addition, it will lead to conclusions not only at the level of theory, but also at the level of applied policy regarding the emphasis placed on the pedagogical competence of teachers and their readiness to manage the classroom, but also to ensure a positive learning climate. Our methodological strategy aims to move along the following axes:

1. the bibliographic research;
2. the study of secondary quantitative data; and
3. the qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

In the first stage of the research (pilot research), in the form of an interview, five teachers in each country will be asked to answer general questions about their profession, the situations they face in the classroom and the manipulations they are asked to adopt to ensure a meaningful learning environment interaction with their students. This specific approach will highlight the points that concern the teachers the most and, in this way, we will be led to the second stage of the research (main interview), when the data and experience obtained from the previous stage will be included, the questions will be formulated with greater clarity and readjusted based on feedback from the previous stage.

When it comes to focus groups, it is essential to design and deliver an effective and enjoyable discussion, which requires consideration not only of issues of sampling and group composition, but also of group dynamics, as well as the comfort and convenience of the participants. research participants. After all, the success of a focus group is related to the stimulation and engagement of participants, and we will work in one direction to develop topic guides and introduce questions appropriately to ensure that participants are able to contribute to the discussions as fully as possible (Robinson, 2019).

The above stages of the research phase and especially the pilot and the main interview will be used in the final drafting of our questionnaire with a more organized list of questions and adapted to the final axes of study. In the final questionnaire, we

intend to include both open-ended and closed-ended questions to ensure objectivity and lead the respondents to answers within the conceptual framework, and in cases where it is not possible to communicate with the interviewees in person, we will use online interviews.

The comparative study and analysis of the education and training systems of teachers in Greece, France and England is not going to be a simple list of similarities and differences. Its main objective is to identify the scope of the pedagogical competence and preparedness of secondary school teachers in the three countries under study and the effectiveness of the educational systems. Regarding the analysis of secondary quantitative data, social scientists have the possibility of analyzing high-quality data and at the same time reaching valid conclusions. The analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and focus groups in the three countries will play an important role in the proposed study, as qualitative research in education successfully utilizes archives or texts, discussions between individuals (interviews) or groups (focus groups) in both in-person and online environments (Ward & Delamont, 2020).

We intend to use content analysis to answer the research questions and draw conclusions about the issues under investigation. Content analysis allows qualitative material to be transformed into quantitative data and is used to draw conclusions from texts and other units of meaning. In addition, it is expected to build an ideal framework for the study of social representations, of living everyday ideology since this perspective is an important element from the point of view of qualitative research (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). As a research tool, inductive content analysis organizes, categorizes, and groups the qualitative data of the research, which will ultimately answer the research questions and it is expected that the empirical data will be included in the framework of a theory.

Since this research is in progress we have not reached yet to conclusions, however the pilot interviews demonstrate a vivid interest of teachers in the reforms to take place.

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Aikaterini Sklavenitou, PhD Candidate, University of Crete, Greece

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