

## Factors That Cause Professional Stress to Teachers of Secondary Education in Greece: Bibliographic Review and a Proposed Empirical Research on the Correlation of Professional Stress with School Performance

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the factors that cause the professional stress of teachers in Secondary Education of Greece. It records several factors that are found in recent international literature and focuses on the main factors of Modern Greek education. A research gap emerges from this review of the literature, regarding various factors. Thus, a proposal for a new research is being formulated, focusing on the approach of school performance as a factor of professional anxiety for secondary school teachers, as well as on the inventory of effective ways of limiting this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Occupational anxiety, teacher stress, Secondary education, stress factors, school performance, admitting examinations, treatment strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

The term “factors that cause professional stress to teachers of Secondary Education in Greece” refers to the causes that create negative feelings to teachers regarding their profession [1]. In the present work, this term is also related to school performance. This is a term used to classify pupils at a “grading scale” [2].

Teachers experience higher levels of stress than other professional groups [3, 4]. In the empirical investigations carried out by Robinson [5], Antoniou et al. [6], Karaj & Rapti [7], Katsioulas & Hatzipanayotou [8], Davrazos [9] and Skaalvik & Skaalvik [10], their research goals were related to the recording of stress factors in Secondary Education teachers. They conclude to exogenous and intrinsic factors below, confirming the relevant categories that Kyriacou & Sutcliffe [11] had already formulated.

#### Exogenous factors

These factors are related to school and its functioning. Especially the negative relationships between colleagues and the lack of cooperation within school or with the leadership [7] increase teachers' stress levels. The problem is aggravated by an authoritarian administration [8] when setting unrealistic goals [4]. In addition, an important anxiety factor is the students with a “difficult”, unresponsive behavior [6, 7, 11] that cause behavioral problems [12] and have no incentives [4], although they have especially increased educational needs [9]. On the other hand, students' good performance reduces stress levels [8]. It is also stressed in the relevant bibliography that among the stress factors are the multiple professional obligations

[8], the workload of teachers [6], which results from adapting the teaching practice to the needs of pupils, something also reported as important for the Albanian teaching reality [7]. An additional factor exacerbating teachers anxiety is the heterogeneity of the classes [13], but also the type of school. The research of Katsioulas & Hatzipanayotou [8] confirms that this mainly happens in General and Vocational Senior High-Schools because of the admission courses in tertiary education. The study of Weinstein & Trickett [14] specializes in teachers serving in special education schools. Finally, the exaggerated demands of the school administration, the evaluation of teachers by others [4], the recent legislation regarding the assessment of the educational performance [8], the frequent educational changes [4], but also the wider economic and social climate of the era, which is followed by low wages, limited social status of the profession [9], the abolition of teaching positions and the linking between the performance evaluation and the wage promotion are factors that apply to the Greek educators [8].

#### Intrinsic factors

These factors are related to:

- The individual characteristics of teachers. In relation to their personality, stress is strongly displayed on teachers experiencing competitiveness, have ambitions and unrealistic expectations, pursuing control and enforcement. On the contrary, it is limited when teachers have self-esteem, internal control and psychological endurance [6]. The demographics of teachers. It is noted that great educational / professional experience reduces anxiety levels, while less

corresponding experience increases stress levels, because younger teachers have not activated adequate strategies to deal with work-related stress [8]. With regard to gender, the various studies disagree. On the one hand, women show higher levels of anxiety and higher job dissatisfaction, because they experience negative conditions in the classroom, are dealt with negatively by the pupils and suffer from the lack of reconciliation between work and family life [6]. On the other hand, the studies by Davrazos [9] and Vasilopoulos [15] conclude that gender is not a cause of anxiety, at least for the Greek reality.

### **CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW**

From the above-mentioned review of the relevant bibliography, the teachers' stress is an international phenomenon and not only Greek, due to the interaction of many different factors (bureaucratic, organizational, procedural issues, educational changes, communication and co-operation relationships between students, teachers and parents) [16]. Although it is noted that amongst the main sources of teachers' stress is school performance [8], it is neither investigated why, nor whether there are any practices that can be applied to limit it. In particular, the relation of anxiety to school performance is documented by the general evidence that "stress levels increase in courses for admission to tertiary education (AV 3.66), while students' good performance reduces anxiety levels (AV 3.37)" [8]. School performance has not been ranked among the other major sources of stress in nowadays economic crisis. At the same time, this phenomenon is related to a specific type of school, mainly the General Senior High-School [8], but there is a bibliographic gap about whether the phenomenon is more intense in certain classes and courses. The validity of the results for every type of school population has not been checked, since the teachers of Vocational High-Schools have not been inquired.

It is also clear that only quantitative surveys have been carried out. No qualitative research has been implemented or triangulated studies, despite the multidimensional and complex nature of the research problem under consideration [17]. The question under investigation requires an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, for which qualitative research is more favorable [18]. Besides, qualitative research is deemed appropriate in those cases where the researcher holds the most important aspects of the subject under investigation, but considers that there may be some aspects that he/she is not aware of or have not been included in his/her original approach. In addition, it is noted that specific questions related to teachers' anxiety and school performance of pupils in semesters have not been answered, in comparison with the performance in promotional, admitting and final examinations, along with effective strategies to deal with them. It has not

been studied whether the exact characteristics of the Greek educational system, the specific conditions experienced by teachers and pupils in the country (e.g., those related to the difficulties of finding work after graduating from school because of the economic crisis and high unemployment rates), but also the prevailing attitudes and values of parents (a keen interest in having a career secured for their children) exacerbate the professional stress of teachers. Furthermore, it has not been investigated how the stress on teachers is increased due to the pupil's lack of motivation and discipline and their parents' interest in the performance of their children.

In relation to the effective actions to deal with it, it is noted that general proposals have been recorded, which may be adopted individually by the teachers who are employed in secondary-education schools in Greece [8]. These individual strategies have not been evaluated, but they have also not been associated with other strategies applied by teachers in dealing with cases of indifferent and undisciplined low-performance pupils, in order to achieve their active engagement and improve their performance. Moreover, effective strategies that are collectively applied within teachers' associations have not been approached in depth, what actions are being taken to improve the performance of their pupils so as not to create anxiety for teachers. Still, there have been no case studies of competent headmasters that suggest initiatives to improve the performance of their pupils and to reduce the stress of their school teachers. Finally, no comparison has been made between the views of teachers before and after the crisis about their anxiety and the performance of their pupils.

From the above criticism, there is a need arisen for research that will achieve a better explanation and coverage of bibliographic gaps identified. It will have a descriptive and exploratory character and will use a descriptive method, because its application is suitable when it comes to studying factors that influence the educational reality and to explore attitudes related to the research problem under consideration [19, 20].

### **THE PROPOSED EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

In the above context, the aim of the proposed research is to analyze, define and interpret the correlation between the performance of pupils of secondary education and the professional anxiety of teachers, as well as to interpret the experiences and beliefs of the participants of the research problem under consideration in times of crisis. The participants in this survey will be teachers who at the time of the survey are serving in Secondary Education in Greece and their site of implementation will be the Secondary Education schools or the Local Education Directorates. The choice of participants should be "intentional" and targeted. It is suggested that stratified sampling [21] should be used to complete a sufficient number of subjects from subpopulations, namely from all types of secondary

education schools. Also parts of the subpopulations are teachers who actively teach, as well as those holding positions of accountability (directors, headmasters, deputies). The purpose is focused on the following research questions and sub-questions.

### New research question

Why the school performance of pupils is a professional anxiety factor for the teachers of Greek Secondary Education in modern times?

### Research sub-questions

- What are the views of teachers serving in modern times in Secondary Education regarding parental attitudes about the performance of their pupils as a source of professional anxiety?
- What individual actions are adopted by teachers serving in Secondary Education schools to reduce their anxiety resulting from the performance of their pupils?
- What strategies are implemented by educational administrators who serve in Secondary Education schools to reduce the stress of their teachers from the performance of their pupils?
- What strategies do the teachers' associations implement in Secondary Education schools to reduce the stress of teachers that comes from the performance of their pupils?

The pupils themselves will also benefit from this research, as the above-mentioned research directions seek to improve teachers' working conditions. The results of applied research will not only enrich existing knowledge in the field of professional stress, in order to become deeper and more comprehensive, such as those of school performance, parents' attitudes towards their children's performance and teachers' anxiety, but also lay the foundation for further inquiry. But most of all, they add new perspectives, they approach new ideas related to the practice of dealing with this phenomenon, that is, they focus on the practical use of the acquired knowledge [22]. Consequently, its findings have a "specific application/use", serve a "certain practical purpose", will become good practices, which are proposed to be adopted by the educators who are aware of the stress symptoms and accept that they wish to be restricted [23].

### CONCLUSIONS

The scientific originality of this research proposal lies in its content, as it has not been explored in details (as far as we know) neither the specific cause of the professional stress of high-school teachers in Greece nor the ways to deal with it. This research aspires to cover an important gap of Greek bibliography, to contribute to the rather limited and not so recent Greek (and not only) bibliography, but also to reveal useful and practical information for the teachers, in order to recognize the problem and to protect

themselves against it, for improving the quality of education, in general [20].

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