proceedings

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Proceeding Paper

The Quality of Educational Work in Primary Education and the Leadership Competence in Achieving the Goals of the Educational Unit †

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† Presented at the 1st International Conference on Public Administration 2024, Katerini, Greece, 31 May–1 June 2024.

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the quality of educational work in primary education, the degree of leadership competence of the principal, and the relationship between the quality of educational work and the leadership competence of the principal. The study aims to investigate the effect of demographic factors on the quality of educational work and the leadership competence of the principal. A quantitative survey was carried out and a structured questionnaire was used. In addition, convenience sampling was applied to collect opinions from 109 secondary school teachers. The findings suggest that the educational work produced in primary education is not of high quality and the leadership ability of principals was measured to be moderate. Gender does not affect the three dimensions of the quality of educational work but affects the dimension of the social and cultural agenda. Gender and educational level do not determine teachers' views of leadership competence. Also, there is a statistically significant, high and positive relationship between quality educational work and leadership competence. Leadership competence is more strongly related to learning outcomes and less strongly to the remaining dimensions of quality educational work. Finally, leadership competence is a factor that predicts at a statistical level the quality of educational work.

Keywords: educational work; quality; leadership; school principal; primary education

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Citation: Kounatidou, G.; Pantelidou, A. The Quality of Educational Work in Primary Education and the Leadership Competence in Achieving the Goals of the Educational Unit. *Proceedings* **2024**, *111*, 22. https://doi.org/10.3390/proceedings2024111022

Academic Editors: Maria Tsourela, Dimitris Paschaloudis and Charisios Achillas

Published: 10 April 2025

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1. Introduction

The field of education is critical and particularly important because it contributes to establishing foundations for the smooth development of students, for their socialization, and for providing them with skills through which they can learn to be independent, effectively integrate into society, and gradually prepare as future citizens. It is important for a school unit to operate efficiently, and within its framework, it is necessary to produce quality educational work. Producing quality educational work entails meeting significant conditions within the school's operation. Such conditions may include the teaching methods applied and the teaching process as a whole, the achievement of learning goals, the image presented by a school, and more. In addition to the above and many other factors, a school unit can function properly when it is led by personnel who are effective in motivating other members, contributing to problem-solving, and promoting the school's vision. A school's principal plays a unique and pivotal role within each school unit, and it is essential not only to implement leadership practices but also for these practices to be sufficient. There are references indicating that leadership is a significant parameter that influences a school and its effectiveness. Therefore, within the framework of leadership, it is imperative for a principal to continually evaluate the practices they employ [1–3]. Thus, within the context of leadership, it is imperative for a principal to continually evaluate the practices they employ.

Based on the above considerations, this study constitutes an effort to explore the quality of educational work and leadership efficacy. The aim is to examine these variables, investigate if and how they are related to each other, and explore whether factors such as demographic elements determine educators' perceptions of the quality of educational work and the leadership efficacy of the principal [4–7].

School units across Greece and the world need to operate effectively for the reasons mentioned above. Through this study, a fundamental issue concerning the functioning of the educational system as a whole is raised, and the investigation of variables such as leadership efficacy, which is deemed particularly significant, is expected to lead to significant conclusions for today's educational community and under what conditions it can be enhanced. The study of leadership efficacy can enrich the existing literature and significantly contribute to the provision of quality education. Therefore, it is expected that data will be collected which will not only document the current situation but also indicate how a high level of education can be achieved and how strong foundations can be laid so that this does not seem like a utopia but can be achieved in practice [8–10].

The presented work is structured into two (2) main parts. The first part is theoretical; it analyzes the concept of the quality of educational work, approaches leadership and leadership in relation to education, and presents relevant theories of leadership behavior. Additionally, the research methodology is presented. The second part is the research section; it presents the results of the research around which a discussion is developed based on the results of other studies. The work concludes with conclusions, limitations, and constraints of the research, followed by the bibliography used.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The current study constitutes an experimental investigation in the field of Primary Education, aiming to examine the relationship between the quality of educational work at the school level and the leadership competence of the school principal. Specifically, the research objectives of this study are distributed across three main areas. Regarding the quality of educational work, the first objective was to analyze its quality by educators in Primary Education schools. The second objective was to investigate the degree of leadership competence possessed by the school principal concerning the quality of educational work. The third objective focuses on exploring the potential impact of participants' demographic characteristics (gender, education level, and prior experience) on their overall assessment of the quality of educational work. The above purpose is framed by the following research questions:

- What are the opinions of Primary Education educators regarding the quality of educational work?
- What are the opinions of Primary Education educators regarding the leadership competence of the principal?
- Is there a correlation between the leadership competence of the principal and the quality of educational work?
- Do demographic factors determine educators' opinions about the quality of educational work?

2.2. Sample Description

A total of 109 individuals/educators participated in the study. The educators come from the Primary Education level, and their selection was performed through convenience sampling. Most of the participants are female graduates of higher education institutions, with over 20 years of teaching experience.

2.3. The Questionnaire as a Research Tool

To achieve the research aim, quantitative data collection methods were employed, utilizing a research tool (questionnaire) tailored for Primary Education educators. The

questionnaire was designed using closed-ended questions to ensure clarity of responses and precision in coding, data entry, and analysis. The questionnaire includes introductory text describing the purpose of the research and providing information about ensuring participant anonymity. Additionally, relevant information was provided to confirm that the use of data are limited to the purposes of this specific study [11–13].

For the purposes of the research, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to investigate the internal consistency among the variables of the questionnaire. For each specific dimension of educational work quality as well as for the scale measuring leadership adequacy, the value of the index appeared to be satisfactory. In research, a value above 0.70 is considered good [14], and in this case, all values are above 0.70 except for the dimension of school climate, where it is slightly lower (Table 1).

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability coefficient.

	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Teaching process	0.831
Learning outcomes	0.730
Social and cultural agenda	-
School climate	0.634
Leadership adequacy	0.889

Based on the data from the table below, it can be inferred that 2.7% of the respondents do not believe at all that the goals and content of teaching are adjusted according to the students' learning needs. A total of 19.8% of the respondents simply disagreed, having a less extreme opinion. Moderately positioned were 22.5% of the sample, while the remaining 53.1% had a positive opinion. From this percentage, 42.3% agreed and 10.8% strongly agreed. Those who responded positively are more (53.1%) compared to those who responded negatively (22.5%) and neutrally (22.5%). Finally, the question under study was not answered by 1.8% (Table 2) of the sample (2 individuals).

Table 2. Distribution of opinions regarding whether the goals and content of teaching are adjusted according to the students' learning needs.

		n	**%**
Valid	I completely disagree	3	2.7
	I disagree	22	19.8
	I neither agree nor disagree	25	22.5
	I agree	47	42.3
	I fully agree	12	10.8
	Total	109	98.2
Missing	System	2	1.8
Total		111	100.0

According to the table below, it can be concluded that 0.9% of the respondents strongly disagree that teaching time is appropriately utilized for teaching the cognitive subject matter and curriculum. However, 17.1% of the respondents simply disagreed, while 31.5% responded moderately, and the remaining 46.8% strongly agreed. The question under study was not answered by 3.6% of the sample, which is 4 individuals (Table 3).

Table 3. Distribution of opinions regarding whether the instructional time is appropriately utilized for teaching the subject matter and the curriculum content.

		n	%
Valid	I completely disagree	1	0.9
	I disagree	19	17.1
	I neither agree nor disagree	35	31.5
	I agree	45	40.5
	I fully agree	7	6.3
	Total	107	96.4
Missing	System	4	3.6
Total		111	100.0

Distribution of opinions regarding whether the assessment of students' progress is performed systematically and with various methods.

In the following question, if students indicate satisfaction with what they are learning, 3.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 22.5% disagreed, and 37.8% of the sample remained neutral. From this percentage, 32.4% agreed, and 1.8% strongly agreed. Finally, the question under study was not answered by 1.8% (Table 4) of the sample (2 individuals).

Table 4. Distribution of opinions regarding whether students express satisfaction with what they learn.

		n	%
Valid	I completely disagree	4	3.6
	I disagree	25	22.5
	I neither agree nor disagree	42	37.8
	I agree	36	32.4
	I fully agree	2	1.8
	Total	109	98.2
Missing	System	2	1.8
Total		111	100.0

Distribution of opinions regarding whether students develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills for life after school.

In the following question, if students develop knowledge, attitudes, and skills for life after school, 3.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed, 22.5% disagreed, and 37.8% of the sample remained neutral. From this percentage, 32.4% agreed, and 1.8% strongly agreed. Finally, the question under study was not answered by 1.8% (Table 4) of the sample (2 individuals).

3. Discussion of Results

The primary aim of the study was to analyze the quality of educational work by educators, investigate the level of leadership adequacy possessed by the school principal, and explore the relationship between the quality of educational work and the leadership adequacy of the principal in relation to demographic factors.

For the set of 11 variables examined, which reflect the quality of educational work as perceived by the respondents, namely the educators, the responses were predominantly moderate. They claimed that the goals and content of teaching are moderately adjusted to the learning needs of the students, and instructional time is moderately utilized appropriately for teaching the cognitive subject matter of the curriculum. The responses given by the respondents regarding whether teaching is structured with a variety of teaching approaches and whether innovations in teaching methodology are introduced were also moderate. Furthermore, the research observed that available teaching aids and audio-visual materials are widely used during instruction, but student progress assessment is

moderately conducted systematically and utilizing various methods. Among these issues pertaining to the dimension of the teaching process, the one that seems to have gathered the most positive responses from the respondents concerns the provision of teaching aids and audiovisual materials.

Furthermore, students reported moderate satisfaction with what they learn, and the comprehensive development of students, regardless of abilities, gender, social, and cultural background, is promoted to a moderate extent. Additionally, educators moderately believe that students develop knowledge, attitudes, and life skills. For the above issues, the highest mean score concerns the issue of developing knowledge, attitudes, and skills for life from the students' perspective after school. Respondents claimed that the participation of school students in national or international competitions is quite significant, indicating that the social and cultural agenda of schools is characterized by notable quality and effectiveness.

Finally, educators moderately believe that the school facilities are adequately maintained and operate safely, and there are moderately specially designed rooms and laboratories for teaching special subjects. For these issues, respondents answered in a nearly similar manner, responding more positively to the existence of specially designed rooms and laboratories. Examining in detail the variables and dimensions that outline the quality of educational work, it is observed that quality is largely shaped by the social and cultural agenda and to a lesser extent by the school's profile.

The respondents evaluated the quality of the educational work as moderate, which somewhat contrasts with the expectation that educators would provide a more positive assessment.

Regarding the level of leadership adequacy from the perspective of the principal, in the present study, it was found to be moderately good, as the mean score was found to be 3.46.

In the present study, it was observed that gender, as a factor, does not influence the respondents' perception of the quality of the educational work overall. It was found that male and female respondents do not have different perceptions regarding the teaching process, learning outcomes, and the school's profile.

For the overall dimensions of the quality of educational work, the difference in the level of respondents' opinions was not statistically significant. Regarding the factor of educational level and its relationship with the quality of educational work in the present study, no statistically significant relationship was found. However, in Koutova's [15], research, it was found that respondents' perceptions of the quality of educational work are determined by the educational level.

Furthermore, the respondents in this study appeared to have similar opinions regarding the leadership adequacy of the principal, and this issue did not seem to be determined by gender, as the result of the test was not statistically significant. Similarly, Koutova [15] in her research arrived at the same result, showing statistically significant differences in perceived leadership adequacy based on gender.

Regarding the factor related to educational level, no relationship was found in this study, and respondents perceive leadership adequacy regardless of the level of education they have completed.

In the present study, as well as in the study by Koutova [15], the quality of educational work was associated with leadership adequacy, and a strong and statistically significant relationship between the two variables was found ($r = 0.597$).

Finally, both in the present study and in Koutova [15] research, the same result emerged regarding whether leadership adequacy predicts the quality of educational work ($p < 0.05$). In the present study, leadership adequacy was found to predict educational work quality by 67%, while in Koutova [15] research, educational work quality was predicted by leadership adequacy at a rate of 60.8%. Overall, the results of the present study do not deviate significantly from those of Koutova [15] study. A comparison of the two studies reveals that very similar results were obtained in both.

4. Conclusions

Summary of Findings

In this study, the concept and importance of leadership emerged, highlighting the necessity of implementing practices from the perspective of school principals that favor the quality of educational work. From the theoretical and research perspectives presented in this work, it can be concluded that the quality of educational work is a concept that encompasses various dimensions. Overall, educational work can be effective when the principal is an effective leader.

The relationships between the two variables, namely the quality of educational work and the leadership adequacy of the principal, demonstrate conclusively how significant and decisive the role of the principal is.

The concept of effective leadership, as well as leadership adequacy, confirms how crucial it is for a principal to be proactive and operate multidimensionally, while also ensuring the facilitation of the school through the implementation of various practices at professional, pedagogical, administrative, and other levels. The notion of leadership adequacy pertains to the teaching process as well as the learning process, which is vital in ensuring a healthy and satisfactory environment for all school stakeholders. It refers to the effective guidance of school staff, efficient problem solving, and proper management of all activities taking place within the school's framework. The principal plays a critical and decisive role in ensuring the vision of a school unit and its goals, providing incentives to educators, and contributing to the creation, maintenance, and strengthening of bonds within the school community. Additionally, they emphasize concepts such as effective organization and efficient coordination.

"Based on the results obtained as well as the findings of other studies with which a comparison was made, it is concluded that the leadership adequacy of school principals is not very high and there is significant room for further improvement. This suggests that principals should place greater emphasis on their work, strive more for the enhancement of the learning process, and actively engage in actions through which the smooth operation of the school units can be favored, the school's goals can be ensured, and the development and evolution of the educational staff can be achieved". "By placing greater emphasis on the concept of leadership, principals can contribute to the enhancement of the quality of the educational process, but this requires more leadership practices. Through their role, principals can influence the teaching process, learning outcomes, the social and cultural agenda of the school, and the school's ethos".

"It can be inferred that his role is both decisive and critical; thus, the quality of the educational process is closely linked to the extent to which a principal can be an effective leader".

Thus, the principal emerges as the individual through whom a school unit can be upgraded and acquire a distinct identity. It can be inferred that the principal has the ability to transform the educational process, set priorities, and devise strategies that can significantly improve the image of education. It is desirable for every school unit to operate effectively, and effectiveness is a concept examined in the light of various factors. Inevitably, leadership adequacy is one of these factors. Thus, it is inferred that every school unit is important to be staffed by principals who have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience to manage issues related to the school's operation. The issue of upgrading the quality of education is constantly crucial and should be a primary concern for governments responsible for advocating and ensuring the right to access quality education.

5. Recommendations for Future Research

- Based on the results highlighted by the study, it is deemed necessary to propose the implementation of new research in the future.
  It is important to replicate the same study with the participation of more respondents. Additionally, it is deemed significant to involve participants from different cities in Greece in order to explore more perspectives.

- Qualitative research could be conducted, utilizing interviews as data collection tools. Through interviews with respondents, specifically with leadership figures (directors), the issue of leadership could be further investigated.
- The same study could be conducted with the same number of participants or even a larger sample size, while also using supplementary tools (interviews). Mixed-methods research would provide the opportunity to validate the results of the study (quantitative research) and draw more conclusions.
- It would be useful to employ alternative techniques for measuring the quality of educational work, such as the use of quality indicators.
- The results could be used in future research by stakeholders (e.g., schools, primary education directorates across the country) to evaluate the quality of educational work and formulate policies for its improvement (e.g., conducting training seminars, implementing personalized programs targeting directors, etc.).

Author Contributions: G.K. and A.P. conceived the study. G.K. developed the theoretical framework. A.P. aided in the analysis. G.K. supervised the project. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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