

## How to Ensure Quality in Education: Terms and Conditions

*Zoitsa Malliou*

*(3rd High School of Arta, Arta, Greece)*

**Abstract:** In present time highly prepared students who will compete at national, European, or even international level are valued. This presupposes the improvement of the education provided in schools. To achieve such a demand the evaluation of the teaching process is a must and an important condition is the participation of teachers. In Greece there has also been the idea of connecting education with the local authorities, not only as it now happens in terms of premises, facilities and equipment infrastructure, but in relation to the needs of each region as concerns scientific staff and workforce. Today the idea of quality is identical with the examination results and in most Greek schools the approach is rather behavioral, that is to say the teacher is compelled to aspire only to knowledge which is evaluated by using many tests, revision tests and formal examinations sticking with the curriculum. However, if our intention is to establish real quality in education, we must value the procedures for it. A modern European school should be made up of educators- scientists who, by constant training, can create an engaging learning environment that will motivate students to participate actively, that will offer equal opportunities, will develop their entrepreneurial spirit, will promote mobility and the exchange of teachers and pupils by improving foreign languages teaching and by strengthening European cooperation; as long as these are not theoretical in the bills of the Ministry of Education but put into practice, with the participation of teachers, parents association and the activation of all local government bodies as well as the businesses of each region.

**Key words:** quality in education, assessment, Greek educational system

### 1. Twelve Principals on Educational Assessment

In present time highly prepared students who will compete at national, European, or even international level are valued. This presupposes the improvement of the education provided in schools. To achieve such a demand the evaluation of the teaching process is a must. Among the principals of educational assessment, I rank in the first place the improvement of education as the principal objective of assessment. In the second place comes simplicity and functionality because I believe that the simpler a system is, the more functional it gets, leaving no room for doubts. Participation lines up in the third place. If this attempt is to be successful, teachers must consent to the whole procedure, feeling safe and protected, which is the reason why I mark out for the fourth place the respect for the personality and dignity as a prerequisite for good cooperation and involvement in the process. Meritocracy labels the fifth place, because, as far as the Greek social context is concerned, it is non-existent, with some exceptions. I put validity in the sixth place because I reckon that a reliable evaluation system is bound to inspire confidence in both the education community and society. For the same reason I place transparency and fairness in the seventh and

---

Zoitsa Malliou, M.Ed., 3rd High School of Arta, Greece; research areas: multicultural education, quality on education, educational administration. E-mail: [malliouz@yahoo.gr](mailto:malliouz@yahoo.gr).

eighth positions because these two principles guarantee the quality of evaluation. Although for some teachers the satisfaction of their needs is of primary importance, I rank it in the ninth grade because I believe that a teacher who loves his profession and does his duties conscientiously and with pedagogical love aiming at the best possible education of his students receives from children and their parents the acknowledgements he deserves. So I make this recognition appear in the tenth place and I will correlate it with the reward, moral and financial, which would offer an extra inducement to teachers to improve their performance. In the last but one position I put continuous assessment, because I consider the above mentioned principles of primary importance for a fair and reliable evaluation system to function; and in the last position the educational guidance from the part of the state because so far, apart from theories, I have not seen a real willingness to implement it.

If we wish to have an effective evaluation of the teaching process, I believe that all twelve principles are substantial. However, to attain this objective, an important condition is the participation of teachers. We have seen in the past that significant attempts, aiming at the innovation of reforms, failed because teachers were, for their own reasons, negative (political beliefs, trade unionism, not sufficient guidance etc.) (Kiropiou-Koutroumanidou, 2011). Therefore, in order for the evaluation process to be continued, there must be, following discussion and dialogue, an agreement on the procedure and the objectives: What is the purpose of the evaluation? What should be evaluated? Who will evaluate it? What criteria should be followed? How frequently? Teachers should realize that the purpose of assessment is not punitive but it entails personal improvements and efficiency. They also need to be well aware of the process by which they will be evaluated, the exact criteria and the evaluation authority which must be independent and reliable. It is imperative that a relationship of trust is established among the participants and it must be clearly understood by all, that, whether it is an internal evaluation of the school or an external one, this is applied in order to have better school results, and, without fail, better prepared students for the labor market. I must mention, at this point, that there exists a great mistrust on the part of teachers as regards transparency, justice and meritocracy of the system (Bouzakis, 1998). I would therefore suggest, before the formal implementation of the procedure, to put into practice a pilot evaluation period during which all teachers will participate, will be evaluated and thus they will have the opportunity to reconsider, study new approaches in the teaching and especially will realize that they need a continuous training to better meet the requirements of their tasks. In my opinion nothing new can be applied in education without the approval and cooperation of teachers, so a relationship of honesty and trust must be built among those involved, always with a view of improving education (Kassimati, 2021).

## **2. The Example of the Finnish Educational System**

The Finnish education system is one of the most frequent talking points in the International Educational Community and it is a reference subject in most researches on school improvements and the quality of education. The reasons the Finnish system is considered so successful are, first and foremost, the scientific training of teachers in various scientific fields such as educational psychology and sociology, the curriculum study, the students assessment, the education of people with disabilities and the didactics on the fields they have chosen. In Finland this profession is chosen by 10% of the excellent students who, by the time they reach the classroom, are holders of a postgraduate degree, have a positive personality, excellent interpersonal relationships and are committed to work in a school. Second, these first-rate teachers work with others on a daily basis and monitor the way their colleagues teach. This offers them the opportunity to evaluate their own method and activate the common accountability among them. They spend less time in the classroom and in this way they have time for pedagogical reflections. Third,

Finnish teachers have the autonomy to create their own work plan and in collaboration with their colleagues, under the surveillance and guidance of their principal, as well as the approval of the Municipality, they design the curriculum which is based on the needs of their school. A fourth important responsibility of teachers is to assess their students not only on the basis of their performance in exams, but also through the use of sample standardized tests and thematic reviews. Finally, teaching is considered an independent, outstanding profession that enjoys public respect and praise. Finnish teachers enjoy the great trust of the public because they themselves have a high sense of responsibility for their profession. Therefore, professional dignity and social respect make Finns consider teaching a life-long profession. Of course, we must not forget that along with its social status the teaching profession is better paid in comparison with other countries (Kupiainen S., Hautamaki J., & Karjalainen T., 2009).

The autonomy which the Finns enjoy to design the curriculum of their school, along with the design of their own subject of teaching, could also be enacted in the Greek education system together with the excellent scientific training of the teachers and the cooperation among them. In Greece there has also been the idea of connecting education with the local government, not only as it now happens in terms of premises, facilities and equipment infrastructure, but in relation to the needs of each region as concerns scientific staff and workforce. Each region in Greece possesses a sector, e.g., Epirus: livestock, Thessaly: agriculture, Aegean: fishing, energy, Crete: forestry, etc. So, each school could, depending on the needs of its region and its human workforce, implement programs which would provide students with the chance to familiarize themselves with the produce of the area and later develop it further without neglecting the teaching of science, mathematics and the humanities. Surely, except for the fact that at the moment the Greek legislation does not allow it, some difficulties may arise. It could not be applied in High Schools due to the national examinations countrywide which are held centrally and according to specific syllabus. Secondly, there is no permanent teaching staff in all schools. There is a considerable number of them who do supply teaching and change schools every year as well as full-time teachers who fill vacancies each year at different schools depending on the needs of the Education Department. At the end, the most serious difficulty is the lack of collaboration spirit and therefore unwillingness among teachers to cooperate with each other let alone with the other professionals. Much could change in the Greek education system as long as there were political will and the education were a priority of each government. The Finns claim that they have chosen public education as the best opportunity for economic recovery, which is literally not the case in my country.

### **3. Quality of Education and the Greek Reality**

Since the 19th century the quality of education has been recognized, even by intuition, in the eminent schools of Europe and USA. This recognition existed either because school was responsible for the shaping of national identity, or because it provided specialization for the needs of industry, or even because it ensured social cohesion and the division of labor. The teaching of humanistic studies as well as the facilities and technical infrastructure of an institution along with its curriculum were also considered a criterion of quality. Finally, the scientific training of teachers, their manners, the activities they developed within the scientific community and their leadership abilities were also criteria. Today the idea of quality is identical with the examination results and in most Greek schools I daresay that the approach is rather behavioral, that is to say the teacher is compelled to aspire only to knowledge which is evaluated by using many tests, revision tests and formal examinations sticking with the curriculum (Vavouraki, Zouganeli, Sofou, & Koutra, 2008). However, if our intention is to establish real quality in education, we must value the procedures for it. I am referring to the students' attitudes, beliefs and needs. We have to place the

student at the centre of education. We want a student who acquires the necessary knowledge on science as it is taught at school, but who will also master skills so as to manage situations when he enters active life. We want a mentally healthy student who can survive in both school and social environments. If this objective is to be won, we must lay emphasis on the teacher who must reconsider his views adopting the critical approach which requires critical thinking and analysis as well as an active participation on the part of the students. Keywords in this regard are the upgrading, renewal and the evaluation of knowledge by means of further education, seminars and conferences, which are provided by the life-long learning programs. Besides any pedagogical training, direct contact with students and parents is essential to create a more favorable learning environment with all that it entails. Finally, it is vital to open the school to the community through the school councils, parents associations, the open educational events as well as the cooperation with the local authorities.

As mentioned above, the function of the quality is of paramount importance for both teachers and students. The teachers, by re-examining their job conditions, will attempt a personal upgrade by modifying their reflections on the lesson planning, their relationships with their students and their regular training. If this is achieved and we have a teacher who goes to school happy, because he has a mission to accomplish, and if he carries out his duties with passion and love, then the students will treat him and his lesson differently, with more respect and interest. Given that the school principal is on the same wavelength, if he inspires confidence in teachers, parents and students, and if he aims not only at the harmonious operation of school but also at the creation of a learning environment which will favor learning through the course of the curriculum as well as through experimental activities, educational trips and events, again the students will benefit because a good school atmosphere effects their success. To some extent I agree with this statement. That is why all the people involved must agree that quality without evaluation is non-existent. We all have to agree that the student is the major consideration, not as a graded subject, but as a personality. The school should reassess its objectives in practice rather than in the curricula. Such objectives to be attainable require from the part of the education community to accept their mistakes and correct them. I am referring to the methods of teaching, the management of teaching time, the support of those students with special needs and interests, the teacher's conduct in the classroom. This is how I believe we will be able to create a school in which students will feel safe, motivated and will feel far from downgrading it.

#### **4. Prospects of Educational Assessment in Greece**

Following the first attempt to qualify assessment in the previous century, the two World Wars, a Cold War and an overall change in the relationship between the world of education and the state, and after education was seen as a mechanism for promoting social justice as well as a means of economic development, we have ended up to the contemporary education policy which borrows terms from the world of business: option, competition, management, productivity, etc. This is because quality in education is considered a key drive of growth in the same way human workforce makes up a key resource for the European Union. The truth behind it is that poorly prepared individuals reduce production capacity. As a result, the education policy was seen as a subsector of economics and many community sectors became involved in the field of quality assessment which went beyond the national borders and was incorporated into the European education policy, which aims at becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy worldwide, capable of a viable economic development, with more and better jobs as well as greater social cohesion (European Council, 2000). This led to the adoption of a community collective model, according to which the goal of education is the integration of citizens into society, their preparation for the roles

they will commit themselves to, the development of collaboration. It also led to the Universally-approved Administration model whose concern is training, professional skills, efficiency and competitiveness (Orphanos, S). We clearly observe that, after the Lisbon Treaty in 2000 and the Education and Training Programme 2010, Greece is also trying to bring education up-to-date by setting new objectives such as the rendering of equal opportunities, the integration of ICT into the curriculum, the teaching of two foreign languages, the connection of school with life and work, the development of the students' talents. The aim of this policy is a school with better results equal to the European ones, a school which will supply the "market" with the qualified citizens who will be more productive and more competitive.

I surely view this development positively. As a teacher on active service I have found out that in recent years, especially after the nineties, the Greek school and teachers have been underestimated in the eyes of society. The economic prosperity turned the Greeks into private tuition. As a result, although the school results were good (excellent grades, success in the entrance examinations in the Universities) the quality of education, according to the 16 indicators, did not apply to all students and this raised the problem that a large percentage, mainly the children with low SES, had low performance despite the fact that they were completing secondary education. In addition, in recent years, due to the economic recession, the budget for education is constantly decreasing in my country. I must also point out the tediousness not to mention indifference of some teachers to participate in the whole process of evaluation as regards the results and the quality in school units. I therefore fully agree with all three objectives of the 2000 Education and Training Program (Education and training, 2010) in terms of improving the quality and efficiency of education schemes facilitating access for all to education and life-long learning, but especially to the opening up of education schemes to society as a whole and to the world. A modern European school should be made up of educators- scientists who, by constant training, can create an engaging learning environment that will motivate students to participate actively, that will offer equal opportunities, will develop their entrepreneurial spirit, will promote mobility and the exchange of teachers and pupils by improving foreign languages teaching and by strengthening European cooperation; as long as these are not theoretical in the bills of the Ministry of Education but put into practice, with the participation of teachers, parents association and the activation of all local government bodies as well as the businesses of each region.

## References

- Bouzakis S. (1998). "Evaluation in the modern world: A historical-comparative approach", *12th Panhellenic Conference ILO-WTOD*, Chios.
- Education and Training (2010). "Key messages from the council and the commission to the European Council — Joint interim report of the council and the commission on the implementation of the detailed program of follow-up work on the objectives of education and training systems in Europe", *OJC*, C/104, accessed on 30.04.2004, p. 1, available online at: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52004XG0430\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52004XG0430(01)).
- European Council (2000). "Presidency conclusions", Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000, available online at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1\\_en.htm](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm).
- Kassimati Aik (2021). "Conception, forms and theoretical framework of educational evaluation", *Educational Material for the Seminar: "Modern School Leadership and Skills in the 21st Century"*, ASPETE (in Greek).
- Kiropiou-Koutroumanidou K. (2011). "The evaluation of educational work and teachers: Historical dimension and modern trends", doctoral dissertation, Democretian University of Thrace, accessed on 28-12-2021, available online at: <https://thesis.ekt.gr/thesisBookReader/id/42405?lang=el#page/1/mode/2up> (in Greek).
- Kupiainen S., Hautamaki J. and Karjalainen T. (2009). "The Finish education system and PISA", accessed on 03-06-2022, available online at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228647231\\_The\\_Finnish\\_education\\_system\\_and\\_PISA](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228647231_The_Finnish_education_system_and_PISA)

- Orphanos S. (2018). “Quality evaluation and assurance in education”, *Educational Material for the Course “Quality Assessment and Assurance in Education”*, Frederick University (in Greek).
- Vavouraki Zouganeli and Sofou Koutra (2008). “Quality in education”, in: *Quality in Education, Research for the Evaluation of Qualitative Characteristics of the Primary and Secondary Education System*, Pedagogical Institute, accessed on 3/6/2020, available online at: [http://reader.ekt.gr/bookReader/show/index.php?lib=EDULLL&item=83&bitstream=83\\_01#page/3/mode/1up](http://reader.ekt.gr/bookReader/show/index.php?lib=EDULLL&item=83&bitstream=83_01#page/3/mode/1up) (in Greek).