THE LEADERSHIP OF A SCHOOL UNIT

George F. Zarotis, Dimitrios Ntalossis, Maria Koukoli

University of the Aegean, Faculty of Human Sciences, Rhodes, Greece

Corresponding author:
Dr. George F. Zarotis

University of the Aegean, Faculty of Human Sciences, Rhodes, Greece
E-Mail: zarotisg@rhodes.aegean.gr, E-Mail: drgzarotis@t-online.de

Abstract

The school principal has a specific role in the school environment, which for the most part is bureaucratic. However, given the constantly changing environment in which the school operates and given the relationship between the school and the local community, the school principal needs to undertake additional responsibilities and moreover also possess specific skills in order to fulfil his or her role as a principal-leader. The ultimate research goal is to determine the purpose of leadership within the school unit. The method adopted for the study was a review of the relevant literature. In light of the present study, it is evident that in order for educational organizations, or otherwise educational units, to accomplish their purpose, effective management is a prerequisite. As regards the factors that contribute to school effectiveness, researches have shown that there is an inseparable link between school unit leadership and school effectiveness. An effective school principal-leader assists and supports teachers, while overseeing the educational work, and also encourages and promotes the involvement of teachers and parents in the decision-making process, which leads to the commitment of teachers to the school organization and increases their job satisfaction and performance. Furthermore, teachers should be able to teach all children, both those with high cognitive abilities and those with a low level of academic skills. An important role in this process plays the principal of the school. However, teachers, on the other hand, should not simply accept the principal's vision, especially if they want to be an integral part of the process of school change. Instead, teachers should create a vision for the school together with the principal, and not just act as executors of his/her vision.
Finally, four factors characterize the successful process of improving the school unit.
These factors are: recognition of the improvement process by the school leadership, interaction and communication both between school members and between the school unit and the local community, the existence of a system of values, as well as cooperation between school members, and between them and society, to design and implement the selected strategies.
Key words: School Principal-Leader, Management & Leadership, Effective Leadership

1. INTRODUCTION

In order for educational organizations, or otherwise educational units, to accomplish their purpose, effective management is a prerequisite. After all, various studies have shown that both progress and behaviour of

students depend on the characteristics and management of the educational unit. Leadership plays an important role in the management of school units, while at the same time it is a significant factor in connecting the school with the local community and in achieving school effectiveness. The present study addresses the concept of leadership within the school unit. The school principal has a specific role in the school environment, which for the most part is bureaucratic. However, given the constantly changing environment in which the school operates and given the relationship between the school and the local community, the school principal needs to undertake additional responsibilities and moreover also possess specific skills in order to fulfill his or her role as a principal-leader. Overall, research seems to show that an effective school is run by an effective principal who works in collaboration with the staff, together they share a common vision for the school, and they put a great deal of emphasis on achieving goals. Many studies appear to indicate that the existence of school culture is important for the effectiveness of the school unit. The school principal also works outside the school boundaries, that is, with the environment in which the school unit operates, and therefore should interact with this environment. An effective school relies on the interaction between the school unit and the local community. In relation to the community, the school management has five key responsibilities: 1) to represent the school in the outside world, 2) to support senior management in the development of its work, 3) to encourage parental involvement, 4) to foster relationships with employers and 5) to encourage the community to learn (Zarotis et al. 2019; Ntalossis et al. 2019).

2. METHODOLOGY

The present research is a bibliographic review study, presenting the critical points of the existing knowledge about the concept of leadership within the school unit. There is no specialized and comprehensive work on this subject in the relevant literature. This work endeavors to cover this gap and will perhaps also be a useful aid for those who in the future will attempt similar efforts. The main aim of the bibliographic review is to frame the study within the "body" of the relevant literature. The review of the current study concerns clearly formulated questions and uses systematic and explicit criteria for critically analyzing a body of published papers by summarizing, sorting, grouping and comparing.

3. Bibliographic review study

3.1 Relationship between management and leadership

As Koullanis (2008) states, "Managing an educational organization is the process of coordinating people (students, teachers, support staff), activities, and existing tools in order to provide education more effectively". Leadership, as Watkins (1986, as cited by Georgiadou and Kambouridis, 2005, 126) conceived it, "should be seen as a dialectical process that creatively influences the production, reproduction and transfer of certain practices and structures. Such a viewpoint makes the leadership of a school an integral part of its cultural identity."

The management theory of school organizations reports the following four forms (OECD, 2009):

1. Management focused on school objectives: Principals take actions that are directly related to the goals of the school, focusing on ensuring that classroom teachers achieve those goals. Principals

who adopt this style of administration tend to set goals that are based on student performance and curriculum improvement.

2. Educational management: The principals who adopt this form of administration work with teachers to correct the pedagogical problems that may exist, and at the same time they inform teachers of opportunities for additional training.

3. Direct supervision of the teaching process: Based on this model, principals make suggestions to teachers about improving their teaching techniques and at the same time they often monitor pupil's efforts and progress.

4. Responsible management: Principals who adopt this style of management focus on persuading parents and teachers on the need for new ideas and processes as regards school operation in order to develop responsibility towards students, teachers, parents and the local community in general.

5. Bureaucratic management: The principals that adopt this style of administration are more concerned with procedural matters, trying to ensure that everyone in the school follows the regulations and that everything works in accordance with the law.

The two leadership styles that correspond to the previous five models of management are educational leadership and administrative leadership. Educational leadership relates to the first three models of administration, while administrative leadership relates to the responsible and bureaucratic model of administration (OECD, 2009). The figure below illustrates this relationship between management and leadership models.

Graph 1. Relationship between management models and leadership styles
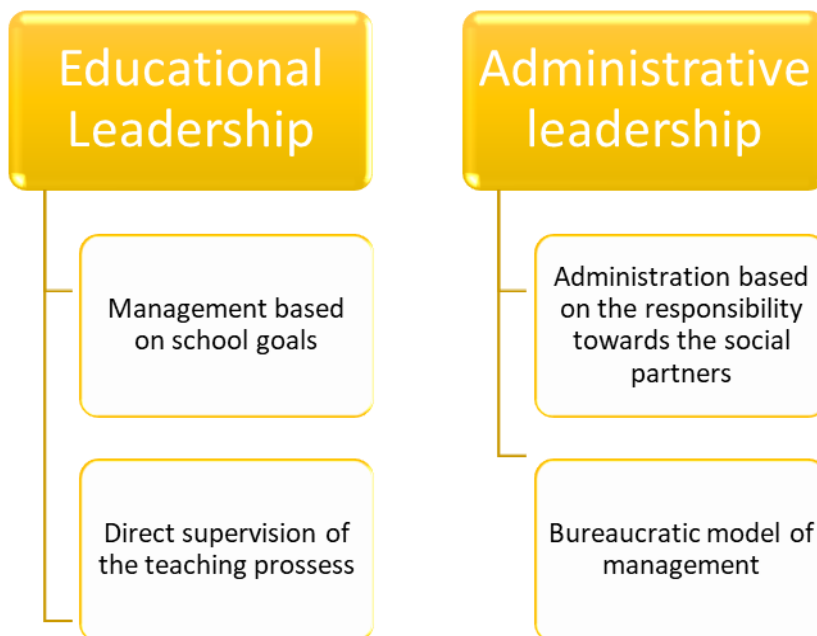
Finally, it is worth noting that in the decentralized system of administration there are four forms of school unit leadership at decision-making level (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). The first is the management control, which delegates this authority to the principal of the school unit. In this way, only the principal is responsible for each school unit, which maximizes cost effectiveness at all levels. Professional control

delegates the power of decision-making to teachers, aiming to exploit teachers' knowledge of what are the school needs in the classroom. At the same time, this model may motivate teachers to increase their efficiency, which leads to increased effectiveness as regards the learning process. The third form is the community control, according to which parents are responsible for making decisions. In this model, principals and teachers respond more to the needs of parents, better reflecting the needs and preferences of the local community. Finally, the fourth form is balanced control, where the decision-making process is delegated to parents and teachers, who are the main social partners of a school unit. However, the model where only principals decide is absent, since the opinion and active involvement of both teachers and parents is necessary as they express, in a way, the needs of the local community.

3.2 Responsibilities and competencies of the school principal

Principals are the key factor in a school unit, since under education law, they are primarily held accountable for the school community and it is their responsibility to ensure the conditions for a democratic, competitive, effective and open to society school (Koutsospiros, 2007). The success of the school principals depends to a large extent on how they handle the human factor, that is, their leadership role. The role of the principal changes as values and structures of society change (Tsayang et al., 2010).

According to Michopoulos (1998, as cited in Fasoulis, 2001), nowadays societies require efficient and effective education, and therefore the former traditional model of the school principal can no longer respond to the demands and challenges of current societies. School leadership should be seen as a function of principals' personality, competence and characteristics with less emphasis on their abilities, knowledge and effort (Feeney, 2009).

In this context, Krüger (2009) argues that school principals should have competencies that are reflected in their behaviour, attitudes and actions. All of these competencies can be defined as the ability of school principals to combine knowledge, skills, attitudes and professional identity, which are appropriate for a particular occupational situation, with their personality characteristics and their development in an integrated framework, capable of enabling appropriate action in specific occupational situations within the school unit. These competencies and therefore leadership capacity can be achieved not so much based on the individual characteristics of school principals, but through the emphasis on creating a new framework education in relation to leadership (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2006). The figure below illustrates the competencies that a school principal should possess in the overall context of effective leadership of a school unit.

Graph 2. The competencies that a school principal should possess for the effective leadership of a school unit
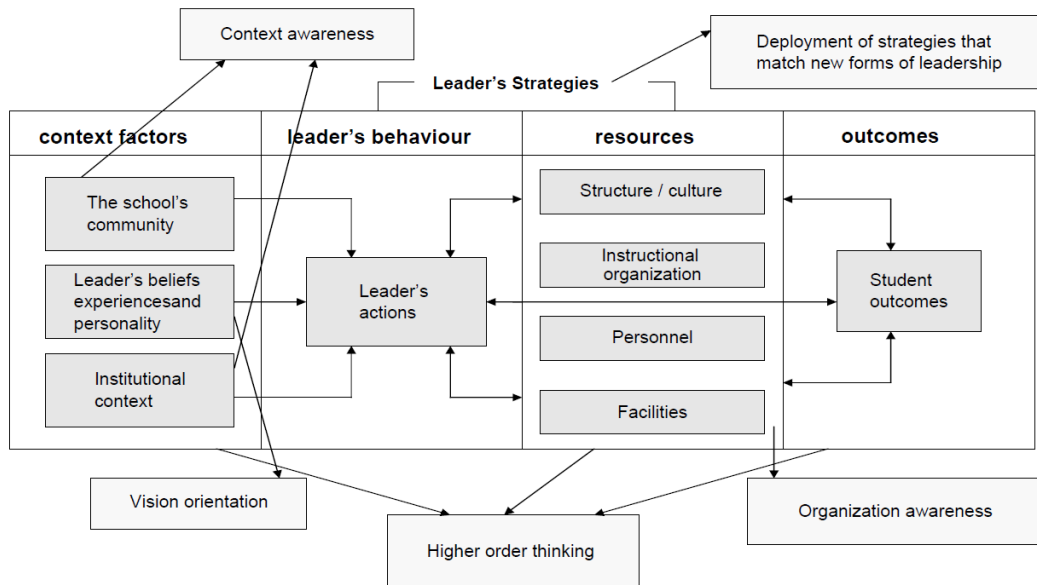
(Krüger, 2009, 121)

According to Nakos (2007), a school principal should accomplish the following objectives: (a) coordinate the school's human resources and logistics to achieve the school unit's objectives, (b) facilitate the adaptation of the school to the social and economic changes taking place in the external environment and finally (c) maintain and improve the logistical infrastructure of the school and its human resources. In this light, the school principal is both administratively and pedagogically responsible for the school, and should therefore make use of the capabilities of the staff available in distinguishing roles and responsibilities (Nakos, 2007). According to Dean (1993), the administrative functions for which the school principal is responsible are the supervision of the school's administrative work, the monitoring and control of the school's finances, or otherwise the financial management of the school, the monitoring of the building and school grounds, and the implementation of relevant legislation in relation to the health and safety of children in the school environment.

National Committee for the Principals of Secondary Schools (NASSP, 1982, as cited in Dean, 1993) identifies seven main responsibilities – functions of the school principal, which are the following:

➢ Developing school objectives, as well as developing policies and guidelines
➢ Organizing school and designing programs to implement and achieve the objectives set.
➢ Monitoring the implementation of policies and strategies to achieve the objectives
➢ Resolving any problems that arise in the school environment as well as maintaining order
➢ Managing and distributing school material
➢ Creating the appropriate climate for the personal and professional development of the educational staff
➢ Representing the school in the environment in which it operates

The characteristics that an effective principal - leader should have are the following (Kapur, 2007):

➢ Vision for the future. In all organizations the vision for the future is linked to the future of the organization. Thus, the head of a school unit should be able to identify potential opportunities and threats due to social change and social structures and institutions.

➢ Transfer the vision. The charismatic and effective principal-leader should convey his/her vision for the educational organization and the rest of the school community, and ensure that everyone shares the same vision and has the same philosophy and mission. He/she also needs to confirm that everyone agrees with this vision and will participate in policies to bring that vision to reality.

➢ Raising awareness. The principal should find those outlets and channels that will allow for the expression of any apprehension or concern and will foster the cultivation of awareness amongst students in particular, and the promotion of social awareness and cohesion.

➢ Cultivating critical consciousness. An effective principal - leader should also cultivate critical awareness (reflection, research and discussion). Students should gain a sense of individual and collective responsibility, learn about their relationships with other members of the local community and the community in which they live, and finally learn about human rights. Through education, students should increase their ability to participate actively in the decision-making process that leads to social, cultural and economic change.

➢ Creating a positive climate. The principal should ensure that teachers create a positive and safe environment which encourages students and which, at the same time, is emotionally secure.

➢ Communication with teachers and parents. An effective principal-leader should be in touch and communicate with both teachers and parents so that he/she can understand their needs, desires, and suggestions. Communication with parents also reinforces their sense of belonging to the school community and participating in activities within the school.

According to surveys, school principals are responsible for four main areas. The first is to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers, the second is to provide a supportive climate, the third is to convey the mission and purpose of the school to those involved in the educational process, and the fourth is to provide a climate that encourages learning. In addition, the responsibilities of the principal include team orientation and encouraging professional development (Kotton, 2003).

However, Boris - Schacter and Langer (2006) point out that the school principal is mostly in charge of administrative responsibilities than of duties related to school administration. This is an obstacle to the development of the principal as the leader of the school unit, as it is argued that a principal's duties should be more related to learning and education (Georgiadou & Kambouridis, 2010). In fact, the principal should spend less time fulfilling bureaucratic responsibilities and more time in the classroom, teaching, guiding and counseling teachers as well as enhancing their personal and professional development (Boris - Schacter & Langer, 2006).

This fact also raises a debate about the characteristics a principal should have in the context of the effectiveness of the school unit.

3.3 The school principal – leader in the context of the effective school unit

Leadership is based on two directions: the first is the concept of power, which is the right of the principal to control the actions of others, and the second is the concept of influence, which means influence the actions of others without exercising power (Deji & Makinde, 2006).

An effective school principal, or otherwise principal-leader, creates his or her own vision for the school, and at the same time imparts it not only to the teachers of the school unit but also to the parents and the local community (National Research Report for Greece, 2008; Cotton, 2003). As noted by Day et al. (2001, as cited in Campbell et al., 2003), good leaders are informed by and communicate clear personal and educational values that represent their ethical goals for the school unit. After all, one of the factors that positively affect the quality of education is having a clear vision for the school in terms of understanding the results, the priorities and the evaluation, along with recognizing the school's responsibility for achieving this vision and its individual goals (Pamuktsoglou, 2001). Based on this vision, the principle sets specific goals. In this context, an effective principal - leader is committed to this vision and to the school mission, in order to fulfill the individual objectives towards the effectiveness of the school unit (Murphy, 2005).

Slater and Doig (1988, as cited in Murphy, 2005) point out that the energy for change in the school environment is channeled by principals who can promote and direct it. Furthermore, educational work is largely determined by principals (Whitaker, 1997, cited in Murphy, 2005). The principal's commitment to the school objectives and to the school mission is almost the only necessary condition for making a school unit effective (Birnie and Lustgarten, 1996, as cited in Murphy, 2005).

In addition, with regard to the objectives of the school unit, Scheerens (2000) points out that it is important to set priorities, such as the relative importance of cognitive versus non-cognitive objectives, and the emphasis on basic subjects, such as mathematics and composition, as opposed to non-basic courses. In addition to creating a vision for the school unit and his/her commitment to that vision, a principal creates a climate of support, unity and collaboration within the school that contributes to its effectiveness (National Research Report on Greece, 2008; Cotton, 2003).

This positive climate is further enhanced by the promotion of teacher participation in decision-making. The involvement of teachers in the decisions taken within the school unit requires a participatory management approach (National Research Report on Greece, 2008). The joint involvement of the principal and the educational staff in the decision-making process and the management of the educational unit is an element that contributes to the improvement of the quality of education (Pamuktsoglou, 2001). Heller and Firestone (1994, as cited in Murphy, 2005) point out that the success of teachers' initiatives is largely based on the active support of school principals, as the principal has the greatest influence on the role of teachers as leaders (within the classroom), through his/her support and contribution to their personal and professional development (Blegen and Kennedy, 2000, as cited in Murphy, 2005).

Also, in the light of a more decentralized and participatory management system, the principal should take the following steps during the decision-making process (Res, 2004):

i. Problem recognition. The principal is responsible for identifying the problem facing the school unit, describing it in a clear and comprehensible manner, and setting the policy goals for its solution.

ii. Specifying school unit needs and performance criteria

    iii. Offer alternative solutions

    iv. Evaluate alternative solutions and find the most appropriate one

    v. Implement solutions

Campbell et al. (2003) point out that leadership enhances school morale and contributes to teachers' leadership. In particular, inspirational leadership can lead to effective teaching, which in turn leads to an effective learning process. In addition, effective leadership can contribute to teachers' commitment to the school organization and consequently increase teachers' job satisfaction and performance (Hulpia et al., 2009). It also encourages teacher-to-teacher collaboration (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2005), which ultimately leads to increased educational quality, improved school performance and school effectiveness. At this point it is worth noting that school ethics are in line with the moral values that society expects of current students and future citizens. In the context of school ethics and principals, Spitzmuller and Ilies (2010) point out a holistic approach to school management through authentic leadership. According to this approach, the principal - leader should have strong values and ethics, and a vision for the future of the school unit. Furthermore, he/she should be optimistic and focus on results with the contribution and participation of everyone involved.

Effective leadership should not focus solely on students' academic performance and the creation of tomorrow's workforce. Instead, it should focus on the strengthening of the democratic spirit and social justice within the school unit, the reinforcement of the school's organizational culture and the creation of democratically minded citizens who will respect diversity and be tolerant of multiculturalism (Mullen and Jones, 2008). The above is based on the finding that the school is responsible for creating the patterns and behaviours that give citizens the ability to act collectively (Godoy et al., 2007).

In addition, the school principal is also responsible for adapting the school to the new teaching and learning methods dictated by the information and communication society in the context of school effectiveness (Krüger, 2009). Nakos (2007) lists the challenges that the principal of a school unit has to face in the context of present-day societies. These challenges are: the design, implementation and maintenance of an information infrastructure, the integration of technology into the curriculum, the use of technology to enhance communication with the wider community, the search for resources that will further enhance educational technology, the use of technological means to carry out administrative responsibilities, ensuring the safe access of pupils and teachers to the internet, creating conditions for teachers' further training on the use of new technologies and finally providing support and encouragement for teachers to make use of new technologies in the educational process.

Finally, it should be noted that a leader-leader understands and utilizes the individual skills of teachers, contributing to their personal and professional development, e.g. through their participation in continuing education programs (National Research Report on Greece, 2008).

From the above analysis it is understood that an effective school is run by an effective principal - leader who works together with teachers, adopting a participatory management model. The principal should have a vision for the school and moreover he/she should be able to impart it to teachers, parents and the wider local community, putting emphasis at the same time on school goals.

In addition to the above, the processes involved in managing a school unit are effectively executed when the principal (Dean, 1993):

- has a mission for the school
- inspires commitment to this mission and gives direction and purpose to his work
- coordinates school work through the allocation of tasks and responsibilities
- is actively and visibly involved in the design and implementation of the management of any change
- is ready to appreciate and praise the contribution of teachers
- has the gift of communication and informs those involved in the educational process about important decisions and actions?
- has the ability to challenge the obvious, so as to address problems and take advantage of opportunities
- is committed to school, its members and reputation.
- objectively assesses strengths and weaknesses so as to make the best use of any practices to remedy deficiencies
- emphasizes the quality of teaching and learning, every day and in every lesson
- has high expectations from all school members and all students
- Recognizes the need for support and encouragement from all in order to do their best for the purpose and mission of the school.

2. Conclusion

As regards the factors that contribute to school effectiveness, researches have shown that there is an inseparable link between school unit leadership and school effectiveness. It should not be considered that leadership has only a direct impact on learning outcomes but also an indirect on the school unit through its influence on school organization and school culture. An effective school principal-leader assists and supports teachers, while overseeing the educational work, and also encourages and promotes the involvement of teachers and parents in the decision-making process, which leads to the commitment of teachers to the school organization and increases their job satisfaction and performance.

School principals are considered to be the most critical factor contributing to the reorganization of the school, based on changes in the external environment of the school unit, as well as the demands of parents, pupils and the local community. Indeed, school improvement has been linked to activities that aim to change school and the education system, and which enhance school effectiveness by increasing the desired outcomes for learners.

According to surveys, school principals are responsible for four main areas. The first is to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers, the second is to provide a supportive climate, the third is to convey the mission and purpose of the school to those involved in the educational process, and the fourth is to provide a climate that encourages learning. In addition, school principal's responsibilities include team orientation and encouraging professional development. The leadership of a school unit plays a critical role in the quality of education provided. A qualified elementary school principal should never embrace the view that the school must remain stubbornly entrenched in its strictly predetermined educational and solitary duties, devoted solely to providing knowledge and an indifferent viewer of the rapid developments in

society.

Finally, the school principal should act like a coach, partner, motivator, and at the same time there should be a distinct school goal (vision) in the direction of a common perception for the results, priorities, evaluation and responsibility, recognizing the responsibility of the school for its achievement (Zarotis et al. 2019; Ntalossis et al. 2019).

4. REFERENCES

1. Georgiadou, B., Kambouridis, G. (2005). The principal - leader. Educational Issues Review, Issue 10, 121 - 129. Available on the web site: http://www.pi-schools.gr/download/publications/epitheorisi/teyxos10/121-129.pdf.

2. National Research Report - Greece (2008). Greek education system and performance indicators. Available on the website: http://www.pro-school.eu/documents/National_Research_Report_GREECE%20EL.pdf.

3. Kioulanis, S. (2008). Education organization and administration. Available at the website: http://www.kioulanis.gr.

4. Koutsospyros, Ch. (2007). «Administrative Competence and Preparedness of School Principals - How Ready We Are to Assume Administration? ». Available at the website: users.thess.sch.gr/xariskuts/dieythintes_xaris.doc.

5. Nakos, K. (2007). The role of the School Principal and the contribution of New Technologies in the management of the Secondary Education School Units. 2nd educational conference titled "Language, Thought and Practice in Education", 19 - 21 October 2007, Ioannina. Available on the website: http://ipeir.pde.sch.gr/educonf/2/17Afises/nakos/nakos.pdf.

6. Pamouktsoglou, A. (2001). Effective school: Characteristics and perceptions in an effort to evaluate it. Review of Educational Issues, issue 4, 81–91. Available on the website: http://www.pischools.gr/publications/epitheorisi/teyxos5/.

7. Res, G. (2004). Decision-making procedures in an educational organization: Reporting and redefining. *Review of Educational Issues,* issue 9, 42–52. Available at the website: http://www.pi-schools.gr/download/publications/epitheorisi/teyxos9/RES.pdf.

8. Fasoulis, K. (2001). Quality in Human Resource Management of Education. Critical Approach to the Total Quality Management System (T.Q.M.). *Review of Educational Issues,* issue 4, page 186 – 198. Available at the website: http://www.pi-schools.gr/publications/epitheorisi/teyxos4/.

9. Boris-Schacter, S., Langer, S. (2006). *Balanced Leadership. How effective principals manage their work*. New York: Teachers College Press

10. Campbell, C., Gold, A., Lunt, I. (2003). Articulating leadership values in action: conversations with school leaders. *International Journal of Leadership in Education: Theory and Practice,* 6(3), 203-221.

11. Dean, J. (1993). *Managing the secondary school*. London: Routledge.

12. Deji, O.F., Makinde, O.T. (2006). Comparative Study of the Influence of Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Men and Women Leaders on their Leadership Styles and Patterns in the Rural Areas of Nigeria. *Journal of Comparative Social Welfare*, 22(1), 49-62.

13. Feeney, E.J. (2009). Taking a Look at a School's Leadership Capacity: The *Role and Function of High School Department Chairs. The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 82(5), 212-219.*

14. *Godoy, R., Seyfried, C., Reyes-García, V., Huanca, T., Leonard, W.R., McDade, T., Tanner, S., Vadez, V. (2007). Schooling's contribution to social* capital: study from a native Amazonian society in Bolivia. *Comparative Education*, 43(1), 137-163.

15. Hammersley-Fletcher, L. (2005). Distributing leadership in primary schools. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education,* 33(2), 46-50.

16. Hulpia, H., Devos, G., Rosseel, Y. (2009). The relationship between the perception of distributed leadership in secondary schools and teachers' and teacher leaders' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement: An International Journal of Research, Policy and Practice,* 20(3), 291-317.

17. Kapur, A. (2007). *Transforming schools – Empowering children*. New Delhi: SAGE.

18. Kotton, K. (2003). *Principals and student achievement. What the research says*. USA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

19. Krüger, M. (2009). The Big Five of school leadership competences in the Netherlands. *School Leadership & Management: Formerly School Organisation*, 29(2), 109-127.

20. Leithwood, K., Menzies, T. (1998). Forms and Effects of School-Based Management: A Review. *Educational Policy,* 12(3), 325 – 346.

21. Murphy, J. (2005). *Connecting teacher leadership and school improvement*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

22. Ntalossis D., Zarotis G., Koukoli M. (2019). EDUCATION AND EFFECTIVE SCHOOL. International Journal of Information Research and Review, 06(8), 6408-6416.

23. OECD (2009). Creating Effective Teaching and Learning Environments. First results from Talis. Available at the website: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/17/51/43023606.pdf.

24. Rhodes, C., Brundrett, M. (2009). Leadership development and school improvement. *Educational Review*, 61(4), 361-374.

25. Scheerens, J. (2000). *Improving school effectiveness*. Paris: UNESCO

26. Spitzmuller, M., Ilies, R. (2010). Do they [all] see my true self? Leader's relational authenticity and followers' assessments of transformational leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 19(3), 304-332.

27. Tsayang, G., Monyatsi, P., Bulawa, P., Mhozya, C. (2010). An Evaluation of the Sustenance of the Primary School Management Development Project in Botswana. *Journal of Social Science*, 23(2), 111 – 121.

28. Zarotis G., Ntalossis D., Koukoli M. (2019). ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION OF THE GREEK EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND FORMS OF EVALUATION. In International Journal of Recent Scientific Research, 10(E)10: 35480-35485.