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## **The role of educational policy in shaping the professional identity of Secondary School teachers in Greece**

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### **Abstract**

*In this paper the issue of the professional identity of Greek teachers in Secondary Education was explored. The factors which affect the work of teachers, the way teachers view their work and themselves as professionals and whether educational policy affects the levels of their motivation, commitment and their job satisfaction are investigated. The findings have shown that the majority of Greek teachers consider themselves to be professionals. Statistically significant correlations between professional identity and gender, between professional identity and educational policy as well as between educational policy, job satisfaction and years of working experience to a certain extent have been revealed.*

**Keywords:** *professionalism, professional identity, educational policy*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the last years, teachers are required to re-examine their traditional roles and satisfy their students' needs as effectively as possible in a very different social environment. Teachers are no longer responsible solely for the communication of knowledge, the sterile teaching of their subject matter and the development of their students' cognitive skills, but they should also take up more responsibilities, such as facilitating their students' learning, catering for their psychological balance and promoting their social integration, broadening thus their role as educators. For this reason, teachers are often confronted with decisions that can have ethical consequences on the satisfaction of the multiple, diffused and even contradictory demands on the part of different "clients" (students, parents, community) (Kelchtermans, 1996).

The teacher's profession, like any other profession that has the human in its very centre, is characterized by high levels of stress. Modern teachers face more stressful conditions (Papa, 2006) than they used to, due to the general cultural, socio-economic

and working conditions in which they find themselves and also because of the transformation of the structure of modern societies. Consequently, the teachers gradually are under the pressure to improve not only their teaching, but their students' performance as well, so that the latter can respond to the new socio-economic conditions more successfully (Osborn, 2006). Teachers should also be able to function in multicultural environments, to adapt to the new social conditions (like single-parent families), to encourage new learning methods through the use of New Technologies, to be able to manage the ever increasing influence of the media on the lives of young students, to be able to function in bureaucratic organisations (Esteve, 2000; Popa & Acedo, 2006), as well as to cultivate new skills in their students, like team-work and high-level thinking. Evidently, there is intensification of the modern teacher's work (Day, 2002; Day, 2008; Res et al, 2007).

However, all these require methods and ways of teaching to which more and more the teachers are not accustomed (Hargreaves, 2000), since teachers' education remains basically the same and as a result teachers are not prepared to face the new challenges. It is the case that the provision of education, and mainly of the secondary compulsory one, to all social groups has led to a radical transformation of the educational systems all over the world and thus more attractive working conditions should be created for the teachers. Still, though, Hargreaves (1994, in Day et al, 2006b) reports that research has shown that most reforms have not taken into account and they haven't paid any attention to the teachers' emotional needs, to their needs in

pedagogical knowledge and to their overall identity. Teachers tend to be treated by the state more as mere recipients of the educational policies and reforms than active subjects. They may be regarded as an inextricable part of the implementation procedure of the educational policies and reforms, but not of their design, a fact that gives them only limited control over the whole process of improving education (Holmes, 1998 reference in van Veen & Slegers, 2006; Olson, 2002; Res et al, 2007). Generally, teachers, like all civil servants, are considered to be efficient only when they satisfy and meet the definitions of others concerning what an effective teacher or an efficient employee is etc (Day et al., 2006b). We should always take into account that the teachers live and work within relations of power, i.e. their professional relationships are unequal (Ginsburg, 1995). At the same time, on a daily basis they face a series of problematics, such as relationships with colleagues, their motivation, the decline of their self-esteem and their chances for professional development (Kelchtermans, 1993).

In conclusion, all of the above circumstances, and especially when there are intense and radical changes in the educational policy, have an influence on the concepts of teachers' professionalism and professional identity and affect their expectations and their working conditions and practices, while their emotional commitment towards their work might be at risk because of the way and the extent to which these changes are accepted, adopted, adapted and finally supported (Day et al, 2006a). Furthermore, reduced motivation and job satisfaction, as well as alteration of

the professional identity might even be noted (Day, 2002; McNess et al., 2003; Hodgkinson & Hodgkinson, 2005; Day et al., 2006b; Day et al., 2007).

## **2. RESEARCH CONTEXT**

Within a traditionally centralized educational system, Greek teachers have to deal with reform agendas, as well as policies and practices rigidly dictated by the central government with limitations, contradictions and ruptures that didn't give and continue not to give proper attention to the teachers' experience (Res et al, 2007), not to take into account the national traditions and the class reality, something that leaves teachers exposed and makes them adopt policies with which they do not agree from the beginning and in the design of which they certainly did not participate. Most of the educational reforms seem to be fragmented without careful and sufficient planning, and first and foremost without the consent of the educational community (van Veen & Slegers, 2006). Educational policies are implemented without adequate evidence that they will have positive outcomes, having too broad or vague targets and goals (van Veen & Slegers, 2006), while none up to now have proven to be especially decisive (Muller et al, 2007). Educational laws aim at just the school level (measures for the school system), and not at the community/ society level. Moreover, there is much confidence in the dynamics of administrative changes, although research has shown that such changes on their own cannot make a difference in schools and

professionalism, let alone in the social conditions vital to the success of these changes (Fullan, 2001 reference in Bolivar & Domingo, 2006). Papanoum (2005) talks about teachers' conflict and division because of the increased bureaucracy, the quality of school leadership, the lack of cooperation, understanding and the ability to manage change.

One of the greatest problems of Greek education is the insufficiency of financial resources. This is the result not only of the financial crisis, but also of the attempt of cutting down on public expenditures. The teachers' salaries are much lower compared to other European countries and there is also reduction in the subsidization of the educational system. The insufficiency of the budget available becomes more pronounced through the dense classes, the high teacher/students ratio and the inadequate school maintenance, classroom space, teaching aids and equipment. So, it becomes obvious that the teachers' working conditions are bad. There is also an unsatisfactory level of teacher education (O.E.C.D., 1997). Teacher education in Greece is circumstantial, coincidental and fragmented and thus it does not meet the teachers' real needs (Lignos, 2006; Muller et al., 2007). This is because the teachers are confined into the role of a passive recipient and they don't get the chance to decide and define their needs and the topics on which they would like to be trained, something which reflects the centralization of our educational system even in teachers' education (Papaprokopiou, 2002). Moreover, the great number of foreign students who attend (Greek) schools brings forward the issue of effectively handling

groups with different linguistic, cultural and social characteristics (Benekos, 2007). At the same time, teachers also have to satisfy the needs of more and more students with learning disabilities and behavioural problems who attend regular classes (Papa, 2006). Thus, the demands placed on teachers are great and especially within the Greek educational system which has a deeply exam-oriented nature, where there is no room for creativity, the teachers have to stick to (the same for many years) books (O.E.C.D., 1997) and to move within very specified teaching limits, irrespective of the specific teaching conditions (National Board of Education, 2006). Within these circumstances, teachers feel isolated since cooperation, support and horizontal communication among teachers and among teachers and Directors are absent (National Board of Education, 2006), while parental contribution to the learning and teaching process is also limited. The relationship between school and parents has a more typical rather than substantial nature (Papagiannidou, 2000; Gliaou – Christodoulou, 2005) and the “parents’ participation is characterized by a more typical-legal dimension rather than a substantial-pedagogical one, (which) is mainly expressed through the lawful consequences of age” (Athanasoula-Reppa, 2008, p.168).

### **3. THE RESEARCH**

#### ***3.1. Aim***

This paper aims at investigating the characteristics of the professional identity of secondary school teachers in Greece ( through how teachers themselves view their



identity and their professionalism), their job satisfaction within the Greek educational system and the extent to which the implemented educational policy can influence all these attitudes and beliefs. For this reason, the following research questions were posed:

1. How do teachers conceive their role and themselves as professionals?
2. Which are the main factors that have an influence on the work of teachers and their identity?
3. Does educational policy influence teachers' professional identity, their motivation and commitment levels and their overall job satisfaction?

### **3.2. Method**

The research approach followed was basically quantitative. The research tool used was a questionnaire, which included closed and only two open-ended questions (“*I feel dissatisfied with my job, because....*” & “*I feel satisfied with my job, because...*”). The questions included were formed after extensive study of the relevant bibliography, while some of them were based on the questionnaires of: Day, Flores & Viana (2004) entitled *Transitions in Professionalism: Teacher Identities in Times of Change*, Sarri & Papani (2007) entitled: *Work motivation and Job Satisfaction between private employees and civil servants* and Papani & Giabrimi (2007) entitled: *Development of a scale measuring the teachers' professional adjustment- job satisfaction, work stress*

*and burnout*. The questions were divided into four big groups: Group A, where the subjects had to give answers in relation to how they see themselves as professionals; Group B, had to do with job satisfaction within the Greek educational system; Group C, asked from the teachers to rank the contribution of various factors to the quality and effectiveness of their work in order of importance, and finally there was Group D, where the subjects could agree or disagree with different aspects of the organization of our educational system. Before all these, there were questions regarding the demographic characteristics of the subjects questioned, as well as an ordering of the reasons that motivated each person to select the teaching profession. In total, 170 secondary school teachers participated in the research. Moreover, the data were supplemented by interviews given by five teachers who work in public schools in urban areas.

The majority of the subjects are women (67,5%), 33,7% between 31 and 40 years old, 33,1% between 41 and 50 and 17, 8% up to 30 years old. Just a 15,4% are between 51 and 60 years old. Nevertheless, it became obvious that, even though the 66,8% of the total respondents belongs to the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups, still the vast majority (67,6%) of the subjects has work experience no more than ten years. The type of schools where the teachers work is balanced, with vocational educational slightly falling behind (19,9%).

The statistical analysis was carried out with the help of SPSS 17.0 and content analysis was used for the analysis of the qualitative data.

## 4. FINDINGS

### *4.1. How teachers regard their role and themselves as professionals.*

Group A questions and the two open-ended questions that follow, answer to the first research question. For the analysis of these findings we will be using the five dimensions of the professional identity (self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspective) according to Kelchtermans (1993). A first glimpse at the total sample leads us to the conclusion that the majority of the teachers, irrespective of gender, work experience or any other variable, view themselves as professionals (self-image) and agree to a great extent with the sub-questions that make up this picture ( See: Figure 1). For example, a 54.7% answered to the phrase “I see myself as a professional” with I agree/totally agree, as opposed to a 18.9% which gave the answer I disagree/ I totally disagree. Generally, when subjects were asked to evaluate themselves as educators (self-esteem) and to specify their work (task perception), the majority of them stated that they respect their job and are proud of it (69.4%), they feel satisfied with its quantity and quality (77.7%), they like taking up initiatives (70.7%), they use modern teaching techniques and approaches (71.8%) and they are familiar with the techniques and methods required for their work (71.7%). As a result, they successfully meet their students’ learning needs (85.9%). Teachers feel that they have become more effective as years go by (88.2%), they consider

themselves to be conscientious and consistent professionals (94.1%), adaptive within their workplace (78.2%), active ( 71.7%) and they feel that their superiors appreciate their work (65.3%) and that cooperation with their colleagues is constructive (68.2%). The interviews conducted confirm the same things. Most of the respondents replied positively to the question “*Would you characterize yourself as a professional?*”:

*“Yes, with room for improvement” (male, French teacher).*

*“I think yes” (male, teacher of Economy).*

*“I achieved that to a fairly great extent. And this is where the fact that my husband had his own business helped. Comparing what the private sector, which is more demanding,, it helped me develop these characteristics and mainly consistency” (female, English teacher1).*

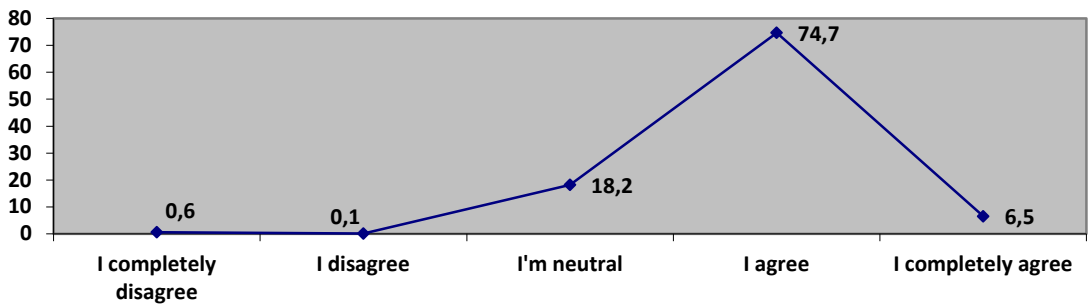
*“Certainly yes, and I do what I can to remain professional” (female, English teacher2)*

However, the way each teacher sees other teachers in general isn't always the same. In the interviews, the adjectives used to describe the modern teachers were: *ineffective, don't set targets, loose* (as to the working hours), *lack of concern, detached* (“*in the sense that they go into the class, they do what they have to do, without doing something more. They don't add emotion*”). Modern teachers are not characterized by their colleagues as especially professionals, either because of the existing conditions in the educational system, or because of the fact that “*most of the*

*teachers have as their primary goal their rights and then their obligations*". Only one teacher supported that:

*"I think that modern teachers are professionals... that they are responsible towards their students, that they try to cover their subject matter... responsible, that they love their job, the students and I personally believe that they are not interested in money. They do it because they love children and their job, their teaching. In other words altruistic" (female, Greek teacher).*

As far as job motivation is concerned, 78.8% of the sample see their professional interest and commitment declining as years go by and thus they have become more impersonal towards their students (81.8%). On the other hand, 89.4% have started questioning the importance of their work. 65.9% of the respondents believe that their job has become a daily routine and for this reason a 74.2% would change profession, if possible (future perspective). Such a stance comes in stark contrast with the previous positive image that teachers had for themselves as professionals. Such a differentiation can be attributed to external factors which can have an effect on professional identity, such as: personal problems (64.7%), the type of the school unit where someone works (48.2%), the position of the subject someone teaches in the school timetable (57.6%), as well as students' attitude towards school (45.3%). After comparing the two independent samples (men-women), it became obvious that this tendency is mainly shaped by women.



*Figure 1. How I view myself as a professional (total picture of the sample)*

#### **4.2 Factors affecting teachers' identity.**

The second research question tries to trace the practical factors which affect teachers' professional identity. For this reason, a correlation analysis has been conducted which revealed a statistically significant correlation between professional identity and gender ( $r = 155$  with  $p < 0,05$ ), and also between professional identity and the various dimensions of the organization of the educational system (educational policy) ( $r = ,187$  with  $p < 0,05$ ).

- **Professional identity and gender**

As for the first independent variable, if we examine the concepts of professionalism and professional identity separately in men and women, then we

conclude that more women than men reply positively that they see themselves as professionals. That is, of the 74.6% of the subjects who state that they agree that they are professionals, the 70.6% are women as opposed to the 29.4% of men. At the same time, it is again women who keep a neutral position on the same issue. Obviously, the people who are neutral or disagree with professionalism, are more influenced by various parameters in their workplace, a fact that makes them question their work more and triggers feelings of doubt regarding the possibility of having an impact on their students' progress as well as the usefulness and the possibility of having ambitions within the framework of our educational system. What is more, as Papanis & Rontos (2007) claim, a Likert scale does not help us decide whether neutrality means having doubts or not having a formed opinion (See: Table 1).

**Table 1**

*How I view myself as a professional (Total picture of the sample- frequencies in relation to the gender of the respondents)*

	Men			Women			Total		
	N	%	%	N	%	%	N	%	%
I completely disagree	1	100	1,8	-	-	-	1	100	
I disagree									
I'm neutral	14	45,2	25,5	17	54,8	14,9	31	100	
I agree	37	29,4	67,3	89	70,6	78,1	126	100	
I completely disagree	3	27,3	5,5	8	72,7	7	11	100	
Total	55	32,5	100	114	67,5	100	169		

No answers 2

$X^2(3) = 5,0$  ( $p < 0,05$ )

- **Professional identity and educational policy**

The correlation analysis also revealed a connection between professional identity and the dimensions of the organization of our educational system.

Initially, by comparing the answers to the questions in Group C, which refer to the importance that various factors bear for the quality and the effectiveness of the teacher's work, with the answers to the questions in Group D, can give us a quite enlightening picture. Among the first three factors which the sample name as the most important ones for the teacher's work is public acknowledgement and the sense of moral and social contribution (always among the first three choices of the sample). Furthermore, teachers think that taking initiatives and implementing new ideas are also very important (1st and 2nd choice for the 25.9% and the 14.7% of the respondents respectively), as well as building a rapport between the school and the parents (1st choice for the 14.7% and 3rd choice for the 11.8%). Finally, there are also the dimensions of variety at work (2<sup>nd</sup> choice for the 11.8%), team work (3<sup>rd</sup> choice for the 11.2%) and infrastructure (3<sup>rd</sup> choice for the 12.4%).

Consequently, since these factors are assessed by the respondents as important, we should examine the extent to which all these are provided by our educational system, otherwise their absence or inadequacy may have an impact on the quality of the teaching process, the sense of self-effectiveness and in the long run on professional identity as well. The 68.8% of the teachers believe that our educational system doesn't encourage initiatives and doesn't welcome new ideas, and that it doesn't encourage



cooperation and team spirit (64.7%), although these two are considered to be really important for teachers. The 68.9% don't think that teachers are properly recognized by the society, a fact that can lead to a questioning of their status, since no one can realize *"the significance of the student's development through the educational process"*:

*"Every day teachers confront the general public, who put the blame on them for the failure of the educational system"*

*"(The teacher's work) is not recognized by the parents and the state. The teachers who work for the public sector are not much appreciated by the community and this has an impact on the students and the teaching process"*.

*"Usually this "job" is met with prejudice and stereotypical concepts by other social groups (e.g. teacher = lazy and "passenger")"*.

*"Many times the work, the organisation, the zest are met with passivity or even with negative mood by students, colleagues and parents"*.

On the contrary, there is a balanced picture in the question *"The relations of the school with my students' parents have been developed to a satisfactory extent"*. The 53.6% are fairly or even very satisfied, while the 44.7 % are fairly or even very dissatisfied. The 65.9% support that their job has become a daily routine, so obviously there is lack of variety, and as far as infrastructure is concerned, this is unsatisfactory as well ( in fact, in the open-ended questions it is listed as one of the reasons of disappointment in the job):

*“There are no ....infrastructures to improve my work”,*

*“The infrastructures to help teaching become more constructive and interesting for both teachers and students are absent”,*

*“My work is sub-subsidized by the State”.*

Additionally, teachers seem to be concerned about the lack of motivation to improve their work and their performance as well as the absence of opportunities for professional development, situations which are directly connected to the absence of meritocracy (the 64.7% agree with the statement) and evaluation. However, both meritocracy and evaluation could enable teachers and their work to be more widely acknowledged. The impasse grows bigger when there is not enough guidance and contact with the superiors (Directors, Counselors), which could substitute the afore mentioned weaknesses. However, this gap does not lead to complacency and worse performance according to the 42.4%. Moreover, as a good number of teachers stated, there is no solidarity between colleagues and there is not a common vision for education. Such situations “ *make the introduction of alternative teaching and learning methods difficult*”.

Going further to more practical issues of school reality, there are references to low salaries, which “*do not correspond to the qualifications and the performance*”, so they are not considered to be adequate. Besides, the 64.1% believe that the teachers’ salary does not correspond to their work and a 48.9% are not satisfied with the state

social policy (leaves, benefits) in the field of education. Still, very few respondents talked about satisfactory salaries which offer them the opportunity for a good way of life (very limited emphasis was placed on the financial rewards as compared to the organisational parameters of our educational system), about the working hours and the free time available, the permanency and the professional security that the teaching job provides. Consequently, priority was given to the moral rewards and psychological benefits of teaching rather than to the practical benefits.

#### ***4.3. Educational policy: motivation, commitment and job satisfaction***

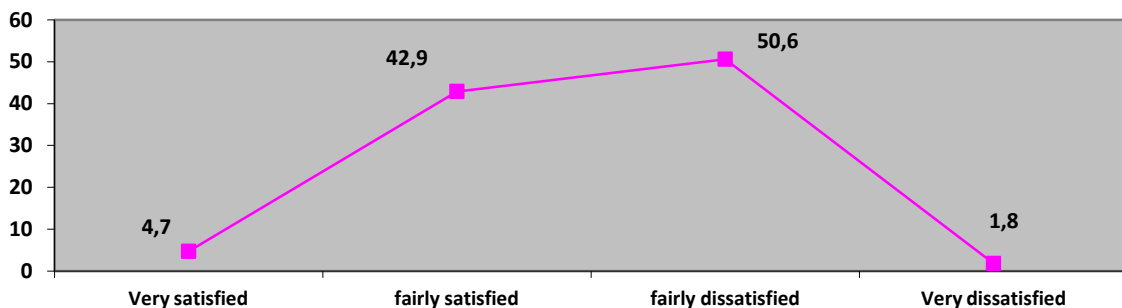
This section answers to the last research question. Beyond the impact that educational policy has on professional identity, a correlation between educational policy and job satisfaction, as well as with working experience has arisen (See: Table 2).

***Table 2***  
***Correlations among working experience and other variables.***

<b>Correlations</b>
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		Working experience	Gender	Questions (Group A')	Questions (Group B')	Questions (Group D')
Working Experience	Pearson Correlation	1	-,049	,129	-,094	,169*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,531	,094	,222	,028
	N	170	169	170	170	170
Questions (Group B')	Pearson Correlation	-,094	,021	-,119	1	-,386**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,222	,789	,121		,000
	N	170	169	170	170	170
Questions (Group D')	Pearson Correlation	,169*	-,130	,187*	-,386**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,028	,091	,015	,000	
	N	170	169	170	170	170

Overall, teachers seem to be either fairly satisfied (42.9%), or fairly dissatisfied (50.6%) with the structure and organization of our educational system (See: Figure 2).



*Figure 2. Total degree of satisfaction from the (9) dimensions of the task within the framework of the Greek educational system).*

By analyzing the answers of the five teachers in the interviews, we will realize that all of them claim that they are satisfied from their profession. As a respondent characteristically states:

*“I feel very much satisfied and full. If I could turn back time, I would give the same. Perhaps though enriched ...» (woman, Teacher of English1)*

If we take a close look at the sentences which make up this scale, we can see that the biggest rates of dissatisfaction concentrate around the lack of lifelong learning opportunities (the 68.9% replied either fairly or very dissatisfied), the absence of further development possibilities (70%) and motivation for improvement (70.6%). Also, the subjects are not satisfied as far as the available resources are concerned (59.4%). On the other hand, satisfaction rates are higher when there are questions where job satisfaction is related to somebody’s personality and their personal ability to deal with their work (For example: Questions B1 & B2). The 74.7% of the subjects is fairly/very satisfied with the opportunities to take up initiatives and creative actions within the school, even though it is acknowledged by the 68.8% that our educational system does not foster new ideas and does not encourage initiatives. The 61.2% are very/ fairly satisfied with their ability to adequately cope with students who have (social) particularities, while the 53.6% consider that the relationship between the school and the parents have been developed to an satisfactory extent. Finally, the 74.7% are fairly/very satisfied with the working environment within which their

teaching and administrative tasks are fully specified (59.4%), although generally the educational system as a whole doesn't set definite and articulate goals (58.8%).

Additionally, the answers did not reveal a correlation between education policy and motivation or commitment to one's work. For example, the permanency and the stability that the teaching profession offers don't necessarily seem to enhance the teachers' commitment towards their work and to improve the quality of their performance (39.4%). Also, the lack of guidance from the superiors doesn't automatically lead to complacency and to a lower level of performance (42.4%). The public judgment of the educational system is not in itself capable of increasing passivity and to erode the teachers' enthusiasm and interest in the profession, according to the 65.9% of the respondents, while the frequent and fragmentary changes in education and the non-linearity between primary and secondary education don't concern the 78.8% and the 75.3% of the teachers respectively. On the contrary, in the interviews became clear that among the factors that are listed as those which can promote or undermine the teachers' enthusiasm and interest in their work, we could mainly find organizational parameters of our educational system. More specifically, the Greek educational system is exam-oriented which makes *“teaching in Lyceum to aim only at learning in order to enter University and not at studying for knowledge itself, so grade hunting prevails (“the marks do not correspond to the students' real value”)*. In an effort to serve such a system, there is centrally specified teaching material and *“outdated curricula”* (Overview of the Greek Educational System, 1995)

which the teachers regard as a kind of a commitment that make *“quality work difficult or even impossible”* and *“don’t allow students to have free access to knowledge and to other activities”*. Consequently, teachers enter a vicious circle where: *“I am compelled to focus on knowledge and not on the cultivation of critical thinking”* and feel that: *“The effectiveness of my work is influenced by inconsistent examination systems”*. So, the teachers reach the limits of their efficacy and often have feelings of vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1993; Kelchtermans, 1996; Kontelli, 2008), since *“the end result is sometimes really poor”*. However, a 69.5% disagree with the statement that the school’s pedagogic dimension and the teacher’s multi-dimensional role are undermined due to the exam-oriented nature of our educational system.

Moreover, teachers are often annoyed when they have to teach subjects that are not directly relevant to their own subject matter. They ask more teaching hours for some subjects and supportive structures, so that their work can be more effective. They feel that their task is not linear because of the frequent changes and the moving around between different schools. For some, classes with many students can also be a reason of disruption to their work (Papa, 2006; Kontelli, 2008), because *“the implementation of new pedagogical methods and innovative teaching techniques remains infeasible”*, a fact that can trigger a sense of incapability (the 85.9% consider big classes to be responsible for feelings of vulnerability among teachers):

*“I feel disappointed when I see that I can’t help students with deviant behaviour”*.

What teachers think would contribute to their greater commitment towards their work, is their more active participation and the more opportunities to take part in the decision making process within the school unit (73.5%).

As far as working experience is concerned, it became obvious that younger colleagues judge those aspects of our educational system which are included in the Group D questions more harshly. In fact, though, the educational system has not received positive evaluation by none of the three categories which are presented in Tables 3 & 4 apart from a very small percentage. Those who do not agree prefer to keep a neutral stance. Additionally, the biggest disappointment rates in our educational system are traced among those whose working experience is up to ten years, followed by those who have worked for 11-20 years, while at the end we find those who are in the last part of their teaching career.

**Table 3**

***Total grade of satisfaction from the (9) aspects of the teaching task within the Greek educational system***

	Working experience								
	Up to 10 years			11 – 20 years			21 – 30 years		
	N	%	%	N	%	%	N	%	%
Very satisfied	5	62,5	4,3	3	37,5	7,9	-	-	-
Fairly satisfied	45	61,6	39,1	18	24,7	47,4	10	13,7	58,8
Fairly dissatisfied	63	73,3	54,8	16	18,6	42,1	7	8,1	41,2
Very dissatisfied	2	66,7	1,7	1	33,3	2,6	-	-	-
Total	115	67,6	100	38	22,4	100	17	10	100



**Table 4**

**Total picture in relation to the extent of agreement with the 17 dimensions of the organisation of the educational system**

	Working experience										
	Up to 10 years			11 – 20 years			21 – 30 years			Total	
	N	%	%	N	%	%	N	%	%	N	%
Completely disagree	2	100	1,7	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	100
Disagree	72	72,7	62,6	19	19,2	50	8	8,1	47,1	99	100
Neutral	41	62,1	35,7	16	24,2	42,1	9	13,6	52,9	66	100
Agree	-	-	-	2	100	5,3	-	-	-	2	100
Completely agree	-	-	-	1	100	2,6	-	-	-	1	100
	115	67,6	100	38	22,4	100	17	10	100	170	

Finally, though, the general conclusion we can draw is that there is only limited reference to issues of mentality and personal responsibility, while at the same time there is also limited self-criticism among the 170 questionnaires:

*“Sometimes I do not impose as much as I should and in this way I waste time at the expense of my students who feel like learning”*

*“I don’t totally achieve the teaching goals I set. I am not familiar with the new teaching methods, so as to make my class more pleasant”.*

*“The civil servant mentality is pretty intense. There is irresponsibility among teachers”.*

*“I can see indifference”.*

During the five interviews conducted, when the subjects were asked about whether the observed lack of willingness and commitment towards one’s work is a reaction to

the unfavourable working conditions or a matter of mentality and a characteristic of the civil servant identity, then again the external conditions were held responsible.

Three out of five agreed that educational policy is to blame:

*“The first one, because there is not a cohesive and stable educational policy...there is micro politics at the expense of the educational system. So, all these make you unwilling because you cannot set targets” (male, French Teacher)*

*“Not the civil servant identity. Not that, I mean I don’t believe that the so-called permanency is to blame, I don’t believe this. I believe it is the educational system itself that presses you...” (female, Modern Greek Teacher)*

*“It is a reaction towards the various unfavourable parameters that teachers are obliged to accept...” (female, English Teacher2),*

one answered that mentality is mainly responsible:

*“The second one basically. If it were a reaction, we would do much more to change it” (female, English Teacher1),*

while there was a reference to both factors:

*“Both. We do our jobs in a formal way, but not substantially, and on the other hand there are the educational problems as well” (male, Teacher of Economy).*

However, in the question *“Do you believe that the improvement of our educational affairs is mainly a legislative/administrative task or a personal concern?”* (removed from the final questionnaire), the respondents (four out of five) recognized that the improvement of our educational affairs should be not only a legislative/administrative task but a personal concern as well or even a combination of both:

*“Reforms also help, but I think that it is a personal matter”* (female, English Teacher1)

*“I believe that we can do it ourselves”* (female, Modern Greek Teacher)

*“It is definitely a combination of both”* (female, English Teacher2)

So, there a general tendency to attribute all the problems and difficulties either to a third party or to the bad organization of our educational system, which is definitely true and definitely causes complications. The impression given is that, although there is willingness on the part of the teachers to offer, still there are external obstacles which make the teaching task difficult, such as curriculum pressure, bad organization of the educational system etc. This is summed up in a teacher’s words:

*“I would like to offer in multiple ways, but...”*

## **5. DISCUSSION**

In the present research, the way in which teachers view themselves as professionals and the factors which influence the teaching task and the professional identity (mainly the gender and the educational policy) were examined. Also an attempt was made to measure the impact of the educational policy on sustaining commitment, motivation and the overall job satisfaction among Greek teachers in Secondary Education. The professional identity was found to be determined by two basic factors: the educational policy and the gender of the respondents. Even though the Greek educational system does not fully meet the needs of its teachers for social recognition, implementation of new ideas, taking up initiatives, good infrastructures etc, still the teachers of the present sample feel the inner drive to complete their work successfully and at the same time they feel committed towards that. Therefore, they could be characterized as employees with motives (Whetten & Cameron (2002), reference in Sarri & Papani, 2007). They seem to be more motivated by inner motives (a need to satisfy personal needs), rather than external ones, like the financial motive or the motive for good performance or the good organisation, which are otherwise absent from the structure of the Greek educational system.

As far as gender is concerned, women respect their profession more and are more proud of it. Besides, being a teacher is a job that is traditionally considered to be the most suitable for women (Maragoudaki, 2008). Women seem to have a stronger sense of mission, they believe that they can make a difference in their students' learning and they feel that they correspond to their students' learning needs. This attitude can be

attributed to the way women were socialized: their ability to recognize and understand not only their own feelings but the others' as well was deeply cultivated (Brody & Hall, 2000; Craig et al., 2009), so they are more compassionate (Mehrabian, Young & Sato, 1988). This ability renders women more responsive and responsible for the needs of others. A greater percentage of women state that they have become more efficient as the years go by, they feel full of energy and claim to be more consistent with their duties. Besides, when women grow older and reach their mid-careers, they receive greater satisfaction from their jobs and they feel greater self-accomplishment, since they manage to combine their family and working duties more effectively (Auster, 2001). However, the working conditions seem to influence women more, so that they see their commitment decreasing to a greater extent as the years go by, they become more impersonal, they question the importance of their work and they see their work turning into a daily routine which they would change if they got the chance.

As for the job satisfaction, the subjects' dissatisfaction was more connected to the structure of the educational system rather than the teaching profession itself, while in the questions which concerned the respondents' personality and their personal ability to cope with their work, then the satisfaction rates were higher. Similar findings were reported by Botsari & Matsaggouras (2003), where teachers showed greater satisfaction with the recognition they received from parents, students, colleagues and superiors and less satisfaction with the system's meritocracy and the working conditions. Perhaps this is the case because the way in which teachers view their

professional identity and the way the others see them are both basic parameters of motivation, commitment and their job satisfaction (Day, 2002; van Veen & Slegers, 2005) and maybe even more important than the educational policy itself. Papers from Sousamidou et al (2007) & Brouzos (2004) reported similar findings of high job satisfaction. On the other hand, gender was not found to influence job satisfaction. Within the Greek educational system, at least at classroom level and among plain teachers, one does not see many variations between the two sexes as far as salaries, promotions and favourable or unfavourable working conditions are concerned. Furthermore, a paper from Sousamidou, Milona & Tireli (2007) has shown that job satisfaction is fairly high among Greek teachers, without being conditioned by the gender factor. In the case of Greece, job satisfaction could also be related to the absence of other working prospects for teachers outside education, rather than being true and deep satisfaction with the conditions and the terms of the current job (Menon & Christou, 2002).

Furthermore, those with less years of working experience were stricter, while those with more years in education chose a rather neutral stance. As far as the latter is concerned, according to the socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 2000), the age, because of the better adjustment of emotions, reduces the levels of negative emotions in people, and can make older people more conciliatory and less negatively predisposed. Or such an attitude can be attributed to the fact that the educators who are relatively new to the profession come in contact with the realistic

image of learning and teaching (Lamote & Engels, 2010), which is in stark contrast with the most optimistic outlook of their abilities they carry from university and the experiences they gain during their training. However, since reality brings them down to earth and they should re-negotiate the limits of their efficacy, they become harsher judges of the educational system, while any incompatibilities between their expectations and the working reality can lead to disappointment in their work.

Finally, teachers, irrespective of the gender factor, produced high rates of positive self-image as far as their professionalism and their professional identity is concerned, with a high degree of consistency and conscientiousness towards their job and their students. On the contrary, the five interviewees' evaluation of their colleagues was not so favourable. Such contradiction could be explained by the fact that the respondents are asked to judge somebody on the basis of arbitrary personal beliefs, since they will never have access to the thoughts, the feelings and the motives of those they judge (MacDonald, 2008), something which certainly constitutes a weakness. This in combination with the fact that we as people most of the times tend to present a more improved, than the real one, image of ourselves, even if what we claim does not necessarily reflect our true thoughts and intentions (Paulhus, 1991, reference in McDonald, 2008), leads to the aforementioned differentiation. Besides, the perception each person has for different things does not always reflect reality. Anyone can have a distorted idea about who he/she really is (John & Robins, 1994). Our personal convictions and our personal meanings about reality, as well as our understanding

about relationships and our position in the world are shaped through our subjective emotional world (Day, 2002). Pronin (2008) reports that the way we see ourselves and the way we see others differ. For ourselves we are immersed in our own feelings, sensations and cognitions, the same moment that our view of others is guided by the external view of things. However, according to Pronin this asymmetry leads people to judge themselves and their behaviour in a different way from the way they judge other people's behaviour, a fact that leads to a conflict, which is also confirmed by the findings of the present research.

## **6. LIMITATIONS**

The main research method used in this paper was the questionnaire, which included self-reference scales to measure teachers' self-image, their job satisfaction and the degree of their agreement with different aspects of our educational system. This type of collecting data may be more user friendly, less tiring for the subjects and expected to produce less contradictory answers, yet responding on a pre-specified scale can lead to simplified answers or even to distortion of information (Birelson et al., 1987). Also, there is a systematic tendency on the part of the subjects to reply to such self-reference scales in a way that presents a more favourable image of themselves, without their answers necessarily reflecting what they truly think or do (Socially Desirable Response) (Paulhus, 1991, reference in McDonald, 2008).



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