

TEACHING PROFESSION IN A CHANGING WORLD:

A comparative Study

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Resume en francais:

La Profession 'Enseignant' dans un monde qui change :

Une recherche comparative

C'est un fait que sous le prisme de la mondialisation, l'éducation, les politiques éducatives et les enseignants revêtent un intérêt sans cesse accru, notamment dans le cadre de la conjoncture socio-politique et économique-idéologique. Certes, nombre de questions aujourd'hui abordées dans le domaine de l'enseignement sont communes à différents pays, tandis que d'autres reflètent des spécificités propres. Plus particulièrement, le rôle et le comportement des enseignants, à l'intérieur comme en dehors de l'école, ont de tout temps fait l'objet d'une réflexion scientifique et de recherches dans le domaine de la Pédagogie comparée. Multiples sont du reste les facteurs qui influencent de nos jours la tâche de l'enseignant : bouleversements démographiques, évolution de l'économie, essor des sciences et de la technologie, concept d'identité culturelle, influence des mass media, réponses diverses apportées, de par le monde, aux problèmes de la pauvreté, de l'environnement, de l'immigration, du chômage etc. De plus, en vue de ces changements, les enseignants sont appelés à acquérir constamment davantage de moyens - pratique de langues étrangères, connaissance et utilisation de la technologie, conscience de leur identité européenne et universelle, attitude positive à l'égard des différentes cultures, souplesse et adaptabilité-, ainsi que d'autres qualités de même ordre, indispensables pour faire face aux exigences de l'enseignement actuel des membres d'une société internationale

Bien que les études relatives aux représentations sociales des enseignants en fonction de leur profession soient considérées comme extraordinairement importantes afin d'approfondir la connaissance des facteurs qui contribuent ou non à les satisfaire dans le cadre de leur métier, on ne rencontre en général guère de recherches sur ce sujet précis, comprenant les enseignants européens. L'étude que nous nous proposons de présenter vise à faire apparaître les facteurs responsables de la création de représentations sociales négatives des enseignants du 1^{er} degré. Par le biais d'entretiens, d'observations et de réalisation de questionnaires dans quatre pays (Suède, Grande-Bretagne, Grèce et Chypre), nous relevons les opinions des enseignants relatives non seulement à leur tâche et à leur efficacité, mais aussi au retentissement qu'eux-mêmes attribuent à leur travail, et cela afin de localiser les points faibles et de remédier aux lacunes existant dans ce domaine. Ainsi émergera une discussion féconde entre les instances impliquées, qui permettra d'appréhender

les sujets critiques auxquels l'enseignant doit faire face, à l'heure actuelle, dans l'exercice de sa profession.

En tant que l'un des centres de réflexion actuelle, l'éducation doit participer aux questionnements liés aux nouvelles visions : universalisation des domaines de l'activité humaine, communication mondiale, interconnexions de toutes sortes, régionalisme/mondialisme, compréhension du monde passant par la compréhension de l'autre, démocratie participative, lutte contre l'exclusion et les préjugés, défis économiques, choix politiques, innovations et coopération internationale. Les comparatistes doivent s'impliquer activement dans ce dialogue. L'idée de l'éducation globale, en particulier, associe des domaines d'apparition toute récente : environnement, développement, informatique, relations internationales, formation continue («éducation à vie»), à l'échelle locale et mondiale. Dans ce cadre, également important est, pense-t-on, la question des valeurs et du caractère de ces valeurs ; elle constitue un élément substantiel de la réflexion actuelle qui devrait désormais préoccuper aussi le comparatiste. Le problème auquel notre société se trouve ici confrontée –et, avec elle, évidemment, l'enseignement- est celui de la synthèse des conflits existant entre valeurs, intérêts, modes de vie. Ce problème devient d'autant plus grave que cette société se définit de plus en plus par son caractère composite et hétérogène, sa différenciation et sa complexité : c'est pourquoi le rôle de l'enseignant et, plus généralement, celui de l'éducation, ne cessent d'être réévalués et remis sur de nouvelles bases, afin de promouvoir de nouveaux objectifs. Les comparatistes se trouvent donc aujourd'hui confrontés à de nouveaux défis et placés devant des possibilités nouvelles.

Actuellement, en Grèce comme ailleurs, la réflexion dans le domaine de l'Éducation comparée est corrélée, entre autres, avec l'efficacité des systèmes éducatifs existant dans les différents pays, avec les facteurs influençant et façonnant ces systèmes (mondialisation, dimension européenne et universelle dans l'enseignement, pluralisme des cultures et éducation civique), avec la promotion, non seulement des innovations et échanges éducatifs dans la communauté internationale, mais aussi de l'élargissement du savoir scolaire, avec le retour ou la refondation du modèle historique (recherche historique comparée, Education comparée humaniste mettant l'accent sur les valeurs humaines) – «Nouvelle Cité Universelle». C'est, croyons-nous, dans cette direction que devrait s'orienter également l'Éducation comparée au XXI^e s.

Introduction- General Framework Relating to Teachers' Education

The role and attitude of the teachers inside as well as outside the school setting have always been an important subject of the scientific thought and research in the area of Comparative Education. More importantly, the 'transformation' of the contemporary school is closely related to the relationship of the school with the political, social and economic changes and reclassifications in the broader context. Scholars such as Kazamias (2002) and others refer to a 'new order' which is relative to globalization and its impact on education. Special attention is given to the fact that the 'commercialization' and 'instrumentation' of knowledge and its dissemination constitute a major issue.

In our study we'll touch upon some of the basic speculations and contemporary issues pertaining to the quality and effectiveness of the further education of the primary school teachers at the dawn of the 21st century. These important issues relate to the social image of contemporary teachers.

Research Methodology

In order for the research to be conducted, a semiconstructed interview (Mischel 1996) was initially used as a means of instruction followed by an appropriately standardized questionnaire which included a series of dependent variables- based on the final configuration of the pivots of the study, and independent variables which had to do with the sex, age, region, years and nature of studies, teaching experience and further education of the subjects along with other relative points.

The research was divided into three parts. The first part was about a pilot study in the form of an interview which was conducted with thirty teachers from three countries (10 interviews were conducted in each country), while the remaining two parts on which we based our final conclusions included interviews with 30 subjects (10 from each country) and 700 questionnaires distributed to teachers from the three countries. More specifically 239 questionnaires were distributed in Greece, 185 in Sweden, 228

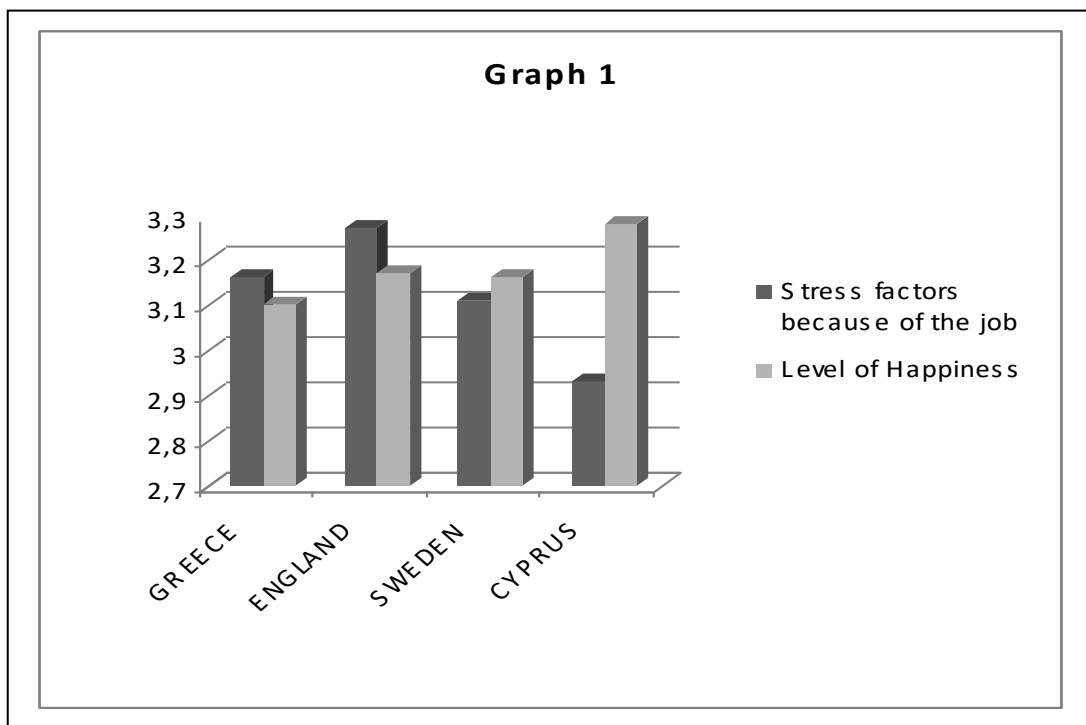
in England and 232 in Cyprus. In order for the sample to be representative teachers of all ages, qualifications, place of residence, sex and marital status were chosen.

The variables examined in the three stages of our research in the four countries are the following:

- The factors influencing the choice of profession
- Work related stress
- Influence of the trade-Unions
- External influence on the teachers' work
- Work related benefits
- New Conditions-Challenges in the workplace
- Salary
- Pressure relating to job duties
- Participation of the teachers in exchange programs
- and how it influences their attitude
- Contacts and relationships with teachers from other countries
- Social upgrading of the teaching profession
- The existence and use of modern equipment at school
- Teachers and new technology
- Familiarity with the advances of the contemporary educational research and sources of information
- Teachers' role inside and outside the classroom (existing and desirable)
- Duties-responsibilities of modern teachers
- Contribution –intervention of teachers to the educational, social changes
- Views about the school of today
- Upgrading factors for the teaching profession
- Pleasure derived from work

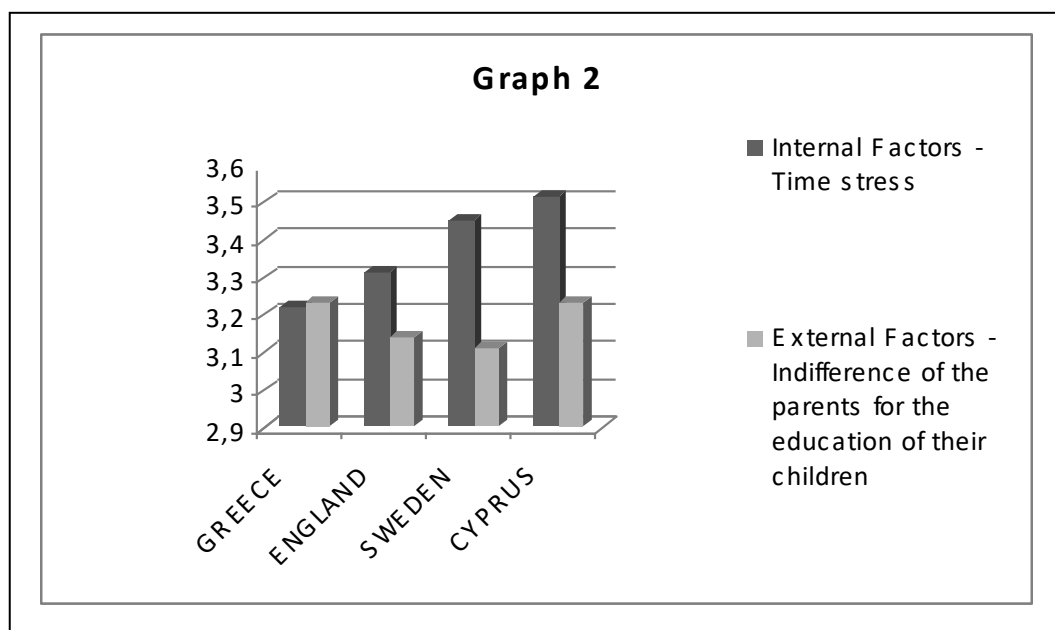
Comparative Results and Interpretations

As we can see from the graph that follows primary school teachers state that they are more or less happy with their work even though they agree that there is a quite a lot of stress relating to their job.



In all the cases the stress caused by work was considerably higher than the satisfaction derived. On the other hand Sweden was exception with the percentage of job-satisfaction being higher than that of stress.

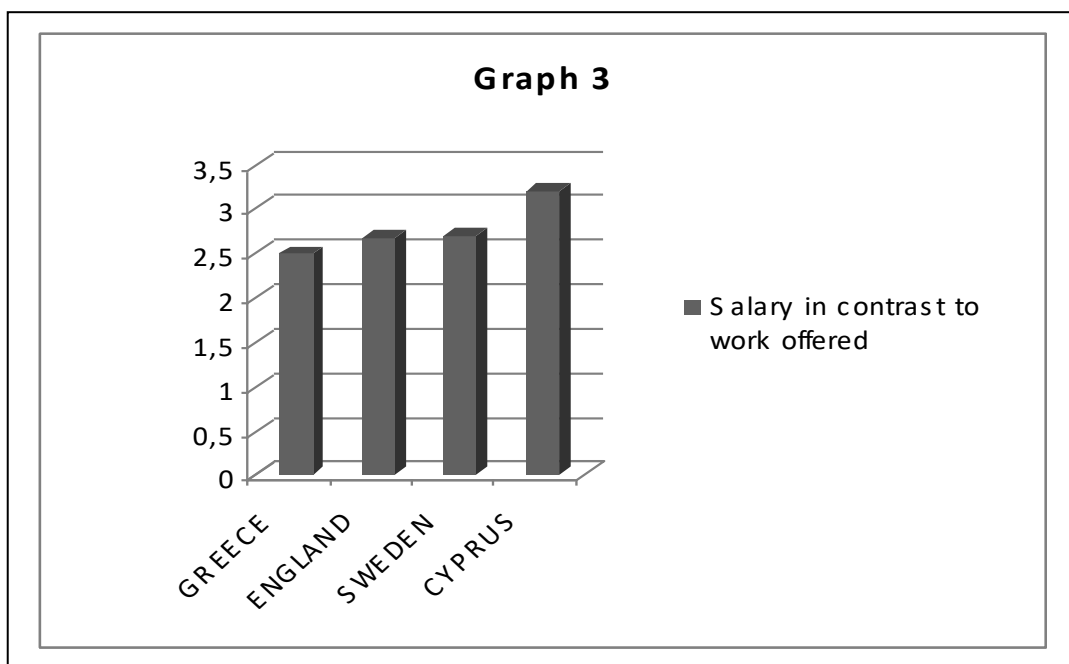
Concerning the major factors causing stress as we can see from the second graph that follows we have included the most important internal and external ones, as well as those which force the teachers to do things they don't want to do.



The most important from the school factors, with which the teachers of the primary education have agreed on has to do with the pressure of time which limits self-action, initiative and impulse on the part of the teachers causing them great stress (Jarvis 2002). There seems to be an agreement by all the teachers concerning the classification of the most important external factor that influences their work and causes stressful situations. According to their opinions this factor is the indifference of the parents for the education of their children. Finally to the question that examines the factors which press the teachers in doing things they don't want to or agree with, it was once again reported that the limited time at their disposal constitutes a serious problem.

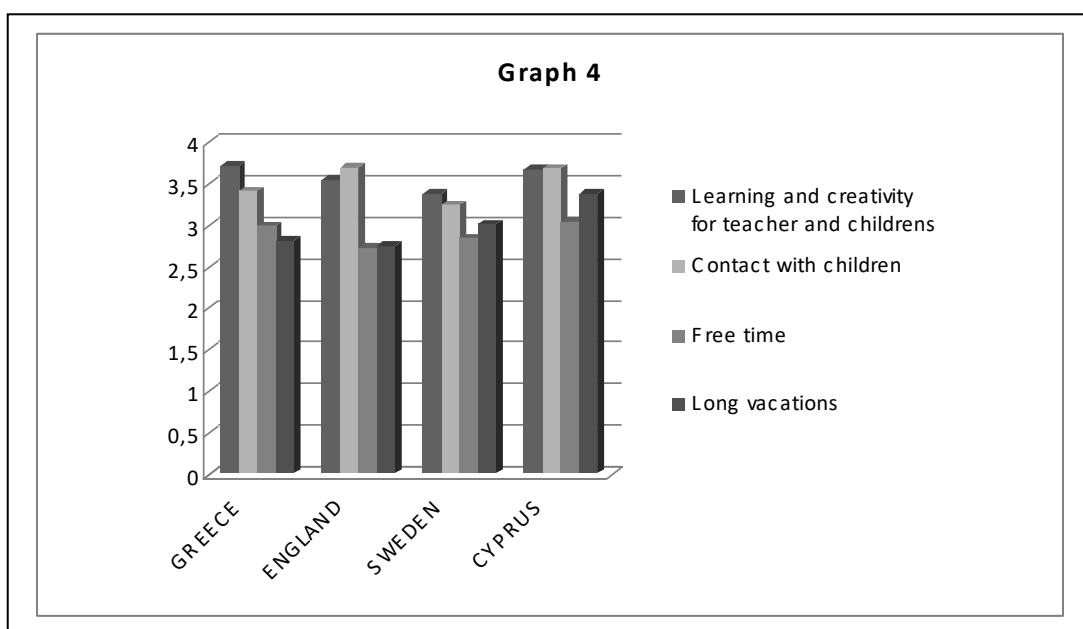
At this point we should make a note of a very important factor that characterizes the attitude, the psychology and the social image of the teachers in the primary education in connection with their profession, which is no other than the lack of substantial time so that the teachers can meet the increasing demands and the peculiarity of their role (Friedman 2000, pp. 595-606). The Swedish teachers followed by the English, the Cypriots and last by the Greek teachers seem to face the biggest problem in relation to this factor. On the contrary the Greek teachers worry at a greater degree compared with their other counterparts for the indifference of the parents for the education of their children. The lack of a good and productive cooperation leads the Greek teachers more often than not to dead-end results, thus creating stress, which is mostly one to the isolation the teachers feel when it comes to problems relating to the implementation of their work.

The negative climate caused by the stress factors mentioned above, is exacerbated by the teachers' references to their salary when they compare it to the work they do (Admiral, Korthagen & Wubbels 2000, pp. 33-52). It is a common opinion among the teachers that they are not paid as much as they should for the work they do. As we can note in **the third graph** that follows there is a uniform agreement that the salary is irrelevant to work offered.

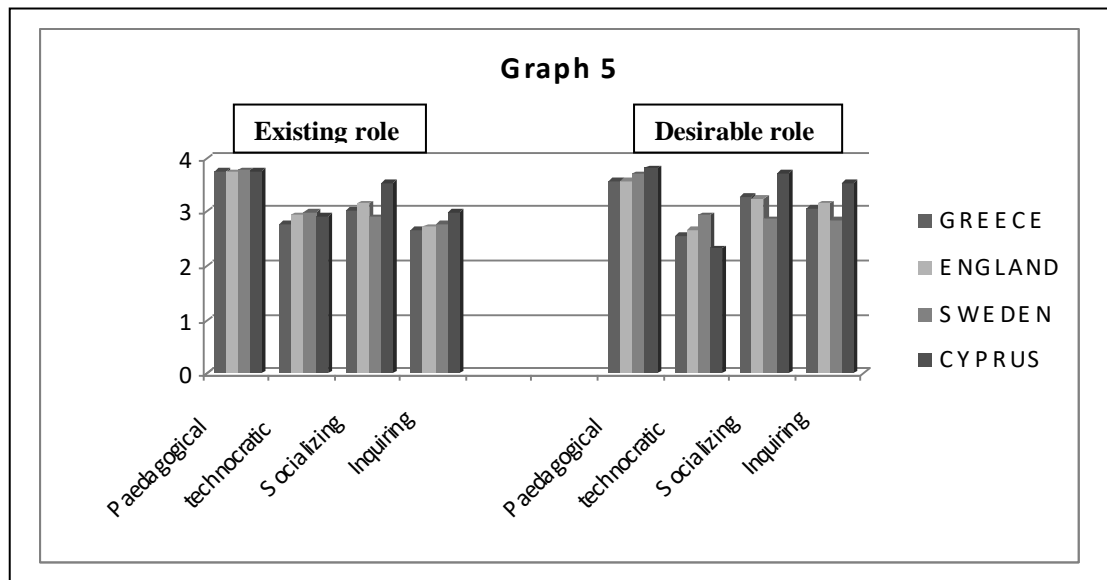


On the other hand, besides the negative elements that fraught education and affect the attitude and the feelings of the European teachers, there are some very important benefits always according to the views of those participating in our research in the four European countries (Greece, England, Sweden, Cyprus).

Thus there is a unanimous agreement regarding the view that the most important benefit relates to the potential of the teaching profession to offer educational and creative possibilities not only to the students but also to the teachers. Another important benefit is the personal contact of the teachers with the student and the long vacation that is available to them. In the **fourth graph** that follows we can see the importance the teachers attributed to these factors.



To conclude with the factors that affect their personal satisfaction from their work we deem worthwhile to refer to the role of the educational system in juxtaposition with the role that the teachers claimed as desirable. The contrast of these two role is clear in the **fifth graph** that follows.



A careful analysis of the above graph combined with the points presented about the results of the questionnaire lead us to note that there is an agreement of the existing and legitimate role at least on some of the points. At the same time, the desire of the teachers for more participation in research is evident. The lack of this parameter creates a more conservative profile for the contemporary teacher. Such behavior can lead to negative attitudes on behalf of the teachers toward their profession leading them sometimes to disdain it, and finally as they themselves claim the State doesn't consider them as capable to contribute to the realization of new plans and proposals. This attitude leads to the creation of negative images which sometimes are reinforced by the parents' opinions who usually feel alienated towards the teachers, viewing them as mere processors of a system in which they have no opinion and interventional role.

In general, our study by presenting some of the contemporary aspects relating to the teaching profession, highlights on the similarities, differences, convergence and divergence, issues and problems, challenges and visions of the 21st century society, which needs to be more humane but also more effective, to be ecumenical but not so globalized and to be able to rise to the challenges of our times (Kazamias 2006, Giroux 1989, Hardgraves 1995).

Concluding remarks

In the 21st century CE scientists have a duty to actively take part in the debate on the issues that ought to guide the modern science of education as well as to the teaching profession: globalization of all aspects of human activity, world-wide communication, diverse interdependencies, the contrast between local and global, understanding the world through the understanding of the "other", participation in a democratic society, the struggle against discrimination and prejudice, the challenges of the new economy, crucial policy decisions, reform and international co-operation. In this context, although teachers are faced with new challenges, they may also benefit from growing potentials. The contemporary outlook of teaching profession includes a number of topics that are common in Greece and abroad. These include: teaching profession across different countries, their structure, functions, and effectiveness, as well as processes and factors that affect education systems (globalization, European and universal dimensions in education, multiculturalism and civic training), promoting education reforms, exchanges within the international community and the broadening of school knowledge. The latter is accomplished through research on school curriculum and content across

several countries rather than research on the school as a social institution in constant interaction with society. An important point on teachers profession in a changing world would perhaps be the emphasis on human values and humanistic education¹. This maybe contribute to the formation of a new context on teachers training and retraining systems based on the real educational needs of the 21st century.

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¹ A. Kazamias, Regarding Comparative Education or Towards a Promethean Humanism in Modern Cosmopolis (Editor: P. Calogiannaki). Series: Comparative Education (Series Directors: A. Kazamias, P. Calogiannaki, S. Bouzakis) Athens, Atrapos Publicers, 2008.