Recording of Primary Education Teachers' Opinions on the Use of Mentoring in the Frame of Implementation of Innovative Educational Programmes

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Abstract

The present paper records the opinions of primary education teachers on the use of mentoring in the frame of implementation of innovative educational programmes. In the first part of the paper, the categories of the innovative educational programmes are presented and the notion of mentoring as well as the characteristics of the mentor role are analysed. Moreover, the frame of implementation of mentoring is presented.

The second part of the paper presents the methodology implemented in the research and the most important research findings. The paper ends with the formulation of conclusions regarding the application of mentoring in the frame of implementation of innovative educational programmes.

Keywords: primary education teachers, mentoring, innovative, educational programmes

1. Introduction

Mentoring is considered an effective method of staff development and training. The word "mentor" comes from Greek mythology and is included in Homer's "Odyssey". Mentor, who was in fact the goddess Athena in disguise, was the counsellor or teacher of Telemachus, the son of Odysseus. The mentor's role was to educate young Telemachus through encouragement and guidance (Cunningham & Eberle, 1993; Kefalas, 2005, p. 2; Equal, 2006, p. 22).

Webster's Dictionary defines "mentor" as "a wise and trusted counsellor or teacher" while the Random House Dictionary defines "mentee" as "the person who is guided by a mentor". Consequently, mentoring is the guidance process which takes place between a guide-mentor and a guided-mentee (E. Friday & S. Friday, 2002, p. 154). The notion of a mentor is perceived as a relationship between a professional and a trainee to whom the mentor offers knowledge, skills, support, reflections and visions (Papastamatis, 2010, p. 210).

In education, educators seek a mentor when they want to evolve, to improve their educational and teaching practices, to feel secure about their choices and to acquire knowledge and skills around a subject.

The mentor, on their part, who has greater experience in the particular field or subject compared with that of the trainees, guides the trainees by transferring their knowledge, experience and good practices to them; he functions as a trusted friend and supporter for them (Fragoulis, 2013).

2. Innovative Educational Programmes in Primary Education

The innovative programmes in primary education are divided into three main categories.

The first category includes the innovative interdisciplinary programmes, such as Environmental Education, Health Education, Local History and Cultural Themes. These programmes aim to renew the content of school knowledge and the learning process and along with the School Vocational Orientation, they are included in the School Activities (Official Government Gazette 629/23-10-1992).

The main objectives of the innovative interdisciplinary programmes are:

a) The development of positive attitudes and behaviours.

b) The cultivation of values in people's social life and in their role as active citizens.

c) The development of basic skills for resolving problems in daily life.

d) The promotion of new teaching and learning methods.

The flexible zone programmes belong to the second category. The main objective of the flexible zone programmes is the development of a cross-thematic approach through activities which aim at a holistic approach to knowledge and at skill acquisition through experiential and collaborative team learning processes, with work plans being the main methodological tool (Karatzia-Stavlioti, 2002).

The flexible zone connects knowledge of different disciplines and upgrades the social and cultural role of school, which is connected to daily life. Most importantly, though, the roles of teachers and students change; the former become animators and the latter become active members in the construction of knowledge in the team.

The European Programmes, such as the "Comenius" programme and the "eTwinning" programme, belong to the third category. These programmes aim to improve the provided education through transnational educational collaborations, to develop the European identity and to reinforce the European dimension. They mainly concern exchanges of teachers who visit other European schools and transfer elements of the Greek education, broaden their horizons and collect ideas for upgrading the analytical curricula.

The "eTwinning" programme concerns e-twinnings of schools from different European countries via the Internet. eTwinning can be used as a means of presenting the work of the teachers involved in the above mentioned programmes, outside the boundaries of our country. Teachers can combine eTwinning with another programme, use the tools provided by the eTwinning portal, cooperate with their European Union colleagues and enter the national and European eTwinning competitions which take place annually. The function of the eTwinning programme is supplementary to the Environmental Education, Health Education and Career Education programmes.

Programmes in primary education are implemented within the curriculum in the frame of the flexible zone and are spread over all the school subjects as well as the all-day school curriculum.

3. Aim and Objectives of Mentoring

Mentoring aims to offer help and support to teachers so that they effectively manage their individual learning, further develop their skills, improve their performance and become more effective in their work (Mihiotis et al., 2006, p. 24).

Mentoring has the following objectives:

- To offer help and guidance from an experienced person to a person with less experience in the frame of an interpersonal relationship, which is developed between the two people.

- To give to the protégé the broader picture of the socioeconomic and educational frame in which the particular educational programme is implemented.

- To offer to the protégé learning opportunities in a non-threatening environment.

- To appropriately support the inexperienced teacher in matters of design, organisation, implementation and evaluation of innovative educational programmes.

- To offer help in resolving problems which arise during the implementation of innovative educational programmes (Fragoulis, 2013).

4. The Mentor Roles

Farren et al. (1984 in Conway, 1995, p. 6; Papastamatis, 2010, p. 210) mention the following mentor roles:

- *Sponso*–the mentor increases the exposure of the protégés (or mentees). Some mentors characterise themselves as protectors. Mentors can offer an appropriate training environment to their protégés.

- *Teacher*–the mentor creates learning opportunities for the protégés (or mentees), using real and hypothetical situations.

- *Devil's advocate*–the mentor causes and deals with the difficulties of the protégés (or mentees) in order to help them execute their work more effectively

- *Coach*–the mentor supports his protégés (or mentees) by detecting what is important for them to learn, what kind of skills and competences they should develop and to which degree.

Woodd (1997) mentions the synthetic elements of the mentor role, which include the roles of supervisor, coach, counsellor and sponsor. The mentor's characteristic, emotional empathy, is considered an important factor in the

development of the mentor-protégé (or -mentee) relationship. The creation of a healthy relationship between mentor and protégés is of vital importance for the protégés' learning and professional support (Finlay-Clifford & Green, 1996, p. 80).

5. The Use of Mentoring in the Frame of Implementation of Innovative Educational Programmes

Mentoring, as a process of counselling and teaching guidance, significantly contributes to the teachers' professional development and therefore to the improvement of the quality of their educational works (Tang & Choi, 2005, p. 383).

According to Collin (1998), mentors can systematically support and effectively guide teachers in the execution of their teaching work, as through the experience and education they possess, they have developed the following skills to a significant degree (Collin, 1998, p. 24):

- Recognition of the competences and weaknesses of the less experienced educators.
- Recognition of the difficulties that teachers face in effectively designing, implementing and evaluating their educational- teaching work.
- Support of the teachers in difficulties and problems that arise during the exercise of their work.
- Skills of analysing difficulties.
- Skills of dealing with- resolving difficulties.
- Skills of mentoring the educators.

In addition, in the frame of using the mentoring process, the teachers' professional development is achieved to a significant degree, as the relationship which is developed between mentor and protégé is based on the mutual interest and the relationship of trust developed between them (Scandura et al., 1996, p. 52).

Johnson, Geroy, and Griego (1999) present the mentoring relationship as a relationship which is influenced and formed by the combination of three parameters: a) socialisation, b) duty and c) lifespan.

Calderhead and Shorrock's (1997 in Rajuan & Verloop, 2007) mention that the mentoring process contributes to the teachers' professional development as it contributes to the development of five important domains of their personality. In particular, it contributes to the development of: a) the academic domain through the provision of knowledge, b) the teaching domain through the development and cultivation of teaching skills and the demonstration of good practices, c) the mentoring domain through the development of problem-solving processes, d) the domain of their personality development through the development of various cognitive, social and emotional skills and e) the metacognitive domain through the development of critical-thinking processes.

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Aim

The aim of the present research is to explore primary education teachers' opinions on the use of mentoring during the processes of designing, implementing and evaluating innovative educational programmes in primary education.

6.2 Research Questions

(1) The trainees' opinions on the use of mentoring in the preparation-design of the innovative educational programmes depend on their demographic characteristics.

(2) The trainees' opinions on the use of mentoring in the selection of the content of educational activities depend on their demographic characteristics.

(3) The trainees' opinions on the use of mentoring during the process of implementing the educational activities depend on their demographic characteristics.

(4) The trainees' opinions on the use of mentoring in the realisation of teaching depend on their demographic characteristics.

(5) The trainees' opinions on the use of mentoring in the evaluation of the learning outcomes of the innovative educational programmes depend on their demographic characteristics.

6.3 Population-Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 95 primary education teachers from the prefectures of Achaia and Heraklion-Crete, who implemented innovative educational programmes during the school year 2012-2013.

The sample was selected using the method of random systematic sampling from all the school units which participated in the implementation of the corresponding programmes (Dimitropoulos, 2001, pp. 52-54).

6.4 Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool used for conducting the research was the questionnaire, as it allows a great number of data to be collected in a short time; this collection would have been extremely time-consuming and therefore difficult to achieve with another technique due to the large number and geographical dispersion of the post-graduate students in combination with the available time and travel ability of the researchers (Kvale, 1996, p. 104; Dimitropoulos, 2001, p. 210; Robson, 2002, p. 271). The combination of open and closed type questions allowed for the collection of the necessary qualitative and quantitative data for conducting the research (Cohen & Manion, 1997, pp. 140-141; Kiriazi, 1999, pp. 127-131).

6.5 Statistical Processing

The questionnaires were processed with the use of the SPSS V.17 statistical programme, which is very widely used in the field of social sciences. Using the SPSS V.17 statistical programme, we performed the analysis of the questionnaire questions.

7. Results

7.1 Demographic Characteristics

As regards the demographic data of the subjects who participated in the research, the following data were obtained:

In relation to sex:

Out of the 95 subjects who completed the questionnaire, 40 (42.1%) were men and 55 (57.9%) were women.

In relation to age:

Out of the research subjects, 24 (25.2%) were 25-34 years of age, 46 (48.5%) were 35-44 years of age and 25 subjects (26.3%) were 45-54 years of age.

Table 1. Distribution according to age

25-34 YEARS OF AGE	24	25.2%
35-44 YEARS OF AGE	46	48.5%
45-54 YEARS OF AGE	25	26.3%
TOTAL	95	100%

In relation to expertise:

Out of the respondents, 56 (58.9%) were teachers, 16 (16.9%) were foreign language teachers and 23 (24.2%) were teachers of a particular expertise (physical education, theatre education, art subjects).

Table 2. Distribution according to expertise

TEACHERS	56	58.9%
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS	16	16.9%
TEACHERS OF A PARTICULAR EXPERTISE	23	24.2%
TOTAL	95	100%

7.2 Trainees' Opinions on the Contribution of Mentoring to the Preparation-Design of the Innovative Educational Programmes

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you make an appropriate selection of an educational programme"*, we found the following from the research results: 60 subjects (63.2%) stated "very much" or "much", 24 subjects (25.3%) mentioned "adequately" while 11 subjects (11.5%) stated "very little".

Table 3. Mentoring and selection of the appropriate educational programme

VERY MUCH & MUCH	60	63.2%
ADEQUATELY	24	25.3%
VERY LITTLE	11	11.5%
TOTAL	95	100%

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you clarify the aims and objectives of the programme"*, we found the following from the research results: 63 subjects (66.3%) stated "very much" or "much", 20 subjects (21.1%) stated "adequately" while 12 subjects (12.6%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) was observed in relation to the age (p=0.00) and the basic qualification (p=0.00) of the subjects.

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you make a correct selection of teaching methods"* we found the following from the research results: 54 subjects (56.8%) stated "very much" or "much", 23 subjects (24.2%) stated "adequately" while 18 subjects (19.0%) mentioned "very little".

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you select appropriate educational techniques during the implementation process of the innovative educational programmes"*, we found the following from the research results: 48 subjects (50.5%) stated "very much", 25 subjects (26.3%) stated "much" while 22 subjects (23.2%) mentioned "adequately".

Table 4. Mentoring and selection of appropriate educational techniques

VERY MUCH	48	50.5%
MUCH	25	26.3%
ADEQUATELY	22	23.2%
TOTAL	95	100%

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you select appropriate educational resources during the implementation process of the innovative educational programmes"*, we found the following from the research results: 45 subjects (47.4%) stated "very much", 28 subjects (29.5%) stated "much" while 22 subjects (23.1%) stated "adequately". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) was observed in relation to the age (p=0.00) and the expertise (p=0.01) of the subjects.

7.3 Trainees' Opinions on the Contribution of Mentoring to the Selection of Teaching Content

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you adapt the content of your teaching intervention to your students' needs"*, we found the following from the research results: 64 subjects (64.7%) stated "very much" or "much", 20 subjects (21.0%) stated "adequately" while 11 subjects (11.6%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) was observed in relation to the age (p=0.00) and the expertise (p=0.02) of the subjects.

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you harmonise the content of your teaching intervention with your students' special characteristics"*, we found the following from the research results: 42 subjects (44.2%) stated "very much" or "much", 35 subjects (36.9%) mentioned "adequately" while 18 subjects (18.9%) mentioned "very little".

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you adapt the content of your teaching intervention to your students' cognitive level"*, we found the following from the research results: 42 subjects (44.2%) stated "very much", 37 subjects (39.0%) stated "adequately" while 16 subjects (16.8%) mentioned "very little".

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you adapt the programme content to the trainees' interests"*, we found the following from the research results: 62 subjects (65.3%) stated "very much" or "much", 18 subjects (18.9%) stated "adequately" while 15 subjects (15.8%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) was observed

in relation to the age (p=0.01) and the expertise (p=0.02) of the subjects.

Table 5. Mentoring and harmonisation of programme content with the trainees' interests

VERY MUCH & MUCH	62	65.3%
ADEQUATELY	18	18.9%
VERY LITTLE	15	15.8%
TOTAL	95	100%

7.4 Trainees' Opinions on the Contribution of Mentoring to the Realisation of Teaching

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you appropriately stimulate your students' interest in the frame of implementation of the innovative educational programmes"*, we found the following from the research results: 58 subjects (61.1%) stated "very much" or "much", 24 subjects (25.2%) mentioned "adequately" while 13 subjects (13.7%) mentioned "very little".

Table 6. Mentoring and stimulation of trainees' interest

VERY MUCH & MUCH	58	61.1%
ADEQUATELY	24	25.2%
VERY LITTLE	13	13.7%
TOTAL	95	100%

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you appropriately connect the programme content with the objectives of the programme"*, we found the following from the research results: 28 subjects (29.5%) stated "very much", 47 subjects (49.5%) stated "much" while 20 subjects (21.0%) mentioned "adequately".

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you achieve an appropriate connection between theory and practice"*, we found the following from the research results: 57 subjects (60.1%) stated "very much" or "much", 16 subjects (23.1%) stated "adequately" while 7 subjects (16.8%) mentioned "very little".

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you achieve appropriate time-management during the implementation of the programme"*, we found the following from the research results: 48 subjects (50.6%) stated "very much" or "much", 35 subjects (36.8%) mentioned "adequately" while 12 subjects (12.6%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) was observed in relation to the sex (p=0.04) and the age (p=0.01) of the subjects.

Table 7. Mentoring and appropriate time-management

VERY MUCH & MUCH	48	50.6%
ADEQUATELY	35	36.8%
VERY LITTLE	12	12.6%
TOTAL	95	100%

7.5 Trainees' Opinions on the Contribution of Mentoring to the Formation of an Appropriate Climate of Communication with the Students

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you develop an equal communication relationship with your students"*, we found the following from the research results: 14 subjects (17.5%) stated "very much", 59 subjects (73.8%) stated "much" while 2 subjects (2.5%) mentioned "very little".

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you promote your*

students' active participation in the educational process", we found the following from the research results: 67 subjects (83.8%) stated "very much" or "much", 6 subjects (7.5%) stated "adequately" while 7 subjects (8.8%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance (α≤0.05) was observed in relation to the sex (p=0.00) and the age (p=0.02) of the subjects.

Table 8. Mentoring and promotion of students' active participation in the learning process

VERY MUCH & MUCH	67	83.8%
ADEQUATELY	6	7.5%
VERY LITTLE	7	8.8%
TOTAL	80	100%

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you to encourage the development of a team climate of communication"*, we found the following from the research results: 54 subjects (67.5%) stated "very much" or "much", 21 subjects (26.3%) stated "adequately" while 5 subjects (6.3%) mentioned 'not at all'. Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance (α≤0.05) was observed in relation to the sex (p=0.04) and the age (p=0.01) of the subjects.

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you correctly use the educational area"*, we found the following from the research results: 24 subjects (30.0%) stated "very much", 30 subjects (37.5%) stated "much", 21 subjects (26.3%) mentioned "adequately" while 5 subjects (6.3%) mentioned "not at all".

7.6 Trainees' Opinions on the Contribution of Mentoring to the Evaluation of the Learning Outcomes

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you use appropriate techniques for evaluating the learning outcomes of the innovative educational programmes"*, we found the following from the research results: 52 subjects (54.7%) stated "very much" or "much", 25 subjects (26.3%) stated "adequately" while 18 subjects (19.0%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance (α≤0.05) was observed in relation to the age (p=0.00) and the expertise (p=0.01) of the subjects.

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you timely implement the necessary corrective interventions for achieving the objectives of the innovative educational programmes"*, we found the following from the research results: 60 subjects (63.1%) mentioned "very much" or "much", 25 subjects (26.3%) stated "adequately" while 10 subjects (10.6%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance (α≤0.05) was observed in relation to the age (p=0.01) of the subjects.

Table 9. Mentoring and corrective interventions for achieving teaching objectives

VERY MUCH & MUCH	60	63.1%
ADEQUATELY	25	26.3%
VERY LITTLE	10	10.6%
TOTAL	95	100%

In relation to the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you review ineffective teaching methods and techniques in the frame of implementation of the innovative programmes"*, we found the following from the research results: 55 subjects (57.9%) mentioned "very much" or "much", 34 subjects (35.8%) mentioned "adequately" while 6 subjects (6.3%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance (α≤0.05) was observed in relation to the age (p=0.01) of the subjects.

Table 10. Mentoring and review of ineffective methods and techniques

VERY MUCH & MUCH	55	62.6%
ADEQUATELY	34	37.4%
VERY LITTLE	6	6.3%
TOTAL	95	100%

Regarding the subject responses to the question *"The mentoring process has helped you attempt innovations during the implementation of innovative educational programmes"*, we found the following from the research results: 35 subjects (36.8%) stated "very much", 42 subjects (44.2%) stated "much", 12 subjects (12.6%) stated "adequately" while 6 subjects (6.4%) mentioned "very little". Out of the bivariate analysis with control of the x^2 criterion, statistical significance ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) was observed in relation to the age (p=0.01) and the expertise (p=0.02) of the subjects.

8. Conclusions

The research findings show that a high percentage of the research subjects consider that the mentoring process helps in the better preparation–design of the innovative educational programmes. More specifically, they express the opinion that the mentoring process helps them in the appropriate selection of teaching subject, in the correct formulation of the aims and objectives of the programme and in the appropriate selection of educational methods, teaching techniques as well as educational resources. This opinion is more strongly stated by the teachers of a younger age as well as by the teachers of a particular expertise.

A high percentage of the research participants express the opinion that the mentoring process contributes to the selection of an appropriate subject during the implementation of innovative educational programmes. In particular, they mention that the mentoring process helps in the harmonisation of the teaching intervention content with the needs, special characteristics, interests and cognitive level of the trainees. This opinion is more strongly stated by the trainees of a younger age as well as by the teachers of a particular expertise.

A very large percentage of the research subjects consider that the mentoring process substantially helps in the successful implementation of the innovative educational programmes as it contributes to the appropriate stimulation of the trainees' interest, to the appropriate connection of the content with the objectives of the programme and to the readiness for harmonisation of the programme content with the learning process flow. This opinion is more strongly stated by all teachers regardless of their demographic characteristics.

A high percentage of the research participants express the opinion that the mentoring process helps in the formation of an appropriate climate of communication with the trainees as it contributes to the development of equal communication relationships between teacher and students, promotes the students' active participation in the educational process and encourages the development of a team climate of communication. This opinion is more strongly stated by the female teachers as well as by the teachers of a younger age.

A very large percentage of the research subjects consider that the mentoring process substantially helps in the use of appropriate techniques for evaluating the learning outcomes, controlling the achievement of the objectives of the educational programmes as well as self-assessing the teaching intervention. This opinion is more strongly stated by the teachers of a younger age as well as by the teachers of a particular expertise.

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