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## Behavioral Factors Affecting the Acclimatization of Newly-Appointed Teachers in Primary Schools: An Empirical Investigation

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**Abstract:** Despite findings in the literature on its significance, the acclimatization of teachers into school units is not well organized. Hence, many newly appointed teachers fell as a “foreign body” into school, they do not interact with the other members of staff and they are not actively engaged in school life. This study aims to explore the factors involved in social behavior (collegial relations) among members of the educational community. These factors may affect the acclimatization/reception of teachers who, regardless of their teaching experience, are called to teach for the first time in a new school environment. According to the findings, it is essential the attitudes of teaching staff, in matters of cooperation, to be transformed and a collegial climate in schools to be established. To this end, fostering empathy among teachers through educational activities and enhancing opportunities for cooperation and teamwork inside and outside the classroom would be of significant contribution.

**Keywords:** *Teacher collegiality, teacher community, teacher induction, teacher reception.*

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### Introduction

The way schools welcome their teachers is a factor that significantly affects the latter's organizational assimilation into the new school environment and their willingness to go above and beyond when it comes to providing teaching and pedagogical guidance to students. In particular, relevant research over the past decade has shown that the reception and smooth integration of teachers into the school unit contributes to a sense of "belonging" and a desire to cooperate with their colleagues (Bush & Middlewood, 2013; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). It also impacts the level of teaching they provide and the learning outcomes achieved (Goddard et al., 2007; Shah, 2012). Furthermore, it enhances their inclination towards professional development (Anthony et al., 2011; Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010b) and constitutes a potential factor when deciding to retire early, either from the teaching profession or from their current school unit (Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).

However, despite such findings in the literature on its significance, the reception/integration of teachers into their school units is not “well organized and many schools do not take systematic action in this area” (Feiman-Nemser, 2010, p. 22). In Greece, for example, unlike other countries such as Japan, China, France, Switzerland and the United States (Ingvarson et al., 2014; Wong, 2005; Zujlan & Požarnik 2014), the reception/integration of teachers in schools is not officially established. In addition, the administrative body of the Greek primary school (the principal or director, the deputy director and the association of teachers of each school) cannot take initiatives to this direction due to the highly centralized educational system (Saiti, 2015; Saiti & Eliophotou-Menon, 2009). Any such actions are devoid of a “tailored plan” (Hristodoulakis, 2009) and are dependent upon voluntary initiatives on the part of principals and/or teachers (Douloudi, 2018). They are also complementary to the introductory training of newly-appointed teachers and focus on “updating the knowledge of their teaching subject, the teaching use of technology, intercultural education etc.” (Katsibras & Gkelameris, 2018, p. 13).

But even at research level, no attempt has been made to identify factors that may influence teachers' adaptation to their new school. This is despite the fact that (a) human resources management is an element that differentiates schools

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from one another and is a determining factor in their smooth operation (teaching, pedagogical, administrative), and (b) teachers who come to work in a school for the first time, whether in Greece (Anagnostopoulos, 2018; Mlekanis, 2005; Saitis & Saiti, 2018; Thanasopoulou, 2019) or abroad (Dawson & Shand, 2019; Eliophotou-Menon, 2012; Feiman-Nemser, 2010), tend not to be offered their principal's or colleagues' cooperation. More often than not, they feel like a "foreign body" or simply "alone". In addition, they lack opportunities to interact with the school community and actively engage in school life (Feiman-Nemser, 2010; Glazzard & Coverdale, 2018).

Consequently, as aforementioned, "this area has not been thoroughly investigated" (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019, p. 117) and the effort to identify the factors that influence the integration of teachers into their new school should continue to concern researchers (Strong, 2005). For the above reasons, this research paper focuses on the internal environment of the school unit and explores the extent to which the effect of collegial stance contributes to the integration of teachers into schools. Its objectives are, through the empirical analysis of primary school teachers' views, to investigate:

- *Firstly*, what behaviours on the part of the school principal and the teachers' association may affect the integration and then acclimatization of teachers who, regardless of their teaching experience, come to teach for the first time in a new school environment, and

- *Secondly*, given the diversity in the characteristics of school teaching staff, the existence of any variations in these behaviours based on variables such as age, years of teaching experience and educational level.

In order to achieve the above objectives, our work is structured as follows: initially, the importance and role of the reception and integration of each teacher in each new school environment and the factors that affect it are investigated bibliographically. This is then followed by the research methodology, the discussion and conclusions on its findings, the practical usefulness of these conclusions, and finally, a presentation of research limitations and recommendations for further investigation of the subject.

### Literature Review

Upon perusal of the pertinent literature, it becomes evident that there are numerous definitions regarding the meaning and content of the term "integration of teachers" in schools (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019; Totterdell et al., 2004). One definition asserts that integration is about supporting new entrants in the teaching profession through structured vocational counselling and short-term guidance programmes, for a few weeks or months (Schermerhorn, 2012). However, unlike most literature references (Eliophotou-Menon, 2012; Kang & Berliner, 2012; Wong et al., 2005) and educational policy texts (European Commission, 2015; Ingersoll, 2012; Pain & Schwille, 2010), this study is not limited to newly-hired teachers. On the contrary, it also applies to teachers who, at the beginning of the school year, may have been appointed to a new school unit for a variety of reasons (health, family, etc.). The expansion of the term "integration", as attempted in this work, could be justified on the grounds that it is necessary to "further capitalise on existing knowledge and experience" of all teachers so as "to promote quality classroom teaching for the benefit of pupils" (Moir & Gless, 2001, p. 114). In addition, teachers who are frequently obliged to change schools, either because of failings in the school education staffing system - as in the Greek case (Alexopoulos, 2019) - or for personal reasons (Grissom et al., 2016), are likely to face personal, social and professional hardships in their new working environment with negative implications for the school community and for their class (Richards et al., 2019; Rogari et al., 2015). It is for this reason that teachers' smooth integration presupposes the adoption of an induction programme that will enhance their acclimatization to their new working environment.

School units are primarily qualified for the implementation of integration programmes (Kearney, 2021), as it is on their premises that teachers work on a daily basis. However, social institutions, scientific associations or other educational institutions (Zembytska, 2016) and the networks of cooperation between them (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004) are also recognized as potential actors in programmes designed for the reception and acclimatization of teachers in schools.

The aim of the integration programme for schoolteachers, usually of a compulsory nature, is mainly to help them become more sociable therein. More specifically, new teachers should not feel left to their own devices; on the contrary, they should get familiar with the current school staff, increase their creative nature and bridge any chasms between their expectations and the school reality in which they are expected to teach for the first time (Kardos et al., 2001; Moore-Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, improving the quality of teaching and learning, ensuring a positive attitude of teachers towards their profession, strengthening their commitment to it and helping them familiarize themselves with the culture of the school concerned have been stated as additional objectives intended for teachers' acclimatization in schools (Huling-Austin, 1990).

In relevant literature, the reception and acclimatization of teachers into school units is predominantly viewed in a positive light. This is because it helps teachers "assimilate the basic organizational elements and culture of their new school unit" (Snoek et al., 2010, p. 15); they feel justified for choosing to teach in it and engage with the new school environment, which develops in them a disposition to stay longer (Howe, 2015; Kelley, 2004; Mansfield & Gu, 2019; Totterdell et al., 2004), in close cooperation with the school community members (Breux & Wong, 2003; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010; Panteli, 2009). Teacher's full acclimatization to their school also has a beneficial effect on their

further professional development, reducing their professional stress, resolving everyday problems in school and in the classroom (Howe, 2015; Kutsyuruba, 2012; Totterdell et al., 2004; Wong, 2005) and adopting attitudes and behaviours which are appropriate and relevant to the psychodynamics of each school's student population.

According to relevant studies, the key factors that can influence the reception and acclimatization of teachers to a new school unit could be categorised as follows:

- Financial resources; that is to say the natural environment, the school's logistical infrastructure, technological equipment and time management (Allensworth et al., 2009; Buckley et al., 2004; Wynn et al., 2007). These are necessary preconditions, not just for teachers to carry out their teaching duties seamlessly in a new school (Swanlund, 2011) but also for the school management to train the new teaching staff, keep them up-to-date and help them acclimatize to their school environment e.g., through lectures, workshops, joint school activities and collaborations.
- Education administration services which, as a result of their decision making, shape the organisational framework of teacher acclimatization programs and their content in schools (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019). In Greece, the competent authority for such action is the Ministry of Education (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2013). Due to the centralised administrative school system in Greece (Saiti & Saitis, 2020), this body defines and supervises both the staffing of schools and the acclimatization of teachers by organising (for newly-appointed teachers only), an introductory short-term training, outside the school unit (Alexopoulos, 2019).
- The working status of teaching staff, i.e., full-time or part-time (Ingersoll, 2003). Relevant studies indicate that when a teacher's employment status in a school is characterised by permanence and full-time work, they are expected to acclimatise more easily therein (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010).
- The elements comprising the school culture (Grammatikopoulos et al., 2013) such as professional beliefs, cooperative relationships, values and the staff's teaching practices. For Wechsler et al. (2010), this factor is considered to be of particular significance for the socialization/acclimatization of teachers into their new school and exerts a positive impact (especially for less-experienced teachers) on their professional development (Fenwick, 2011).
- The role of the principal/leader who, through their cooperative disposition and behaviour, has been proven to facilitate the integration of teachers into school (Angelle, 2002; Johnson & The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004).
- The social relationships and interactions inside and outside the school unit (Achinstein, 2006; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010). In particular, this factor refers to:

(a) The interpersonal collaborative relationships among schoolteachers. Special emphasis is placed on the counselling relationship between newly-placed teachers and mentors. In fact, mentorship, despite the criticism it has received on account of its theoretical clarification, (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007), is considered an indispensable part (Wong, 2004) or even "synonymous with the reception/acclimatization of teachers at schools" (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004, p. 29). However, regardless of whether it is mentorship or other practices such as observation and coaching that shall be preferentially utilized for the reception and acclimatization of teachers in their new school (Helms-Lorenz et al., 2016), social aptitudes are considered as the basic principles that should govern this process (Rippon & Martin, 2003). A collaborative spirit and eagerness to share knowledge and experience - typical of the current social reality as well as modern learning - seem to play the most vital role.

(b) The relationships of the members of the school community with authorities, entities and stakeholders in the local community (e.g., psychologists, coaches, teachers at other schools). Those relationships have been found to contribute significantly to the reception and acclimatization of newly-appointed teachers at both a formal (Gardiner, 2012) as well as an informal level (Donne & Lin, 2013).

- Personal and individual traits, such as emotional intelligence and a disposition to mutual trust, mutual respect, self-awareness, a willingness to take initiative, scientific knowledge and teaching skills (Martin & Rippon, 2003). This group of factors also comprise age, qualifications, gender, any social/family obligations and the degree of professional satisfaction (Achinstein et al., 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010).

To sum up, it could be asserted that although in the relevant literature the term "integration of teachers" concerns newly-appointed teachers, it cannot be limited to them only. The reason being that any teacher could find oneself in a different school environment for a variety of reasons (e.g., work- or family-related) and still face the same hardships and challenges.

Furthermore, with regard to the interest of scholars, this seems to focus on the content, practices, organisation and institutional framework that should govern the reception and acclimatization process of new teachers. Many scholars also draw attention to the role and contribution of mentors' and teachers' collaborative learning groups at schools (Helms-Lorenz et al., 2016). Alternatively, in the case of Greek schools, due to the absence of mentorship and reception/integration programs, the burden of acclimatizing newly-placed teachers falls on, and is assumed by, the principal and the teachers' association (Eliophotou-Menon, 2012; Iordanides & Vryoni, 2013; Snoek et al., 2011; Weasmer & Woods, 2000).

### Methodology

The research data has been collected through an anonymous questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed by mail (both conventional and electronic) and completed by primary school teachers serving in three regional districts of Greece: Central and Northern Athens, Corinth, and Heraklion in Crete, who had been informed about the nature of the research (voluntary participation, aim). It was a sample of convenience (its social/demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1), which produced 257 questionnaires from 22 primary schools (the overall population of Greek primary school teachers in 2020, the year that this study was conducted, was 69.293), properly completed and suitable for further statistical processing (response rate 70.5%).

Table 1. Social/demographic characteristics of the sample

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage %
<b>A. Sex</b>		
Male	66	25.7
Female	191	74.3
<b>B. Age</b>		
≤ 30 years old	42	4.3
31-40 years old	125	48.6
41-50 years old	76	29.6
≥ 51 years old	14	5.4
<b>C. Family status</b>		
Married	167	64.9
Single	75	29.3
Other	15	5.8
<b>D. Studies in education management/administration</b>		
	43	17.6
<b>E. Specialisation field</b>		
Primary school teacher, general or special needs education	210	81.8
Teacher of Physical Education	17	6.6
Teacher of English Language	15	5.8
Teacher of French, German Language	9	3.5
Other field (Art, Music)	6	2.3
<b>F. Type of service in public education</b>		
Permanent, fixed-term position	153	59.8
Permanent, under assignment or secondment	26	10.1
Substitute / On an hourly-paid basis	78	30.1
<b>G. Number of different school placements while in education service</b>		
0-2 times	29	11.3
3-6 times	108	42
More than 6 times	120	46.7
<b>H. Total time of service in education</b>		
up to 5	34	13.4
6 to 10	38	15
11-20	108	42.7
≥ 20 years	77	28.9
<b>I. Time of service in current school</b>		
up to 5	163	64.4
6-10	53	20.9
11-20	32	12.6
≥20 years	9	2.1
<b>J. Difficulties upon assuming duties at schools when you were first appointed</b>		
Yes	162	63.5
No	95	36.5

The questionnaire was deemed as an appropriate research tool for the present study given that it had been utilized for data collection in similar studies in the past (Eliophotou-Menon, 2012; Kang & Berliner, 2012; Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2016). It was designed by the research team upon perusal of former studies in relevant literature (Anagnostopoulos, 2018; Anthony et al., 2019; Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010a; Eliophotou-Menon, 2012) and through the exchange of ideas with principals and teachers in the prefectures of Attica and Corinth. The questions were consolidated so as to take their final form subsequent to a pilot questionnaire (reliability test) which was administered to a small sample (57 teachers in 4 schools in the prefecture of Attica and 2 in Corinth), after taking into consideration

additional observations put forward by teachers. The reliability coefficient of the pilot questionnaire was of a similar level to that of the main study ( $\geq 0.70$ ).

The final questionnaire, which was distributed by the researchers, included two types of measurements. The *first type* comprises 10 variables which could be identified as “General Characteristics of the Sample” (see Table 1).

The *second type* of measurement consists of 4 axes of variables (26 variables in total), which evaluate and quantify teachers’ views through a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree to 5 = Totally agree, or 1 = Not at all to 5 = Very Much).

The research findings were collected from the research team and statistically processed with the aid of the statistical package SPSS (v. 25) as well as techniques related to both nominal and qualitative variables. Those mainly included:

(a) A calculation of the reliability coefficient *Cronbach’s  $\alpha$* .

(b) Data reduction techniques for multivariate sets of variables that investigate the same phenomenon/trait. In particular, Factor Analysis was utilized in order to identify the main factors that correspond to a significant correlation percentage among variables. The exploratory factor analysis was preferred, for the reason that it is considered as the most important since it allowed us to draw conclusions from a complex set of variables, such as those of our research questionnaire, reducing afterwards them to a smaller number of factors (the hypervariables). Through the exploratory factor analysis, we aimed to understand the pattern in the answers of the primary school teachers who answered the closed-question questionnaire, to identify the questions that measure similar things and to understand the structure of their answers to the questionnaire.

(c) Cattell’s Scree Plot technique was used to determine the number of factors that would be extracted.

(d) Univariate Frequency Distribution Tables and relevant diagrams were applied for the depiction of variables as well as Bivariate Frequency Distribution Tables so as to detect correlations between two variables. Finally, those correlations were evaluated using the Pearson Chi-Square test.

## Results

At first, the questionnaire’s internal consistency was tested. The results (see Table 2) showed that in all 4 axes of variables used, the reliability coefficient was quite satisfactory, ranging from 0.70 to 0.93. Consequently, the grouping of the variables/questions and the principal component that arose from those questions was considered reliable, its measurement accurate and the results therein obtained statistically significant and usable.

Table 2. Questionnaire axes and their reliability

Question Axis	Reliability Coefficient (Cronbach’s Alpha)
(1) Reception – Assistance from principal upon arrival of newly-appointed teachers at the school unit	0.896 (N of Items 6)
(2) Reception – Assistance from principal during the first trimester upon the newly-appointed teachers’ arrival at the new school unit	0.937 (N of Items 10)
(3) Reception – Assistance from teachers’ association upon arrival of newly-appointed teachers at the school unit	0.702 (N of Items 7)
(4) Reception – Assistance from teachers’ association during the first trimester upon the newly-appointed teachers’ arrival at the new school unit	0.913 (N of Items 66)

Two types of measurements were then performed. The first type related to the descriptive analysis of demographics (see Table 1) which were subsequently considered as differentiating factors when analyzing the conclusions.

The second type referred to the questions comprising the questionnaire that was completed by the teachers and concentrated on the factors that have an effect on the acclimatization of newly-appointed teachers into the school unit.

The factor analysis technique was applied to the answers of those questions in 26 variables which represent several types of factors related to the reception and integration of newly-appointed teachers in the school unit or other criteria for the evaluation of the acclimatization process of a newly-appointed teacher in the school unit, which in our research constitutes the dependent variable.

Through the correlation matrix it became evident that 26 variables constitute the 4 axes of questions are related to each other ( $p > 0.05$ ) and consequently the Factor Analysis technique could be implemented. Finally, the Factor Analysis produced 4 statistically significant factors with Eigenvalue  $> 1$ , which cumulatively account for over 68% of the total variance of those 26 variables (see Table 3). Bartlett’s test of sphericity was found to be statistically significant, equal to 4507.242 (df = 325,  $p = 0.000$ ).

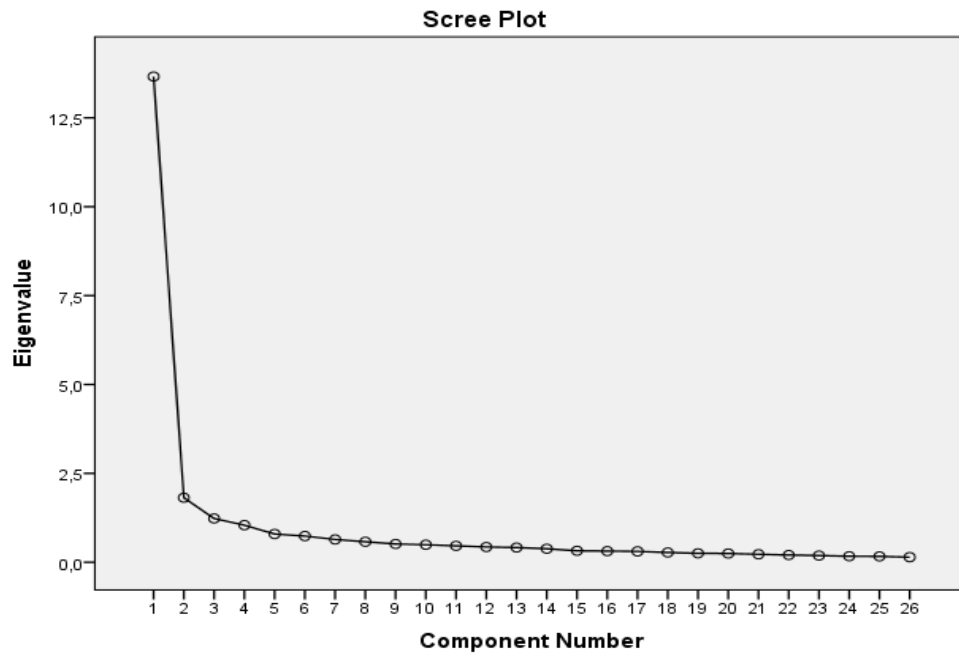
Table 3. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	13.660	52.538	52.538	13.660	52.538	52.538	6.442	24.779	24.779
2	1.815	6.981	59.519	1.815	6.981	59.519	6.078	23.379	48.157
3	1.231	4.734	64.252	1.231	4.734	64.252	4.156	15.986	64.143
4	1.043	4.013	68.265	1.043	4.013	68.265	1.072	4.123	68.265
5	0.794	3.053	71.318						
6	0.737	2.836	74.154						
7	0.640	2.463	76.617						
8	0.576	2.215	78.832						
9	0.514	1.976	80.808						
10	0.493	1.898	82.706						
11	0.461	1.773	84.479						
12	0.430	1.653	86.132						
13	0.414	1.593	87.725						
14	0.380	1.463	89.189						
15	0.324	1.246	90.434						
16	0.313	1.202	91.636						
17	0.306	1.178	92.814						
18	0.274	1.053	93.868						
19	0.252	0.969	94.837						
20	0.246	0.947	95.784						
21	0.224	0.862	96.646						
22	0.205	0.787	97.434						
23	0.188	0.725	98.158						
24	0.170	0.652	98.810						
25	0.165	0.636	99.446						
26	0.144	0.554	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Then, four factors with squares equal to or larger than 1.00 were extracted using Principal Components Analysis for the correlations of the 26 variables. The Scree-Plot Graph attested to our findings (see Graph 1).

Each factor can be considered as a weighted indicator commensurate with teachers' assessment of the factors affecting the integration of newly-placed teaching staff into the school unit. Following the Varimax orthogonal rotation method, the arrangement shown in Table 4 was produced, where the factor loadings for each of the initial variables are presented. Upon recognition of high loadings, the importance of these factors was then interpreted on the basis of the content of the variables which present the highest loadings. The *first factor* represents the collegial stance and practical support provided by the teachers' association, the *second factor* relates to the fair-balanced allocation of duties by the principal, the *third factor* depicts the principal's guidance and encouragement intended to help teachers achieve their professional goals and the *fourth factor* expresses the fair/objective stance and behavior of the teachers' association as an institutional body.



Graph 1. Scree plot

Table 4. Matrix of squared factor loadings for the variables related to the newly-appointed teachers' acclimatization to the school unit.

Variables	Factors			
	1	2	3	4
The teachers' association supported you with class difficulties	0.774	0.276	0.212	0.067
The teachers' association supported you psychologically	0.753	0.299	0.286	-0.13
The teachers' association demonstrated tolerance about mistakes or omissions of yours	0.753	0.233	0.136	0
The teachers' association offered you a sense of "belonging" in the school community	0.743	0.239	0.318	-0.09
The teachers' association surrounded you with amiability	0.732	0.301	0.214	-0.11
The teachers' association helped you handle personal problems	0.708	0.34	0.123	0.102
The teachers' association took decisions which facilitated your work	0.699	0.388	0.261	0
The teachers' association treated you on equal terms with any other senior member	0.697	0.416	0.189	-0.09
The teachers' association encouraged you to actively participate in meetings	0.652	0.29	0.314	0.219
The principal assigned duties proportionate to your abilities and experience	0.212	0.727	0.198	-0.03
The principal provided emotional support	0.438	0.702	0.237	0.037
The principal treated you on equal terms with senior school staff	0.38	0.688	0.157	-0.12
The principal guided or facilitated your professional development	0.409	0.68	0.11	0.124
The principal guided and encouraged you with your teaching duties	0.311	0.659	0.423	-0.02
The principal facilitated you in handling problems	0.477	0.657	0.219	0
The principal provided constructive feedback	0.397	0.621	0.272	0.179
The principal was attentive to personal needs or hardships	0.219	0.616	0.505	-0.04
The principal praised you in public for creative or innovative work	0.412	0.604	0.243	0.164
The principal asked you to express your views at the school's collective administration bodies	0.347	0.574	0.326	0.024
The principal informed you about particular cases of individual students	0.236	0.202	0.81	0.054
The principal escorted you around the school premises	0.182	0.247	0.746	0.045
The principal discussed the challenges of playground duty	0.311	0.136	0.735	0.051
The principal advised you on the school's goals and objectives	0.222	0.372	0.714	-0.06
The teachers' association was formal towards you	-0.049	0.035	0.037	0.925

Next, the non-parametrical Kruskal Wallis test was performed to identify whether there were variations in the average level of factors for each "general characteristic of the sample", as stated above (see Table 1).

The research results showed that, out of the above factors, the second factor (*fair-balanced allocation of duties by the principal*) is affected by age as younger teachers (31-40 years old) tend to provide higher percentages of positive answers as to whether the principal allocates duties fairly upon a newly-appointed teacher's placement at school,  $\chi^2(2, 216) = 8.788, p = 0.012$ .

The length of service at that particular school where the survey was conducted, as a differentiating factor, affects the third factor, *guidance and encouragement by the principal for the achievement of the teacher's professional goals*, since in the category "0-5 years" there are higher percentages of teachers who answer positively regarding the principal's overall support in achieving their goals,  $\chi^2(2, 220) = 11.753, p = 0.003$

Also, the frequency of school placements, as a differentiating factor, affects the second factor, *fair/balanced allocation of duties by the principal*, since in the category "0-2 times" there are higher percentages of positive answers related to the principal's fairness in allocating duties,  $\chi^2(2, 223) = 6.132, p = 0.047$ .

Finally, a newly-placed teacher facing problems while assuming duties at school, as a differentiating factor, seems to affect:

- The first factor, collegial stance and practical support by the teachers' association, where there is a higher percentage of positive answers regarding collegial stance and support from teachers who did not face difficulties,  $\chi^2(1, 226) = 23.212, p = 0.000$ .

- The second factor, fair/balanced assignment of duties by the principal, since there is a higher percentage of positive answers regarding the principal's attitude from teachers who did not face any problems,  $\chi^2(1, 226) = 15.273, p = 0.000$  and,

- The third factor, guidance and encouragement by the principal for the achievement of teacher's professional goals, as there is a larger percentage of positive answers regarding the principal's role therein from teachers who did not face difficulties,  $\chi^2(1, 226) = 12.381, p = 0.000$ .

In contrast, teachers' experiences as new placements do not seem to affect the fourth factor, the fair/objective operation of the Teachers' association as an institutional body,  $\chi^2(1, 226) = 1.682, p = 0.195$ .

### Discussion

The reception and acclimatization of teachers in their school units has been proven by research to influence the school's smooth operation, the professional growth of the teaching staff and the provision of optimum teaching to students (Kearney, 2021; Kyrou et al., 2020; Saitis & Saiti, 2018; Wong, 2004). Despite its significance, organizing the reception of newly-appointed teachers in schools presents a number of challenges and hardships (Mansfield & Gu, 2019; van Velzen et al., 2010). A variety of factors, such as the interactions among school community members, the school's logistical infrastructure, its culture, leadership etc., have been identified by pertinent literature as having the potential for significant impact as regards the reception and acclimatization of teachers in their new schools. The present study focuses on interpersonal relationships among a school unit's members. In particular, it aims to identify the behaviours that could enhance the acclimatization of teachers who, regardless of their teaching experience, are called to teach for the first time in a new school environment.

The study initially drew attention to the importance of a cooperative climate and the principal's guiding/supportive role upon receiving and acclimatizing teachers to their new school. It is worth noting that, unlike previous research (Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999; Kearney, 2021; Serpell, 2000), this empirical study has not indicated the need for partial relief of newly-appointed teachers from teaching or other extracurricular obligations, nor for a limited work schedule. This might be attributed to the particularities of the Greek school reality and, more specifically, to the frequent mobility of teachers from one school to another and the understaffing of several school units around the country. On account of those particularities, reducing the obligations of newly-appointed teachers would severely burden the senior teaching staff, thus resulting in negative consequences for their performance and the school climate.

As regards factors that affect teachers' acclimatization to a new school, this research found the first factor to be significant in terms of the practical support and guidance provided by the teachers' association to new colleagues. This finding could be due to the fact that a school's teaching faculty is well acquainted with the characteristics and particularities of students, as well as with their parents, and has shared experience from conversations among colleagues. Also, they are in a position, due to their experience and familiarization with procedures and the school's natural environment, to advise their new colleagues on the technological infrastructure and facilities of the school premises. Also, they can provide proper guidance when it comes to organizing school celebrations, educational activities and events that are commonly undertaken by the school unit.

This finding concurs and further enhances the view found in relevant literature (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015) that solidarity and collegiality among teachers constitutes a fundamental element for the development of a positive collaborative climate at school. Such a climate is considered to contribute to the optimization of learning, to the psychological-



intellectual and social development of students and eventually to the school unit's effectiveness (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015; Papadatou & Alexopoulos, 2019).

An additional interpretation of the above finding could be the school management's inability to pedagogically support newly-appointed teachers due to their extremely heavy workload. In particular, a big part of the principal's daily agenda in a Greek school is dedicated to bureaucratic activities of an executional nature (Saiti & Saitis, 2020). However, these activities deprive principals of an educational role within their leadership, hence "preventing them from dedicating time to foster a cooperative, supportive climate and guiding newly-appointed teachers in their pedagogical and teaching work" (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020, p. 37).

The second most important factor that can facilitate newly-appointed teachers' acclimatization to their school, as indicated by the present study, is having the principal allocate duties that meet a teacher's individual knowledge, competences and experience. This finding could be attributed to the fact that teachers, in their majority, take great interest in performing their teaching and extracurricular duties to the best of their ability so as to gain recognition by their students, colleagues, the school's management, students' parents and the local community (Evans & Olumide-Aluko, 2010; Keshwar Seebaluck & Devi Seegum, 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011; Yuqing, 2021). However, notwithstanding the significance of allocating responsibilities to teachers in an appropriate manner, school principals do not dedicate time for assigning duties to teachers that reflect their individual personality (character, knowledge, competences), possibly owing to the plethora of bureaucratic obligations assigned to principals by the Greek educational system's administrative hierarchy (Kaparou & Bush, 2015; Papazoglou & Koutouzis, 2019; Stavrianoudaki & Iordanides, 2018).

A factor of significant weight that affects teachers' acclimatization to their new school, as suggested by the present study, is the guidance that the principal provides to teachers with regard to their teaching and pedagogical work (e.g., information on particular cases of students and on call duty in the school yard) as well as the encouragement provided to help them achieve their professional goals (Bressman et al., 2018). These findings, which concur with pertinent research in literature, highlight the importance of the school principal's guiding and supportive role as well as the pedagogical leadership model (Boe & Hognestad, 2018; Dönmez et al., 2021; Male & Palaialogou, 2017).

Finally, the fourth most important factor for the acclimatization of newly-appointed teachers in schools seems to be the institutional role of the teachers' association. This factor represents teachers' desire to be treated fairly and on equal grounds, without instances of discrimination or prejudice as compared to senior teaching staff, upon assuming their duties at a new school. The fact that this factor was identified by the empirical research indicates that the decisions taken by the teachers' association in schools all too often favor senior members of the faculty. The latter refer to issues such as assigning attendant duties in the school yard, delegating the organization of events and, above all, allocating classes at the beginning of the school year. This last issue constitutes a point of friction among school teachers; indeed, it has been a matter of concern in literature (Bakas, 2011) as well as in the Ministry of Education's directives for the operation of primary schools in the country (Guidance Circular, Greek Ministry of Education, num. 74261/Δ1/13-5-2019).

Another objective of this study was to identify any potential variances in the factors that contribute to the reception/acclimatization of teachers based on variables such as age, years of teaching experience and level of academic background. In particular, as regards the second factor (a fair/balanced allocation of duties by the school principal), the present study suggests that it is more of an issue for younger teachers, aged 40 or less. This might be due to the fact that this age group tends to hold a high level of academic studies and qualifications, which they expect to be recognized and utilized by their school's administration.

Also, the research findings indicate that the above factor is particularly significant for those teachers who had changed schools during their years of service. This finding could be explained on the basis of teachers' frequent moves from one school to another - a fact that does not allow principals to properly evaluate the knowledge and competences of their staff so as to proceed to a fair and balanced allocation of school duties. On the contrary, they are more inclined to give priority and rely on teachers who have worked in their school for a longer period of time. It should be further noted that this finding highlights the importance of the administrative principle of team spirit and unity in schools (Fayol, 1949) - a lack of which has provoked criticism (Lloyd & Schachner, 2020) as it can lead to many problems in school education (Elfers et al., 2006; Feng et al., 2018; Podgursky et al., 2016; Scafidi et al., 2007).

As regards the third factor (guidance and encouragement from the principal for their teaching and pedagogical work as well as for the achievement of their professional goals), it has been found to be more significant for teachers who, at the time the research was conducted, had been teaching for less than five years in their school. A possible interpretation of this finding could be that those teachers still do not feel secure in their school environment and have not yet had enough time to acclimatize. It is a finding which seems to confirm the value of acclimatization for every teacher, regardless of their years of service, as well as the absence of supportive procedures in schools around the country.

Additionally, an investigation into any potential variances in the factors that contribute to the acclimatization of teachers based on variables of the sample's general characteristics showed that those newly-appointed teachers who

faced difficulties upon assuming duties consider three out of the four factors identified by the current study as most important for the acclimatization of newly-appointed teachers in schools. These are:

- ✓ Collegial stance and practical support by the teachers' association
- ✓ Fair/balanced allocation of duties by the principal, and
- ✓ Guidance and encouragement from the principal for teachers to achieve their professional goals.

In contrast, it has been found that teachers do not have a high regard for the institutional role represented by the Teachers' association. This could be due to the fact that any hardships or problems faced have made them put more emphasis on the value of informal, interpersonal communication (Jones & Dexter, 2014) through which they can express emotions, convey unofficial information, express doubts or concerns, and react and interact in a direct manner (Verderber et al., 2017).

### **Conclusions**

The current investigation was designed to identify the factors concerning the behaviors of the school principal and the teachers' association that affect the acclimatization of teachers, who, regardless of their teaching experience, are called to teach for the first time in a new school environment. This investigation has shown that mainly four factors could impact teachers' integration into the school life. These are: (a) The collegial stance and practical support by the teachers' association, (b) The fair/balanced allocation of duties by the principal, (c) The guidance and encouragement from the principal for teachers to achieve their professional goals and (d) The institutional role represented by the teachers' association. Additionally, it was found variances in the factors that contribute to the acclimatization of teachers based on variables concerning teachers' characteristics such as age, years of teaching experience and level of academic background.

This paper contributes to existing literature by exploring the factors involved in social behavior (collegial relations) among members of the educational community that may affect the acclimatization of teachers in new school environments. The importance of investigating these factors is particularly important as:

- The impact of social relations on the issue of the reception/acclimatization of teachers into a school needs further investigation (Nasser-Abu Alhija & Fresko, 2010) and,
- The acclimatization of teachers in schools does not only constitute the means that shall guarantee their stay in the school unit or the education sector in general. If that was the case, research interest could focus exclusively on issues such as teaching hours, remuneration, the quality of health care provided, the adequacy of the school unit's logistical infrastructure, the quality of life in the area where the school operates, etc. In contrast, acclimatization relates primarily to shaping an appropriate school climate that will support any newly-appointed teacher (Darling-Hammond, 1997) and will "improve student performance and teaching practices in the classroom" (Strong, 2005, p.193; Thomas et al., 2019, p.178).
- Teachers' mobility is increased, both inside and outside Greece (Alexopoulos, 2019; Allensworth et al., 2009; Podgursky et al., 2016; Steele et al., 2015) - a fact that calls for measures to ensure the school's cohesion and the continuity of its pedagogical, teaching and administrative work is disrupted to the least extent possible (Feng et al., 2018; Goldhaber et al., 2016; Saitis & Saiti, 2018).

### **Recommendations**

The above-mentioned research results indicate that for the acclimatization of newly-appointed teachers, who undertake teaching duties for the first time, it is essential to transform the attitudes of teaching staff in matters of cooperation and establishing a collegial climate in schools. To this end, fostering empathy among teachers/members of the teachers' association through educational activities and enhancing opportunities for cooperation and teamwork inside and outside the classroom (e.g., coordination of teaching between departments, co-teachings and joint training) would be of significant contribution.

Furthermore, the following could be recommended: (a) Greater involvement of the principal in the pedagogical operation of the school and in the support of the teachers' work in the classroom to enhance his/her role as coordinator, facilitator and mentor, (b) The careful assignment of duties to new teachers by the principal and (c) His/her training on issues of pedagogical leadership (mentoring, coaching), in particular on issues and practices relating to the reception and acclimatization of human resources in new working environments, on issues of human resources management and organizational behavior (e.g., conflict communication and management techniques, group dynamics, development of emotional intelligence). It is also necessary to establish and initiate a school Secretariat, as provisioned by the existing legislative framework, which can then absorb some of the bureaucratic responsibilities that burden the school principal.

The review of legislation and the decentralization of administration could make a decisive contribution to alleviating the problems created by the reception and integration of teachers in schools. This would aim at reducing the mobility of

educational staff or at least limiting them within neighboring schools and among colleagues with whom they may have been familiar in the past.

### Limitations

Despite its originality, our research is subject to limitations primarily due to the size of its sample and its origin. In addition, other extraction techniques, such as the parallel factor analysis procedure, could be used so that to produce more factors for the teachers' acclimatization in primary schools. It is therefore proposed that similar research be carried out in the future, encompassing more geographical areas of the country and involving teachers from both primary and secondary education. Future research could also examine the impact of factors related to the role of parents and pupils on receiving and acclimatizing a teacher into a new school environment. Also of interest to the strength of the conclusions of this survey, would be the comparative examination of the factors affecting the reception of teachers between public and private school units in the country, or even between school units in countries with both centralized and decentralized educational systems. To conclude, possible research in the future could explore the acclimatization factors for teachers by taking into account sample variances based not only on gender, years of service and qualifications but also on aspects such as ethnological/racial origin, religious beliefs, physical disability or sexual preference.

### Authorship Contribution Statement

Alexopoulos: Conceptualization, design, analysis, writing. Rogari: Editing/reviewing, writing, analysis, supervision. Raptis: Editing/reviewing, writing, analysis, supervision.

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