

Primary School Teachers' Employment Status as a Factor of Organizational Commitment

Georgios D. Iordanidis¹ & Georgia- Spyridoula P. Sagiadinou²

Abstract

The purpose of the present research is to study the effect of employment status on the collective organizational commitment among Primary School teachers. Moreover, it will examine whether teacher age, total years of service and time of service in the specific school unit affect their commitment and collectiveness respectively. The results of the study indicate that, because schools are characterized by diversity of composition, they have to adapt to the needs of the teachers that make up the staff, as the existence of collective commitment on behalf of the teachers is affected by their personal characteristics.

Keywords: teacher organizational commitment, teamwork, employment status

1. Introduction

Teacher interpersonal relationships and the collaboration practices developed among them at school, as well as the way in which employment status affects these relationships are issues that have concerned special researchers and scientists. Nowadays, the diversity and complexity of situations make the teachers' role extremely critical. Their educational work includes information, advice, cooperation, coordination, administration and management, with the purpose of securing an individual's personal development and self-reliant inclusion in the society. Teacher commitment that is related to job satisfaction seems to be important for the successful realization of their complex work (Somech and Bogler, 2002). Teachers socialize professionally within the school unit (Reyes, 1990) which means that they become familiar with the values, the norms and the required professional conduct that is appropriate for the school organization and are able to share values and goals with their colleagues. In this way they have the feeling that they belong to the school unit, they give but they themselves also receive value from the school organization. Collegiality requires training and supply of assistance to teachers for the purpose of familiarizing them with collaboration practices that promote mutual trust and material support as well (Inger, 1993:3). A significant limitation to the development of a collaboration mentality among teachers is posed by the Curriculum. When management at a national level (as in the Greek educational system), or at a regional level or at the level of the school board provides extremely detailed guidelines concerning the Curriculum, collaboration among teachers is limited to routine advice-giving, trick-trading and material-sharing of a more immediate nature and it does not reach down to the grounds, the principles or the ethics of teaching practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1995: 348-9). However, even these forms of limited collaboration are hindered by the norm of isolation that is prevalent in schools. Most teachers feel that what their colleagues do is of no concern and give advice to their colleagues only when asked. So high a value is placed on autonomy that even veteran teachers with well-grounded views regarding effective teaching refrain from offering advice to beginning teachers, except when they are asked (Inger, 1993:3).

¹ Department of Primary Education, University of Western Macedonia, Florina 53100, Greece, Email: giordanidis@uowm.gr, Phone number: 23850-55062

² Department of Primary Education, University of Western Macedonia, Corfu 49100, Greece, Email: gioulasag@gmail.com, Phone number : 26610- 81646

The successful operation of school organizations does not depend only on quality and collaborative teachers, but also on the stability of the teaching staff in a particular school unit. The staff stability factor as well as the frequent mobility of the teaching staff minimizes school community cohesion, it has a negative impact on the school staff and student performance, while at the same time it deprives the school administration of the possibility to organize creative activities. Teacher mobility due to transfers or secondments has a negative effect not only on staff moral, but also on student performance and school effectiveness in general. It is widely recognized that in a constantly changing environment, working relationships among teachers will also be modified. The purpose of the present research is to examine the degree to which employment status, gender, age, specialization, total time of teaching service as well as the total time of service spent in a specific school unit are responsible for reinforcing or weakening respectively the intensity of teacher organizational commitment and teamwork.

2. Theoretical context

The teachers' working conditions in the school are a significant factor that affects their commitment. The more constant the teachers' presence is, the more committed they are with the school, the better they know their colleagues, the students and the wider school and local community (Heck, 2009). Studies (Morrow, 1983; Reyes, 1990) have indicated a statistically significant difference in organizational commitment and job satisfaction between permanent and hourly-paid workers, as there is a significant difference in the motivation exhibited by each separate category of employees. Teachers on a fixed-term contract have more intense feelings of job insecurity (Kuhnert and Vance, 1992) as opposed to permanent teachers.

The present research is based on the concept of commitment regarding teacher involvement in the school, but also referring to the sense of teamwork. It should be pointed out that the sense of commitment that is developed among the teachers of a school organization is characterized by the organizational features of teamwork which are: communication, trust, coordination, leadership, support of the educational work and feedback.

More specifically, it is worth mentioning that the decisive role of good interpersonal relationships among teachers has been pointed out ever since the 1970s (Lortie, 1975: 192). Good interpersonal relationships are considered to be a basic source of internal reward that becomes meaningful because of the absence of powerful external rewards in the teaching profession and because of the problems that often arise in the relationships between students – teachers (Zahorik, 1987: 386). Contemporary studies on teachers' work life begin with the assumption that collegial relationships help teachers handle the multiple demands of their profession more effectively, reduce stress and increase satisfaction and prosperity.

Collegiality presupposes training and providing assistance to teachers in order to familiarize them with collaborative practices that promote mutual trust and material support as well (Inger, 1993:7). However, most teachers feel that what colleagues do is of no concern to them and as a result veteran teachers with well-grounded views regarding effective teaching refrain from offering advice to beginning teachers, except when they are asked (Inger, 1993:3). Spillane (2006; in Hulpia & Devos, 2010) claims that the leadership of the teacher team determines the framework of the teachers' work with activities that involve teacher interaction and collaboration. Leadership supports cohesion, coherence, open expression of emotions, mutual trust among members and open communication. Team members have clear roles, acceptable, mutual school-oriented targets and goals (Hulpia & Devos, 2010). Moreover, a team of teachers works well when teachers discuss about teaching, they watch each other teach, they jointly plan, examine and assess the teaching material and support each other in order to improve their instruction in a climate of mutual trust, honest communication and collaboration (Hackman, 2004). Collaboration is one of the most essential components found in the composition of effective groups (Crow & Pounder, 2000; Fauske & Schelble, 2002; in Conley et. al., 2004). The most important problems that emerge are those of collaboration and unequal involvement in the teachers' team. A larger degree of involvement entails commitment to teamwork. Putting effort in achieving the targets and goals of the school organization includes coordination and communication, sharing knowledge and strategies (Conley et. al, 2004).

An organic element of the teacher group apart from common acceptance of targets and goals is formal, non-formal and personal communication, sharing ideas and information, social interaction. Open communication raises expectations for greater participation and increases the feeling of participation, of belonging to the teaching body of the school and the sense of collectiveness and collegiality (Dee et. al., 2006).

It is supported that collegiality promotes teacher development beyond personal reflection or dependence on external experts to a point where teachers learn from each other and jointly develop their expertise.

3. The research

The present research is quantitative and studies the phenomenon of primary school teachers' organizational commitment to teamwork, placing emphasis on the relationship between cause (variables of gender, age, specialization, years of total service, years of service in a particular school unit, as well as the employment relationship to the organization) and effect (commitment to teamwork). For the purpose of data collection the questionnaire that was used in the research of Park et al. (2005) was selected. This particular questionnaire focuses on the teachers' group and not the school organization in total. Park et al. (2005) used it because it refers to teacher commitment to teamwork as seen from the teachers' point of view. It consists of 21 items that are answered by a Likert scaling method and it is divided in seven subscales, the characteristics of teamwork. Each subcategory has got three items in the following order: communication, leadership, guidance, feedback, supportive behavior, collaboration and trust. A Likert scale was used in the questionnaire as its data can be subjected to complex statistical analysis. A Likert scale employs a series of numbers-scores as responses-options (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) that respond to ranked options between "Disagree/Agree", namely: 1- Strongly disagree, 2- Disagree, 3- Neither agree nor disagree, 4- Neither agree nor disagree, 5- Agree, 6- Strongly agree.

2.1. Sampling

The sample comes from public and private primary schools of the Regions of Attica, Western Greece, Western Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly and Crete. The number of questionnaires that were sent was 9,500 and the number of those returned was 1,093, yielding a participation percentage of 11.5%. The participants (1,093) were teachers that serve in primary schools of Attica, Western Greece, Western Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly and Crete. More specifically, a percentage of 12.6% of the Attica Region teachers participated, 22.4% from Western Greece, 15.6% from Western Macedonia, 11.3% from the Region of Epirus, 14.4% from Thessaly and 23.6% from Crete.

3. Results

The characteristics of teamwork are presented separately below (communication, leadership, guidance, feedback, supportive behavior, collaboration and trust) and the influence they receive from teachers' personal characteristics (gender, age, specialization, years of total service, years of service in the particular school unit and employment status).

Communication: The communication cluster included the first three items of the questionnaire, which were the following: "*School teachers communicate effortlessly and pleasantly. School teachers often discuss problems that arise in the school. School teachers are interested in informing every colleague about everything they know*". The teachers' mean level of agreement with the communication cluster was 4.78 with a standard deviation of 0.94. The prevailing value was 5. Regarding the communication factor there were statistically significant discrepancies found between this and teacher age cohorts ($F_{3,1083} = 6.977$, $p < 0.001$), since the teachers' oldest age cohort (51-60 years) seems to be experiencing the best communication conditions (scoring 4.9873 with a standard deviation of 0.81509). Moreover, the total years of experience seem to affect the existence or not of adequate communication among teachers ($F_{6,1080} = 5.765$, $p < 0.001$), since teachers with over 30 years of total service seem to communicate more with their colleagues (scoring 5.0306 with a standard deviation of 0.75841). Even the years of service in the current school unit seem to affect the presence or not of adequate communication among teachers and it is statistically significant ($F_{6,1080} = 5.588$, $p < 0.001$). Teachers with 16 to 20 years of service in the current school unit seem to communicate more with their colleagues (scoring 5.0263 with a standard deviation of 0.73990). At the same time, the discrepancy that is pointed out between the teachers' specialization and the communication they believe that exists among their colleagues is statistically significant ($F_{6,1084} = 25.281$, $p < 0.001$). Kindergarten school teachers appear to communicate more with their colleagues (scoring 4.9495 with a standard deviation of 0.80163), as compared to primary school teachers. Finally, teacher employment status in the organization seems to affect the existence or not of adequate communication among teachers ($F_{6,1069} = 7.381$, $p < 0.001$). More specifically, permanent teachers in private schools seem to communicate more with their colleagues, scoring 4.9286 with a standard deviation of 0.61573, as compared to those who are permanent at the disposal of the agency.

Leadership: The following statements are included in the leadership cluster: "*School teachers are willing to participate in school activities. School teachers show high levels of job satisfaction. School teachers give priority to school goals*."

The teachers' mean level of agreement concerning the aforementioned statements is 4.3251, with a standard deviation of 0.95358. The prevailing value was 5, which demonstrates an almost total agreement and acceptance of the aforementioned statements. Regarding the leadership factor, there were statistically significant discrepancies found between leadership and the teachers' gender ($F_{1,1085} = 3.9302$, $p = 0.048$), as male teachers are noted to express a higher degree of satisfaction concerning the aforementioned statements than female teachers. What is more, age appears to affect the leadership factor ($F_{3,1083} = 9.812$, $p < 0.001$), as teachers of the oldest cohorts (from 51 to 60 years) appear to be more satisfied by leadership, scoring 4.4648 with a standard deviation of 0.81490. The discrepancy that is also pointed out between the teachers' total years of service and the leadership factor is statistically significant ($F_{6,1080} = 6.450$, $p < 0.001$). More specifically, teachers with 30 or more years of service report a higher level of satisfaction with regard to the aforementioned statements, scoring 4.6728 with a standard deviation of 0.82898. In addition, the discrepancy that is highlighted between the years of service in the teachers' current unit and the leadership factor is statistically significant ($F_{6,1080} = 3.687$, $p = 0.001$), since teachers who have 26 to 30 years of experience at the unit in which they currently work are more satisfied, scoring 4.4620 with a standard deviation of 1.00820. Regarding teacher specialization, this too seems to affect the leadership factor and it is statistically significant ($F_{2,1084} = 26.947$, $p < 0.001$). More specifically, kindergarten school teachers exhibit the highest level of satisfaction regarding the statements that have to do with leadership, scoring 4.5710 with a standard deviation of 0.81983, as compared to teachers of other specializations. Finally, the teachers' employment status in the organization seems to affect the leadership factor and it is statistically significant ($F_{4,1069} = 8.644$, $p < 0.001$), as those who hold permanent positions in private schools appear to be more satisfied by leadership, scoring 4.9524 with a standard deviation of 0.58261.

Guidance: In the questionnaire that the teachers were asked to fill in there were also statements concerning the "guidance" that exists among fellow teachers. These were the following: *"School teachers make sure that their colleagues work being adequately equipped with teaching and cognitive materials. School teachers encourage their colleagues to deal with new challenges in teaching. School teachers are interested in their colleagues' needs"*. The teachers' mean level of agreement concerning the guidance cluster is 4 and the standard deviation indicated by the statements regarding colleague guidance is 1.05458. The prevailing value, that is the one selected with the highest frequency, was 4. Concerning the guidance factor, the discrepancies detected between this and the teachers' gender are statistically significant ($F_{1,1085} = 4.701$, $p = 0.030$). It is noted that male teachers express a higher degree of satisfaction concerning the guidance received among colleagues. Furthermore, age seems to affect the guidance experienced among teachers ($F_{3,1083} = 9.8083$, $p < 0.001$), since the teachers ranging from 51 to 60 years old are more satisfied (scoring 4.4947 with a standard deviation of 0.92310). The total years of service also seem to affect guidance among colleagues ($F_{6,1080} = 6.622$, $p < 0.001$). Teachers that have over 30 years of service in total indicate a higher degree of satisfaction concerning the aforementioned statements, scoring 4.5963 with a standard deviation of 0.88084. Next, the years of service in the teachers' current school unit appear to affect guidance among colleagues ($F_{6,1080} = 3.581$, $p = 0.002$), as teachers that have 26 to 30 years of service in the current unit indicate a higher degree of satisfaction regarding the aforementioned statements, scoring 4.5679 with a standard deviation of 0.97759. Teacher specialization seems to affect guidance among colleagues ($F_{2,1084} = 27.225$, $p < 0.001$), since once again kindergarten school teachers express a higher degree of satisfaction regarding the guidance statements, scoring 4.5123 with a standard deviation of 0.94684. Finally, the teachers' employment status in the organization seems to affect the guidance factor among colleagues and it is statistically significant ($F_{4,1069} = 9.287$, $p < 0.001$). Those who work permanently in private schools claim to be more satisfied with colleague guidance, scoring 4.5238 with a standard deviation of 1.01875.

Feedback: The feedback category includes statements 10, 11 and 12, which are the following: *"School teachers respond to their colleagues' need for information. School teachers use their colleagues' recommendations for their self improvement. School teachers provide useful recommendations to their colleagues"*. The mean number of teachers selected value "4" in order to express their agreement or disagreement to the aforementioned statements with a standard deviation of 0.98451. The prevailing value is 4. Age seems to affect the feedback factor ($F_{3,1083} = 4.911$, $p = 0.002$), since the 51-60 age cohort of teachers appears to receive a higher level of feedback, scoring 4.4321 with a standard deviation of 0.89480. Furthermore, the total years of service seem to affect the feedback factor ($F_{6,1080} = 4.719$, $p < 0.001$), as teachers that have over 30 total years of service appear to receive a higher level of feedback (scoring 4.5199 with a standard deviation of 0.87540). In addition, the years of service in the teachers' current unit seem to determine the feedback they receive ($F_{6,1080} = 3.707$, $p = 0.001$), since those who have 26 to 30 years of service in their current unit show a higher level of satisfaction regarding the aforementioned statements (scoring 4.5432 with a standard deviation of 0.99205).

What is more, the teachers' specialization seems to affect the feedback they receive ($F_{2,1084}=22.674$, $p<0.001$), as kindergarten school teachers state that they receive the highest level of feedback (scoring 4.4932 with a standard deviation of 0.84048). Finally, the teachers' employment relationship with the organization also seems to affect the feedback factor ($F_{4,1069}=6.994$, $p<0.001$), since the highest level of satisfaction concerning the statements that had to do with feedback was expressed by those who are permanent teachers in a private school (scoring 4.5952 with a standard deviation of 0.92615).

Supportive behavior: The statements that relate to supportive behavior were the following: *"School teachers complement each other when a colleague cannot deal with a difficulty. School teachers are willing to help when asked. School teachers provide help to those in need"*. The teachers' mean level of agreement to the supportive behavior cluster was 4.7063 with a standard deviation of 0.96639, while the prevailing value was 5. Age seems to affect the support that teachers receive from their colleagues ($F_{3,1083}= 5.575$, $p = 0.001$). More specifically, the 51-60 age cohort of teachers seems to receive more support from their colleagues, scoring 4.8800 with a standard deviation of 0.84309. Moreover, the total years of service appear to affect the support that teachers receive ($F_{6,1080}=3.395$, $p=0.003$), as those with over 30 total years of service claim to be more satisfied, scoring 4.9174 with a standard deviation of 0.87390. Furthermore, the years of service in the unit where teachers currently work also seem to affect the support that is developed among teachers ($F_{6,1080}=3.271$, $p=0.003$). More specifically, teachers with 16 to 20 years of service in the current unit experience a more intense supportive behavior from their colleagues, scoring 4.9561 with a standard deviation of 0.78945. Next, the discrepancy that is pointed out between teacher specialization and the support that is expressed among teachers is statistically significant ($F_{2,1084}=20.761$, $p<0.001$). Kindergarten school teachers experience greater support from their colleagues, scoring 4.9235 with a standard deviation of 0.79411. Finally, the teachers' employment status in the organization seems to affect the supportive behavior developed among teachers ($F_{4,1069}=7.118$, $p<0.001$), as those who are permanent teachers in a private school express a higher level of satisfaction, scoring 5.0714 with a standard deviation of 0.71824.

Collaboration: In the questionnaire that was filled in by the teachers there were items regarding the collaboration among teachers. The following statements belong to this cluster: *"School teachers facilitate their colleagues in being more efficient. School teachers perform their duties efficiently in concert with the rest of their colleagues. School teachers collaborate in order to achieve the school goals"*. The teachers' mean level of agreement with the collaboration cluster was 4.49 with a standard deviation of 0.95680. The prevailing value was also 5. Age seems to affect the collaboration among colleagues ($F_{3,1083} = 5.314$, $p = 0.001$), as the older age cohort of teachers from 51 to 60 years seems to collaborate with their colleagues more, scoring 4.6826 with a standard deviation of 0.84770. Next, the number of total years of service also seems to affect the collaboration among colleagues ($F_{6,1080} =5.209$, $p<0.001$), as teachers with over 30 years of service in total seem to collaborate more with their colleagues, scoring 4.7737 with a standard deviation of 0.76696. Moreover, the years of service in the unit where the teachers currently work seem to correlate with the collaboration that characterizes teacher relationships ($F_{6,1080}=2.421$, $p=0.025$). More specifically, teachers that have 26 to 30 years of service in the unit where they currently work seem to be more collaborative, scoring 4.8025 with a standard deviation of 0.81785. The teachers' specialization seems to be related to the collaboration developed among teachers ($F_{2,1084}=18.700$, $p<0.001$). More specifically, kindergarten school teachers are more collaborative, scoring 4.7022 with a standard deviation of 0.81684. Finally, the teachers' employment relationship with the organization seems to affect the degree of collaboration that characterizes their relationships ($F_{4,1069}=5.644$, $p<0.001$), as the teachers who are permanent in a private school collaborate more among them, scoring 4.8571 with a standard deviation of 1.00183.

Trust: The trust cluster includes the final three items of the questionnaire which are the following: *"Teachers have positive work relationships in the context of their work at school. School teachers are dedicated to their work with professionalism. School teachers prepare for their work"*. The teachers' mean level of agreement selected value 4.7286 to express their views on the aforementioned statements, with a standard deviation of 0.86546, while the prevailing value was 5. Age seems to affect trust among teachers ($F_{3,1083} = 3.960$, $p = 0.008$), as teachers of the older age cohort from 51 to 60 years appear to experience a greater level of colleague trust, scoring 4.8641 with a standard deviation of 0.77726. The number of total years of service also seems to affect trust among teachers (scoring 4.9083 with as standard deviation of 0.72983). As regards the years of service in the unit where the teachers currently work, these appear to affect the trust that characterizes relationships among teachers ($F_{6,1080} =3.461$, $p=0.002$), as those with 26 to 30 years of service in the current unit are more satisfied, scoring 4.9383 with a standard deviation of 0.72228.

At the same time, the teachers' specialization seems to affect the trust developed among teachers ($F_{2,1084}=17.105$, $p<0.001$), as kindergarten school teachers seem to trust their colleagues more, scoring 4.8770 with a standard deviation of 0.72034. Finally, the teachers' employment status in the organization appears to determine the trust that characterizes teacher relationships ($F_{4,1069}=4.262$, $p=0.002$), since those who are permanent teachers in a private school develop a stronger sense of trust among colleagues, scoring 4.8810 with a standard deviation of 0.88295.

4. Discussion

The research findings indicate that the factors of communication, feedback, supportive behavior, trust and collaboration appear to be affected by age, the teachers' total service, years of service in the current unit, their specialization as well as the employment status in the organization. The more teachers' age level and teaching service increases, the higher the satisfaction derived from communication among colleagues is, while at the same time collective commitment to the organization is reinforced. This is also confirmed by Allen and Meyer (1997) who found that there is a positive relation between employee age and tenure, and the level of commitment they develop. At this point, it is impressive that teachers with over 30 years of service in the same school unit express the least satisfaction regarding the role of leadership, communication, guidance and feedback that they receive from their colleagues. This fact contradicts the findings of Razak et al (2009), who claim that job-related factors such as total years of teaching experience and years of teaching in the present school unit constitute a solid foundation for the development of various initiatives and activities on behalf of the teachers. Furthermore, a higher degree of satisfaction regarding the aforementioned fields (communication, feedback, supportive behavior, trust and collaboration) is expressed by kindergarten teachers as compared to primary school teachers. It is a commonly accepted fact that the educational and teaching framework in which teachers work engages them in cooperating, researching and discussing the common problems that emerge in the educational and teaching process, a fact that enhances teamwork (George & Bettenhausen, 1990). It would be expected that primary school teachers be equally satisfied with the characteristics of teamwork, due to the nature and the hours of their work that urge them to openly communicate with their colleagues, a fact that enhances the sense of collectiveness and collegiality (Dee et. al., 2006). In addition, the employment status indicates that teachers who are permanently employed in public or private schools are more satisfied by the fields of teamwork, as opposed to those who are permanent teachers at the disposal of the agency. This could be interpreted by the fact that teachers who work at the agency offices have a more process-oriented role that does not offer them many possibilities of communicating and collaborating with their colleagues. This fact is also confirmed by Hackman and Oldham (1976), according to whom task identity (that is, whether an employee completes the whole work or part of it) is a factor that contributes to employee job satisfaction.

The elements of guidance and leadership as characteristics of teamwork appear to be affected by all the aforementioned variables (age, total years of service, years of service in the current unit, specialization, employment status) including the variable of gender. Men express a higher degree of satisfaction from their relationship with leadership, from the goals set by the school organization, as well as from the guidance they receive from their colleagues. This fact is contradicted by the research of Mowday et al (1982) and Mathieu & Zajac (1990), which find that women tend to show more organizational commitment than their male colleagues.

Finally, it should be pointed out that in the research results there was no differentiation between those who work in public schools and those who work in private schools. Research has found that public-sector employees show higher levels of continuance commitment to their organization that were attributed to their special characteristics being none other than ethics and job security (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

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