The Culture of Education and Evaluation in Greek School and Social Reality

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to determine, through relevant research findings and theoretical approaches, the prevailing culture on educational and, mainly, on evaluation issues relating to the reality of school and modern society in Greece. Initially, the discussion begins with the required conceptual framework, followed by the description of the pedagogical function of educational evaluation. Subsequently, based on research findings, indications of education and evaluation deviation from their pedagogical context and orientation are presented. These specific signs of divergence highlight the prevailing educational and social culture, as well as the factors that compose it. The article concludes with final observations and relevant suggestions to address this comprehensive issue.

Keywords: culture, education, evaluation

1. Introduction

To facilitate reading and comprehension of this article, as well as for methodological reasons, several crucial questions are posed referring to the evaluation of the educational process, educational undertaking, and educational evaluation in general:

➢ How is the concept of the term 'culture' perceived?
➢ What is the context of concepts relating to educational evaluation?
➢ What is the fundamental pedagogical context of education and educational evaluation?
➢ What are the contemporary European trends regarding educational evaluation?
➢ What are the main indications of deviation of education and evaluation from their pedagogical purposes that reveal the prevailing culture of the educational and social system?
➢ What are the ramifications of these deviations on the educational process and those involved in it?
➢ Which factors have contributed to shaping these perceptions, mentalities, and practices?
➢ What are the final findings and suggestions that contribute to dealing with the issue at hand?

The concept of the term 'culture' is perceived here as the body of knowledge, activities, and experiences, namely how a person expresses emotion, thoughts, and practices. Based on sociological data, the culture of a society is shaped by the way it is organized and operates, which means by the way its institutions and its cultural, political and economic system are structured, organized and function, as well as by the prevailing notions, ideologies and mentalities, the educational level of citizens, the tradition and the historical operating conditions of the state and the education policy pursued and, consequently, by the way the education system operates, since culture has as its frame of reference what applies to education (Konstantinou, 2015).

This means that the prevalence of notions, mentalities and practices, which establish knowledge-based, grade-oriented, and excessively competitive aspects that are generally directed towards the socioeconomic rules of the market, is a consequence of the social reality which consecutively undermines the educational purpose of the school's mission and in particular that of educational evaluation.

The reasoning behind answering those questions and, generally, elaborating on the issue, is based on the point of view that evaluation is a natural as well as a social necessity and constitutes an integral part of the educational process. Nevertheless, not only is evaluation pedagogical and educational by nature but it is also political, ideological, economic and societal.

As a result, evaluation tends to become a controversial process with difficulty in implementation. Furthermore, it is well documented and widely accepted that the educational undertaking does not only concern teachers, but it is affected and co-defined by a considerable number of factors involved in the process.

2. The conceptual framework of educational evaluation and its main parameters

On a broad level, there is no sector of human activity from which the concept or the process of evaluation is absent either in its formal (standardized) or in its informal (non-standardized) form. Every human activity contains the element of evaluation, whether it constitutes an ordinary everyday-life effort or an organized and systematic form. In this sense, evaluation is a self-apparent and de facto socially imposed phenomenon, associated with any individual or collective activity and with its result. It constitutes a main, determining and integral stage of every organized and systematic process, which is characterized primarily by its planning and then by its implementation. Through organized evaluation, the main purpose is to determine the degree of achievement of the originally planned goal, subsequently to locate those parameters that hamper its accomplishment and, ultimately, to conclude with feedback on the overall process (Dimitropoulos, 1999; Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

As an institution, evaluation is considered to be an integral part not only of the educational process but also of the educational policy of each educational and social system, and it refers to the educational reality of every society. The concept of evaluation in education along with its corresponding process was developed and established in each country simultaneously with the development of their educational systems. That is the main reason why the term 'evaluation' is defined as 'educational evaluation' or 'evaluation in education'. The initial form of evaluation emerged almost exclusively in school, and as a rule, it used to aim at student assessment (Andreou & Papakonstantinou, 1994; Kassotakis, 2018).

The aim of the evaluation of education and the educational undertaking is to make judgments, offer estimates and present findings based on standards, criteria and goals for an overall framework, which encompasses all the parameters that contribute to the function of the educational process, that includes educational policy and programs, school books, teachers and students, etc. (Kassotakis, 2018; Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

The systematic use of the concept of educational undertaking emerged during the 80s as part of an effort to reestablish evaluation after the country had repealed the institution of school inspectors in 1982 (Andreou & Papakonstantinou, 1994). This concept is determined as "the sum of varied activities which take place in a country in an organized and systematic manner and aim at the implementation of the well-established purposes of education… and it refers to all products of the educational system" (Kassotakis, 1992:46).The educational undertaking is essentially defined within three consecutive levels: the first has as a frame of reference the results of the overall operation of the educational system, the second refers to the results of the function of the school unit and the third to the results of educating and teaching inside the classroom (Papakonstantinou, 1993).

According to Kassotakis (2018), the term 'educational evaluation' is used to signify the process of monitoring the suitability, functionality, or effectiveness of all factors of the educational process, its products, and the connections between the educational system and the wider socio-economic system. Therefore, by the term 'educational evaluation' we mean the process that aims to define in as much a systematic, valid and reliable way as possible the suitability, functionality and the result of teaching and pedagogic tasks regarding its goals, criteria and, more generally, its specific methodology. In other words, its determining parameters are the human factors of education (learners, teachers, principals, school counselors, administrative and auxiliary personnel, PTAs, representatives of local government, etc.) as well as the non-human factors (educational policy, purposes, curriculums, school books, educational material, legislature, infrastructure, resources, means and equipment, the system of evaluation, etc.) (Dimitropoulos, 1999; Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

To summarize the views on educational evaluation, one may conclude that all relevant theories focus on its five fundamental parameters. More specifically:

1. The purpose of evaluation (Why is an evaluation conducted and what is its purpose?)
2. The object of evaluation (What/who is being evaluated?)
3. Evaluation body (Who does carry out the evaluation?)
4. Evaluation criteria-standards (What is the basis of the evaluation?)
5. Methods - processes - means of evaluation (In what way is the evaluation conducted?)

3. The pedagogical function of evaluation within the learning process

Regarding the learning process and according to the pedagogical context and to the orientations of evaluation, a teacher ought to monitor whether the learning goals have been achieved or not, to evaluate the overall educational process and to diagnose learners' abilities, potentials, interests, needs and weaknesses. At the same time, the teacher has the opportunity to evaluate and identify his own advantages and disadvantages related to the choices and practices he applied through planning the educational process (Ingenkamp, 1989; Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

This specific function of the evaluation 'binds' the teacher, from a pedagogical point of view, as an evaluator, to make effective use of the methodology provided for this purpose; that is, the appropriate use of criteria, techniques, data-gathering instruments, interpretations and, generally, means of evaluation, so that the process attains validity, reliability and objectivity, thus reinforcing and securing its own acceptance in the highest degree possible. The ultimate pedagogical purpose of this particular process is the information that the teacher draws during this evaluating activity, to eventually help him decide about the appropriate pedagogical and instructional measures that need to be followed in order to provide feedback, which on the one hand will enhance and improve the learning process and on the other hand it will motivate, strengthen and encourage the student himself cognitively, mentally and emotionally (Kapsalis & Chaniotakis, 2011 & Konstantinou, 2007).

Regarding teachers' and educational undertaking's evaluation, this summary overview presents how evaluation contributes to:

- ✓ improving the educational system quality
- ✓ promotingchangeandinnovation
- ✓ giving feedback and developing educators' self-awareness
- ✓ developing responsibility and initiative in educators
- ✓ utilizing evaluation as motivation
- ✓ improving learners' academic performance
- ✓ adopting meritocracy in the selection of education executives
- ✓ highlighting any teacher's inadequacy where necessary
- ✓ supporting teachers through training programs
- ✓ reinforcingteachers' professionalprestige
- ✓ ensuring the quality of educators' work
- ✓ determining the degree of effectiveness of the educational system
- ✓ improving the pedagogical studies curriculum, and finally,
- ✓ informing those involved (e.g., parents) about the quality of the education provided (Dimitropoulos, 1999; Kassotakis, 2018; Baliou,2011; Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

4. European trends regarding the educational evaluation

Over the last two decades, scientific and political discourse as well as official national and European literature have been stressing the necessity for illustrating and evaluating the current situation in education, mostly on the school level, since schools are the basic units of educational systems. This specific form of evaluation is always connected to the improvement of the quality of the education provided. For instance, the European Council and Parliament literature advise state-members to support and, if needed, to create transparent systems of evaluating the quality of education. At the same time, they propose encouraging, and, where necessary, supporting the participation of the human factors of education, like teachers, students, school principals, parents and experts, in external evaluation and self - evaluation of schools to achieve an allocation of accountability for the improvement of school education (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; MacBeath, 2005).

5. Conceptual Framework of effective school

According to the relevant theoretical and research approaches, the effectiveness of the school is highlighted by the way it is organized as well as the way it implements its pedagogical and social functions. More specifically, it depends on: the way it applies its educational goals, the prevailing school climate, the principal as a figure, leader and teacher, who plays a decisive role in the structure on which the school is organized and functions as an educational institution, the teachers' association, the cooperation with parents, the school environment and so on (Karatzia-Stavlioti & Lambropoulos, 2006; Konstantinou, 2015).

For a teacher to perform his role more effectively, the school should be organized and operated, in terms of institution and infrastructure, so that to facilitate teaching and the pedagogical orientations, which will be focused on providing knowledge, developing skills and abilities and, overall, shaping the student's personality.

6. Indications of the culture in education

Based on relevant research literature, the school, in general, fulfills its role more as a mechanism for providing stereotypical services, with dominant features its orientation to conventional curriculum and schedule, syllabus overload, formalism and rigidity in the organization of school processes, communication dysfunction in social relationships, didactics and plagiarism in learning processes and, in general, the absence of pedagogical activities that aim at approaching and fulfilling the needs and interests of the student (Konstantinou, 2015; OECD, 2018; Trilianos, 2004).

However, this specific "accusation" concerns less the Primary school and more the other two educational levels (Middle School, High School). In particular, High School is defined as a place where the organization of educational interaction is presented with obvious negative characteristics. Especially, in High School, there are, among others, strong phenomena of knowledge-based focus, examination-centeredness, grade-orientation and competition between students(ibid.).

There is a regulatory and standardized organization of school functions, to a large extent, through some regulations, circulars, laws and standards, which have transformed the school into a centralized and authoritarian mechanism. The school is in charge of a special "package" of regulations, which act as guarantors in the effort to fulfill and complete its undertaken socio-institutional role. A characteristic feature of the standard rules that prevail in school is that they refer primarily to the provision and completion of the prespecified curriculum, to the reproduction of this curriculum, to its formally and substantially selective valuation and to the provision of occasional conditions, under which these procedures can be carried out without friction. In other words, these rules refer to the teaching process which, as mentioned before, is the dominant element of the educational processes, the central course of actions around which all the activities of the school revolve and through which the achievement of its goals is depended on (Kapsalis & Chaniotakis, 2011; Konstantinou, 2015; Trilianos, 2004).

7. Culture indications of the educational process evaluation

The evaluation in our country has the form of a standardized process, which is used, almost exclusively, for the classification of the students using grading scales and for their promotion or not to higher educational levels. Thus, the examined courses do not test judgment, abstract and synthetic ability, creative thinking and other essential mental functions, but the skill to memorize. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education reserves as its exclusive right the ability to determine the time, the method, the content, as well as the way of grading (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; Xochellis, 2015).

An orientation gives prominence, not to use-values but to exchange-values, such as, grades and qualifications related to the teaching process and orientation to the preparation for a life as "selling a person's product, which is interpreted as workforce in the labor market ". The state, through school, obliges students to learn the curriculum and promises grades and degrees. The students acquire knowledge and information and "reciprocate" them through the school state exams in order to be determined if they have acquired them and then they are rewarded with grades. Also, within the family, the students are "rewarded" or "punished", depending on the grades they have gained at school. The grade, outside of school, amounts to certain privileges or deprivations for their holder. As an exchange value, grades also express the possibility or not, of access to social positions that are considered as privileged (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; OECD, 2011; Xochellis, 2015).

The use of the term 'performance', in order to determine the success of school learning, is identified with its use in the capitalist economy; it is used as a service offer and as a product produced in a specific time frame. This results in the student's interest and participation being oriented towards the production of a learning project. Moreover, school performance is assessed strictly based on the results of the examination procedures, without taking into account what has preceded these results and, in general, how one has arrived at the specific result. With the establishment of performance assessment, as an objective and normative criterion, school failure is legitimized as an individual weakness and insufficiency of the student. This is the concept that the school promotes to students and parents through the way learning and evaluation processes are carried out (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; Trilianos, 2004).

The Ministry of Education, through its circulars and, in general, through its 'suggestions' speaks of "motivation, encouragement, accurate self-perception of the child, diagnosis of aptitudes, abilities, learning difficulties of the child, feedback of teaching and learning, etc. " and on the other hand, it has established an examination-grade-selective system, which by no means facilitates the teacher to take into account the needs, interests, pacing and, in general, the particularities of each student in the school. Moreover, the grade that the teacher attributes to the student can be questioned as invalid, reliable and objective, since the grading process is based, mainly, on the experience and not on the scientific knowledge and ability of the teacher (Konstantinos & Konstantinou, 2017; OECD, 2011; Xochellis, 2015).

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Performance, as a means of individual and social improvement and progress, cannot be ignored, marginalized, or rejected as a whole. However, this should neither be regarded nor function as an end in itself. Performance acquires value if it depends on specific goals and aspirations and if its pedagogical content and perspective are taken into account in its political-economic substance.

8. Impacts of the distorted function of school performance evaluation

A consequence of the situation described above is that the student is constantly under pressure for increasing achievement, which ultimately causes significant emotional burdens, the true dimensions of which are not easy to investigate. According to relevant research, the demand for high academic achievement is associated with side effects and ramifications that burden, primarily, the students. At the same time, the notion that the school is a formal, compulsory and supplementary service organization is formed, while private tutoring schools as socially organized institutions, as it is in Greece, contribute more effectively to achieving the goals related to high academic performance and occupying a position in higher education. This aspect is reinforced by the view of a high school student, that shows how students perceive the operation of the school: "We have more to gain from the days of squatting in school. We normally go to tutoring private school and study for the state exams, without wasting six to seven hours at school" (Dimou, 1999; Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

Also, the demand for high academic achievement results in the emergence of fear and anxiety in students. Other consequences, which are related to this development in school, are the manifestation of competition, grade-oriented, rivalry and other related side effects among the students, a fact that inevitably stresses its dominant and imperative instructional-cognitive goals, such as academic achievement in specific cognitive subjects, such as mathematics, literature, etc., resulting in the degradation and marginalization of pedagogical goals, such as cooperation, teamwork, solidarity, co-responsibility, etc. (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; Mavrogiorgos, 1993).

Regardless of the specific learning goals and efforts of each student, students are divided into a hierarchy of performance, in which there are almost always losers and successful (winners). The result of this plausible and convincing criterion, which is based on the comparison of academic performance, is the orientation of students to a type of learning characterized by competition and rivalry (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; Zouganeli, et al. 2008).

Insecurity, fear and anxiety are outcomes of continuous examinations and evaluation, essentially grading, of students' performance. Assessment is often interpreted as an overall evaluation of the individual, e.g., you are a weak student, which affects their self-perception. Notably problematic are the consequences of school performance assessment regarding the exams related to promotion or non-promotion, school graduation, or a position in higher education. Students, who have a disadvantage in the competition, are often stigmatized as incompetent, which results in burdening their socialization and behavior and receiving similar criticism or other sanctions (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; Leontari & Gialamas, 1996).

Alongside their children, the parents themselves are responsible for and sympathize with the syndrome of stress and anxiety for success. Students' "failures", according to the current evaluation system, are practical and pre-planned, as school performance is assessed not based on individual progress or learning improvement, but based on the general assessment rule or the level of performance of the whole class. (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017; Papas, 1995).

This situation, undoubtedly, affects the learning processes and leads the students to memorize "ready-made" knowledge and, generally, a guided syllabus, while at the same time it becomes the cause of grade-oriented goals and consequently gives rise to competition among students, aggravates and causes disturbances in their relationships or collaboration (ibid.).

It is also certain that in a competitive school environment, social values based on solidarity and cooperation among students subside and give way to confrontation, rivalry and individualism. Neither individual peculiarities can be taken into account in such a competitive school climate, nor are there favorable opportunities for differentiated teaching and learning processes (Angeli, 2013; Konstantinou, 2015).

However, according to relevant research, in practice, the educational focus is monopolized by the individual learning, examination and grading processes, while group and collective processes that promote cooperation and teamwork in students are at a disadvantage. And this becomes obvious by the fact that the student proceeds, but also, he is being assessed individually: learns individually, writes individually, solves exercises individually, develops thoughts and generally manages all learning processes, and ultimately "accounts" for everything. In other words, the student is educated and socialized in school in order to act and function in an individualistic way. We would argue that these experiences, of education and learning, complement those that the student also experiences daily in the family environment, which is usually dominated by overprotective education, with the child enjoying the satisfaction of most of his desires, without limited rules (Konstantinou, 2015).

9. Indications of the culture in the evaluation of teachers and educational undertaking

Evaluating the findings of the period between (1833-1981), one can find out that the evaluation of the teachers was applied continuously by the inspector and had a controlled, personalized, authoritarian, compliant, bureaucratic character, with emphasis on criteria of dubious pedagogical content and method, while the reactions of teachers were in the direction of abolishing this institution (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

Concerning the period between (1982-2015), the relevant findings show that the current educational policy, along with the measures and manipulations for the projects and reforms proposed, brought into focus the evaluation of the teacher including goals, objects, criteria, people and processes with an individual-centered and mainly controlling, hierarchical and technocratic-bureaucratic character, which has as a result, to give rise to a stronger reaction on the part of teachers, who, refuse to be evaluated, mainly through their trade unions, invoking its negative characteristics over time and especially the revival of the school inspector institution (Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

From the texts of the official trade unions, one can conclude that the teachers were and they still are opposed to their own evaluation but also, to a lesser extent, to the evaluation of the educational undertaking of the school unit. As it can be noted in these texts, the reactions against this evaluation are usually due to:

❖ the practices of the past as a cause for shaping a mentality of refusal to apply evaluation,
❖ the established culture of views on evaluation or, otherwise the misconception about its role and function,
❖ the failure to ensure the conditions required for the implementation of a reliable evaluation system, the distrust of the validity, the reliability and the objectivity of the evaluation process and the difficulties of objective valuation of all aspects of the educational undertaking,
❖   as well as due to the distrust of the political leadership of the Ministry of Education and, in particular, to the disbelief of the intentions and the goals (purposes) of the leadership, although a large number of teachers have no evaluation experience after 1982 (Athanasiadis, 2001; Konstantinou & Konstantinou, 2017).

10. General signs of divergence and dysfunction of the educational system as a cause of the shaped culture

According to findings of relevant research literature, as well as to estimations and evaluations of correlated data, the main problems of the Greek educational system, which at the same time constitute the cause of their occurrence, are the following:

➢ Absence of a stable and unified national educational policy. In other words, there are no indications of planning, implementing, and evaluating educational policy, following studying and outlining reality.
➢ Misconception (belief-notion) about the role and function of the school and incomplete - insufficient funding for the operation of education,
➢ Unilateral instigation of students to participate in the exams related to higher education,
➢ Degraded technical and vocational education,
➢ Degraded educational context and function of the senior high school (Lyceum),
➢ Incomplete and insufficient professional, pedagogical and instructional, teacher training, at a theoretical, practical and educational level, mainly of secondary and less of primary education,
➢ Impeachment to the meritocracy of the selection procedures of educational executives (principals, school counselors, etc.), but also a degraded form of implementation of the role for school counselors, at least until recently.
➢ Lack of culture and implementation regarding the evaluation of the members of the educational undertaking, at least until recently, since its implementation began in 2014.
➢ Heterochronism and anachronism of the school, about the new cultural, scientific, technological and social data (e.g., curricula, textbooks, integration of new courses or topics, evaluation of educational undertaking, etc.).
➢ Non-utilization of the possibilities of the pedagogical and social operation of the All-Day School institution.
➢ Formed and long-established beliefs about the implementation of roles (shaped culture) (Eurydice, 2004; OECD, 2018; Konstantinou, 2015).

11. Final Findings and Notes

From the analysis up to this point it becomes clear that evaluation is a natural and social necessity. It is a process that constitutes an integral part of the educational practice and is directly and indirectly linked to the way the school and society operate with their own historical, political, cultural, economic and scientific characteristics. Therefore, the evaluation of the educational process, the teachers and the educational undertaking is a sociologically and sociometrically, intricate and complex phenomenon, which does not only concern the field of the pedagogical science and the teachers, but it is influenced and co-determined by a sufficient number of involved factors.

This means that educational evaluation is not a neutral or autonomous act that is accomplished without taking into account the social, political and other conditions the school appertains to, but, in any case, is a social phenomenon with theoretical and practical aspects as well as impacts on people and circumstances. The practical application has undeniably as a point of reference the educational policy pursued, on which its content and purposes depend to a determining degree. This also indicates that in terms of the evaluation of the educational undertaking it is of great importance to methodologically take into account, the key factors of its output, including educational policy.

It is a confirmed agreement that the school and the teacher are key determinants of social cohesion and economic, scientific, cultural and social development of a country. This signifies from the point of view of education policy-makers that these two factors should not only be protected as important institutions but also that measures should be taken to strengthen the institutional role assigned to them by the social system itself.

Undoubtedly, the eventual consequence of ideological, political and economic involvement in educational issues is the formulation and promotion of purposes, procedures and criteria that probably deviate from the pedagogical orientations of the evaluation. In any case, however, the achievement of any purposes (pedagogical, administrative, etc.) of the educational evaluation depends on the effective use of its methodological tools. This implies that the purpose, object, criteria, body and evaluation techniques (procedures) should be clearly defined methodologically.

Concluding this article, we emphasize that the practical implementation of educational evaluation, requires, above all, a change of perception and mentality, in other words, a change of culture, to the factors involved in issues that have been long-established in their behaviors. This implies a change of culture in the organization and operation of both school and evaluation, which should, or at least, can be based on a perception of findings, information, feedback, collective accountability, and collective responsibility and criticism.

This means that it should be made clear, regardless of the educational and social perceptions or ideologies, that the school ought to operate based on its pedagogical orientations and that the educational evaluation should utilize its pedagogical and quality features, without excessive individualism, competition, grade-orientation, punitive and disputed strategies and expediencies. Because, in any case, the fundamental purpose of educational evaluation is to contribute to the improvement and upgrading of the educational process and the educational undertaking outcome.

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