Differentiating factors of school conflicts

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to investigate the incidence of conflicts in Greek schools and secondarily to investigate whether factors such as the area where the school is located and the level of education can differentiate the incidence of conflicts.119 teachers from different regions of Greece took part in the survey, which took place in the spring of 2022. For the purposes of the survey, a 5-point scale questionnaire was used. The results confirmed the existence of conflicts at multiple levels and with different intensity. The school region factor differentiated some of the teachers' answers, as did the level of education. Specifically, it was found that, in general, the frequency of conflicts in urban areas was higher than in rural areas. In addition, the factor of education level, primary and secondary, differentiated the responses of the teachers regarding the conflicts that occur between the principal/vice principal and parents, with the principals/deputy directors of the school needing to manage conflict situations more often. Finally, it was found that secondary education teachers have been more often faced with conflict situations than their colleagues working in primary education. In conclusion, conflicts are part of the daily life of the school, which both the teachers and the principal/deputy principal have to manage in order to increase the performance, the effectiveness of the school organization. In this direction, a constructive and productive management requires beyond the theoretical background a systemic approach from everyone.
Keywords: level of education, interpersonal conflicts, intergroup conflicts school location,

1. Introduction

Conflict is not a new phenomenon, which is expected to be eliminated. On the contrary, to the extent that people's worldview, values, beliefs, wants, goals, beliefs, needs, motivations, knowledge, capabilities and experiences differ, conflicts will exist as part of their daily lives. . This inherent characteristic of human nature (Kleiman, & Enisman, 2018) that appears between individuals, groups, organizations, countries and even nations (Rubin, 1994), is an integral part of their moral and emotional development (Valente, Lourenço, & Németh , 2020).

Conflict, for most of us, is a very unpleasant "process in which one party perceives that its interests or goal(s) are being opposed or negatively affected by another party" (Wall and Callester, 1995). It is a dynamic situation perceived by individuals in which those involved find it difficult to choose between two or more options during the selection process (Göksoy & Argon, 2016).This results in definitions often including concepts such as incompatible goals between individuals or groups and overt opposition of one person to another person's actions or statements (Longaretti & Wilson, 2006).One of the most comprehensive definitions that approaches conflict from many and different perspectives is the one given by Wilmot and Hocker, (2011). According to the researchers, "Conflict is a felt struggle between two or more interdependent individuals over perceived incompatible differences in beliefs, values, and goals, or over differences in desires for esteem, control, and connectedness (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).For Fisher, (2000) the absence of conflict is associated with the absence of meaningful interaction. From the above it becomes clear that this is a complex dynamic situation difficult to determine, leading to the existence of different definitions that include the concept of interaction, difficulties in choosing a mutually acceptable decision to achieve a desired goal due to irreconcilable differences between individuals.

Often the concept of conflict is identified and used interchangeably with the concept of disagreement. However, these two concepts differ in their time of appearance and resolution and can occur either independently or simultaneously. Thus, disputes are short-term and can be relatively easily resolved as they concern issues and interests that can be settled leading to a mutually acceptable agreement between the members involved. On the other hand, conflicts are long-term, resistant to finding a compromise solution as they are connected to deeper problems in relatively non-negotiable issues which can develop into intractable ones

(Burgess, & Spangler, 2017). The optimistic view is that within the same multicultural group, disagreements occur more often than conflicts and therefore can more often be addressed as they relate to negotiable rather than non-negotiable issues (Brower & Darrington, 2012).

Within an organization conflict can occur at different levels such as a) intrapersonal which occur within a person and include thoughts and feelings, desires, values and principles. These are normal conflicts that, if not resolved, can create other levels of conflict in the person and affect their relationships with other people by creating interpersonal conflicts, b) interpersonal between two people with different goals or approaches to their relationship. This type of conflict can lead to personal growth and the development of relationships with others if managed otherwise it can become destructive to the point where a mediator may be needed, c) inter-groups occur between two different groups within or outside the same organization due to competition for resources, differences in goals or interests, or even threats to group identity. If they are resolved effectively, they can lead to remarkable progress in the organization, while in the opposite case, the result can be very destructive and the conflict can escalate very quickly and finally d) intra-group which, like interpersonal ones, are due to different personalities with the difference that these appear between two people who are in the same group or team.Within a team, they can be very beneficial in leading the team to progress in achieving team objectives and goals. Otherwise, if not managed properly, they can disrupt the cohesion of the entire team and lead to a slowdown in productivity (Valente, Lourenço & Németh, 2020; Piyu, 2019; Smiley, 2018; De Dreu, 2008; Spector, 2008; Fisher, 2000). In most cases, intra-group conflicts are manageable unlike inter-group conflicts (Piyu, 2019).

In the school, as a social organization, which consists of a set of people from different backgrounds, with different personalities that coexist, interact, cooperate and pursue specific goals, conflicts are almost inevitable (Goksoy & Argon, 2016; Saiti, 2015; De Lima, 2001).In particular, interpersonal conflicts may occur between students, school principals, teachers, teachers with the Principal or Deputy Principal, teachers and parents as well as between the Principal or Deputy Principal and parents. Conflicts that are not managed constructively even if stopped will re-emerge dramatically affecting all aspects of school life (Longaretti & Wilson, 2006).

The recent educational reforms in Greece, with the introduction of new innovations, such as skills workshops without proper training, the evaluation of teachers and educational organizations without clear criteria, are expected to lead to a further increase in conflicts. There is evidence that the type, nature (Thapa, 2015) and frequency of conflict differ between schools with the frequency being higher in urban schools (Saiti, 2015; Makaye & Ndofirepi, 2012). According to Mahvar, Ashghali Farahani and Aryankhesal (2018), conflicts are intrapersonal and interpersonal.

People who experience conflict situations are possessed by negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, fear, disturbance, tension, furiousness, mistrust, hostility, damage(Mavrogeorgou, 2021; Dogan, 2016; Plocharczyk, 2013; Longaretti & Wilson, 2006), psychological strain, exhaustion, anxiety (Dijkstra, De Dreu, Evers, & Van Dierendonck, 2009), distress, as a result of the feelings of abandonment they feel - that their human bond with others has been broken (Sage Publication 2022).Negative emotions then lead to low job satisfaction, reduced motivation, low performance and consequently personal disappointments (Wall & Callister, 1995). This has led to the belief that conflict is harmful. undesirable and destructive therefore should be avoided. Today, contrary to this traditional view, it is accepted that conflicts lead to the improvement of society, organizations in general and individuals in particular. With opportunities for conflict as endless as each of us is (Sage Publication 2022), and the positive or negative influence of initial conflicts can expand exponentially in different directions. (Hull, 2022) researchers study conflicts at multiple levels mainly within organizations.

From this point of view, the primary purpose of the present study was to investigate the frequency of interpersonal, intergroup and intra group conflicts in Greek schools. A secondary purpose was to investigate the differences in the above levels of conflict between teachers working in urban, semi-urban and rural areas and between teachers of primary and secondary education. In particular, the following questions were investigated in this research:

(1). What is the frequency of interpersonal and group conflicts within the school organizations of Greece?
(2). Are there differences in the incidence of interpersonal and group conflicts between teachers working in urban, semi-urban and rural areas?
(3). Are there differences in the incidence of interpersonal and group conflicts between teachers working in primary and secondary education?

The results of the present research, in addition to confirming the existence of conflicts within school organizations, will add more clues about the effect of different factors such as the area where the schools are located and the level of education on the occurrence of conflicts in schools in Greece.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

In total, 119 teachers from different regions of Greece took part in the research. Of these, 22 worked in primary education, while 23 in secondary education. In addition, 10 working in schools in urban areas, 34 in schools in semi-urban areas and 20 in rural schools

2.2 Procedure

In order to investigate the frequency of conflicts, a questionnaire was created which was divided into two parts. The first part included questions related to demographic characteristics while the second part included nine questions related to the frequency of conflicts within the school organization. Questions were on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = Not at all often and 5 = Very often. The questionnaire was constructed through the special Google Forms platform offered by Google. Data were collected in an Excel spreadsheet in the spring of 2022. Responseswereanonymous.

2.3 StatisticalAnalyses

Statistical analyzes were performed with SPSS IBM 20.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistical analysis was used to check the frequencies of conflicts while non-parametric analyzes were used to find the differences between the dependent variables of the questionnaire. Specifically, Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis analysis were used for independent samples. Dependent variables were the questions of the questionnaire and independent factors were a) the area of the school (urban, semi-urban and rural), b) job level (primary-secondary). Significance level wassetat .05

The statistical hypotheses of this research were:
(H1) What is the frequency of interpersonal and group conflicts within school organizations in Greece?
(H2) The frequency of interpersonal and group conflicts will not differ statistically significantly between schools located in different regions.
(H3) Will the frequency of interpersonal and group conflicts not differ statistically significantly between primary and secondary education?

3. Results

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to test the 1st statistical hypothesis. From the results it was found that the majority of the interviewed teachers stated that in general the incidence of conflicts is above average (75.6%). Of these, 61.5% have witnessed a conflict episode. In addition, the teachers reported that in a degree from moderate to above, conflicts are observed at different levels. In particular, most reported conflicts between teachers and the principal (75.4%) and less between the vice-principal and teachers (17%). Slightly more than half reported conflicts between teachers and students (54.6%) and between teachers (52.9%). Conflicts between the teachers' association and the Director occur in roughly similar percentages (49.4%). However, the frequency of conflicts between teachers and parents is less (30.2%) and even less between Principal/vice-principal and parents (22.7%) (Table 1). Finally, a large percentage (21.3%) answered affirmatively to the question "if they have been involved in a conflict episode (Table 1, Table 2).

Table 2: Engage in conflict

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	73	61,3
	NO	46	38,7
	Total	119	100,0

Kruskal-Wallis Test was conducted to evaluate Hypothesis 2 (that the frequency of interpersonal and group conflicts between urban, semi-urban and rural schools will not differ). The results showed differences between the three areas (urban, semi-urban and rural) only in the question "In general, frequency of conflicts observed in school unit where you work" $H(2)=11.185$, $p=.004<.05$. Schools in urban areas present more conflicts (Mdn=4) than schools in semi-urban areas (Mdn=3) and schools in the countryside (Mdn=3). Post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests using Bonferroni-adjusted of .017 were used to compare all pairs of groups. The difference in conflicts between urban and Semi-urban schools was not significant (U ($N_{urban=62}N_{Semi-urban=24}$)=20,950,

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z=7,891, p=,024but conflicts between urban and rural schools were borderline significant ....($N_{urban=62}N_{Provinsial=33}$)= 19,516, ,z-2,759, p=,017(Table 3, Table 5).

Table 1: Frequency of conflicts (Percent)

		Valid					
		Notatall	A littleOften	Often	VeryOften	Extremely	Total
In general, frequency of conflicts observed in school unit where you work	Frequency	7	22	43	41	6	119
	Percent	5,9	18,5	36,1	34,5	5,0	100,0
Witnessed a conflict	Frequency	6	35	29	33	16	119
	Percent	5,0	29,4	24,4	27,7	13,4	100,0
Frequency of conflicts between teachers	Frequency	12	44	36	21	6	119
	Percent	10,1	37,0	30,3	17,6	5,0	100,0
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and the principal	Frequency	13	27	42	23	14	119
	Percent	10,9	22,7	35,3	19,3	11,8	100,0
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and the Deputy Principal	Frequency	51	48	14	2	4	119
	Percent	42,9	40,3	11,8	1,7	3,4	100,0
Frequency of conflicts between the Principal and the Teachers' Association	Frequency	19	40	37	17	6	119
	Percent	16,0	33,6	31,1	14,3	5,0	100,0
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and students	Frequency	15	39	47	12	6	119
	Percent	12,6	32,8	39,5	10,1	5,0	100,0
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and parents	Frequency	21	62	22	11	3	119
	Percent	17,6	52,1	18,5	9,2	2,5	100,0
Frequency of conflicts between Principal/Deputy Principal and parents	Frequency	32	60	13	12	2	119
	Percent	26,9	50,4	10,9	10,1	1,7	100,0

Table 2: Frequency of conflicts (mean ± SD).

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Percentiles		
	Valid			25	50	75
In general, frequency of conflicts observed in school unit where you work	119	3,14	0,977	3	3	4
Frequency of conflicts between teachers?	119	2,71	1,036	2	3	3
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and the principal?	119	2,63	1,134	2	2	4
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and the Deputy Principal?	119	1,82	0,945	1	2	2
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and students	119	2,62	1	2	3	3
Frequency of conflicts between Principal/Deputy Principal and parents	119	2,09	0,965	1	2	2
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and parents	119	2,27	0,945	2	2	3
Frequency of conflicts between teachers and the principal?	119	2,82	1,179	2	3	4
Frequency of conflicts between the Principal and the Teachers' Association	119	2,59	1,077	2	3	3
Witnessed a conflict	119	3,15	1,14	2	3	4
Engage in conflict	119	1,39	0,489	1	1	2

Table 3: Difference of conflicts between School unit locations [a,b]

	In general, conflicts observed in school unit	Between teachers	Between teachers and the Principal	Between the Principal and the Teachers' Association	Between teachers and the Deputy Principal	Between teachers and students	Between Principal/Deputy Principal and parents	Between teachers and parents	Witnessed a conflict
Chi-Square	11,185	1,172	4,687	2,010	1,881	5,819	1,128	,569	4,030
df	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	,004	,557	,096	,366	,390	,054	,569	,752	,133

a. KruskalWallisTest

b. Significance level is .05

Table 4: Difference of conflicts between primary and secondary schools

	In general, conflicts observed in school	Between teachers	Between teachers and the Principal	Between the Principal and the Teachers' Association	Between teachers and the Deputy Principal?	Between teachers and students	Between Principal/Deputy Principal and parents	Between teachers and parents	Witnessed a conflict
Mann-Whitney U	1581,500	1693,000	1618,500	1515,500	1472,500	1620,500	1265,500	1388,500	1297,000
Wilcoxon W	2806,500	2918,000	2843,500	2740,500	3957,500	2845,500	3750,500	3873,500	3782,000
Z	-,758	-,124	-,539	-1,120	-1,417	-,538	-2,632	-1,917	-2,333
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,449	,901	,590	,263	,157	,591	,008	,055	,020

a. Significance level is .05

Table 5: School unit locations (mean ± SD, Mdn Range).

Schoolunitlocations		In general, conflicts in school unit	between teachers	between teachers - the Principal	between Principal - Teachers' Association	between teachers - Deputy Principal	between teachers - students	between Principal/Deputy Principal - parents	between teachers - parents	Witnessed a conflict	Engage in conflict
Urban	N	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62	62
	Mean	3,44	2,74	3,18	2,74	1,89	2,81	2,24	2,35	3,11	1,35
	Std. Deviation	,898	1,070	1,222	1,173	,960	,972	1,126	,993	1,161	,482
	Median	4,00	3,00	3,00	2,50	2,00	3,00	2,00	2,00	3,00	1,00
	Range	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1
Semi-urban	N	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24
	Mean	2,83	2,75	3,00	2,50	1,88	2,67	1,92	2,21	2,88	1,54
	Std. Deviation	,963	,737	,885	,978	,947	1,090	,776	,977	1,035	,509
	Median	3,00	3,00	3,00	3,00	2,00	3,00	2,00	2,00	3,00	2,00
	Range	4	3	4	3	4	4	3	3	3	1
Rural	N	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33	33
	Mean	2,82	2,61	2,61	2,36	1,67	2,24	1,94	2,15	3,42	1,33
	Std. Deviation	,983	1,171	1,144	,929	,924	,902	,704	,834	1,146	,479
	Median	3,00	2,00	2,00	2,00	1,00	2,00	2,00	2,00	4,00	1,00
	Range	3	4	4	4	4	3	2	3	4	1
Total	N	119	119	119	119	119	119	119	119	119	119
	Mean	3,14	2,71	2,98	2,59	1,82	2,62	2,09	2,27	3,15	1,39
	Std. Deviation	,977	1,036	1,157	1,077	,945	1,000	,965	,945	1,140	,489
	Median	3,00	3,00	3,00	3,00	2,00	3,00	2,00	2,00	3,00	1,00
	Range	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1

		In general, conflicts in school unit	between teachers	between teachers - the Principal	between Principal - Teachers' Association	between teachers - Deputy Principal	between teachers - students	between Principal/Deputy Principal - parents	between teachers - parents	Witnessed a conflict	Engage in conflict
	N	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49	49
	Mean	3,04	2,73	2,90	2,45	1,98	2,51	2,35	2,45	3,45	1,37
primary	Std. Deviation	1,079	1,255	1,279	1,119	1,051	,794	,991	,959	1,292	,487
	Median	3,00	3,00	3,00	3,00	2,00	3,00	2,00	2,00	4,00	1,00
	Range	4	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	4	1
	N	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70	70
	Mean	3,21	2,69	3,04	2,69	1,71	2,70	1,91	2,14	2,94	1,40
socondary	Std. Deviation	,899	,860	1,069	1,043	,854	1,121	,913	,921	,976	,493
	Median	3,00	3,00	3,00	2,50	2,00	3,00	2,00	2,00	3,00	1,00
	Range	4	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	1
	N	119	119	119	119	119	119	119	119	119	119
	Mean	3,14	2,71	2,98	2,59	1,82	2,62	2,09	2,27	3,15	1,39
Total	Std. Deviation	,977	1,036	1,157	1,077	,945	1,000	,965	,945	1,140	,489
	Median	3,00	3,00	3,00	3,00	2,00	3,00	2,00	2,00	3,00	1,00
	Range	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1

Table 6: Primary and secondary schools (mean ± SD, Mdn, Range).

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Mann-Whitney was conducted to evaluate Hypothesis 3 (that interpersonal and group conflicts will not persist in secondary versus secondary education). The results showed differences in only two questions. Specific differences were found in question a) Frequency of "conflicts between Principal/Deputy Principal and parents" $(U(N_{primary=49}N_{Secondary=70})=1265,500$, z-2,632, p=,008 with Principal/Deputy Principal being involved in conflict situations with parents more often than their colleagues in secondary education and in question b) "Witnessed a conflict" $(U(N_{primary=49}N_{Secondary=70})=1297,000$, z=-2,333, p=,020 where primary school teachers have witnessed conflict situations more often than their secondary school colleagues (Table 4 and Table 6).

4. Discussion – Conclusions

Conflicts could disappear only under certain conditions such as the interacting individuals being very benevolent, resources high, time frames being different, the nature of the relationship not being perceived by the individuals, cooperative incentives and conditions for common success, to increase the strength of the ties between the groups, etc. (Wall & Callister 1995). In school, a social organization in which people from different backgrounds are forced to work together to achieve predetermined goals, it would be utopian if we expected that conflicts would not occur.

The results of this research confirmed the existence of frequent conflicts within Greek schools. The intensity of conflict was even high with most teachers reporting conflict at multiple levels. In particular, interpersonal conflicts were found between teachers, teachers and Principal, Deputy Principal, students and parents. In a similar way, conflicts were found between different groups such as teachers and parents and also between the Principal/Vice Principal and the parents. Our results confirm those reported in international (Hakvoort, Larsson & Lundstrom 2020; Goksoy & Argon, 2016; Makaye & Ndofirepi, 2012; De Lima, 2001), and Greek literature (Manesis, Vlachou, & Mitropoulou, 2019; Papageorgakis & Sismanidou, 2016; Saiti, 2015; Saiti, 2014) by other researchers. The complex and dynamic role (Chalkiadaki, 2019), which the school organization in Greece is called upon to perform after the latest reforms, but also the stress and insecurity they cause to teachers may be the reason for the appearance of conflicts in schools in Greece.

The analysis of differences in the occurrence of conflicts between urban, semi-urban and rural schools showed that in urban schools conflicts are more often observed than in schools in rural areas. Our results reinforce and add to the results of Saiti's (2015), research, which investigated conflict in only primary schools while we used a sample of both primary and secondary teachers. It is an indisputable fact that schools in urban centers, more than those in rural areas, show a greater in homogeneity of the student population due to the increased wave of immigration. Possibly the conflicts are intrapersonal and interpersonal both between teachers and parents or even students. Future research could investigate the type and nature of conflicts as in the present we investigated only the frequency.

In addition, we found that Principals of secondary schools come into conflict with parents more often than their secondary school colleagues. Parents of young students often intervene when they feel they need to protect their children or if something upsets them. The first recipient of these is the Director, as the person in charge of the school's administration, and secondarily the teachers. Thus, this result did not surprise us.

Finally, we found that elementary school teachers have been witnesses to conflict situations more often than their college colleagues. As the question was general, we do not know if the teachers with the answers generally meant conflicts or conflicts between teachers, students, with the Principal or a combination of them. Our results are in line with Mahvar et all (2018), who report mainly intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts within the school organization.

The increased duties of both Principals and teachers and the evaluation that was recently introduced in Greek schools, the greater heterogeneity of the student population due to the increased immigration wave, the financial crisis mainly for parents and the global epidemic in recent years are likely to lead to increased levels of stress and insecurity for both teachers and students' families. Stress and work overload have been considered particularly stressful factors (Jaramillo, Mulki & Boles, 2011). Stress is included among the factors that can lead to conflicts as it produces a tension in the individual that can lead to conflict in order to defuse (Wall & Callister1995).

Today's educational complexity requires principals to adopt a more systemic perspective on school management (Benoliel, Shaked, Nadav & Schechter, 2019) starting with the management of conflicts which can be harmful (De Dreu, 2008) if not manage constructively affecting multiple levels of school life (Longaretti & Wilson, 2006).

It should not be overlooked that conflicts cannot be resolved only with the intervention of the school principal but also with similar initiatives by teachers (Saiti, 2014). However, both teachers and principals lack the appropriate theoretical background to deal with conflicts (Msila 2012; Okotoni O &Okotoni, 2003).

It should not be overlooked that conflicts cannot be resolved only with the intervention of the school principal but also with similar initiatives by teachers (Saiti, 2014). However, both teachers and principals lack

the appropriate theoretical background to deal with conflicts (Msila 2012; Okotoni O & Okotoni, 2003). The new education law in Greece, beyond the necessity of the trainings it introduces, gives the right to Principals to carry out in-school trainings with the role of the trainer being taken by a teacher. Within these frameworks and after the training of the principals, they could train the teachers of their schools, who can then, in addition to mitigating the conflicts, teach the students as well.
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