# RESEARCH REPORT

# ASPECTS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GREEK *HOLOIMERO* ('ALL-DAY') PRIMARY SCHOOL

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**Abstract** – *The 'holoimero' school is a special school type in Greece that functions until late in the evening. 'Holoimero' constitutes one of the most important components of the latest educational reform. During its operation, at the end of the morning shift, the 'holoimero' or 'all day' school seeks for the creative occupation of the students who decide to participate in its programme, which includes activities not offered in the morning shift. The present research investigates the factors of the effectiveness of 'holoimero' that, according to some of its teachers, are of great importance. The main argument of the present study is that certain variables are related to the effectiveness of the 'holoimero' school. Some of these variables are school financing and autonomy, school climate, openness to the community, flexibility, pedagogical innovation, and active involvement of those concerned with the organisation and implementation of the curriculum.*

## Introduction: the Greek *holoimero* school

*H*oloimero is a special type of school in Greece. Its name derives from the Greek words 'holo' (which means 'all') and 'imera' (which means 'day'). Thus, *holoimero* stands for an 'all day' school, a recent innovation in Greece. In fact, the *Holoimero* School was established in Greece in 1998 as a part of a centrally guided reform effort of the Greek government to rehabilitate the role of the primary school sector from kindergarten to the age of 12. From 2002 onward[1], this programme has become common in Greek primary schools and presently the majority of primary schools in Greece are functioning as 'all-day' ones. The teaching programme in *holoimero* schools begins at 7am instead of 8:10am as in regular schools, and ends at 4:15pm instead of 1:30pm.

Though many educational systems include some form or other of all-day schools, the term 'all-day' is not used in precisely the same way internationally. Apart from the divergence in semantic definition, a divergence can also been

recorded in the underpinning philosophy and rationale, the way the initiative is implemented, and the very duration of the programme. Indeed, one can find variations of the same idea not only between countries, but also within them as well. Generally, however, the idea of having to stay at school for the greater part of the day refers to an alternative type of schooling that tends to take one of two main forms (Eurydice, 1997; Deckert-Peaceman, 2004). In the first type, which can be referred to as *closed* or *obligatory*, school attendance is mandatory for all students, and the syllabus, which lasts through into the afternoon, is incorporated in the traditional school programme. In this type of extended programme both the all-day school and the normal school constitute a single structure, since traditional subjects, creative activities and students' homework preparation for the next day are distributed throughout the school timetable. In Greece there are only 28 all-day schools of the closed-type, and these are still in their pilot phase. No central decision has yet been made by the Ministry of Education to increase their number.

The other type of programme can be called *open* or *flexible*. In this case attendance is optional for the students who wish to attend the all-day school syllabus after the end of the morning lessons. The syllabus in this case includes homework preparation for the next day's classes, mainly in combination with activities of a creative character. It should also be noted that in the school year 2006-2007, roughly 150,000 students studied in 6,636 open-type all-day schools. Of these, 4,271 were primary schools and 2,365 were kindergartens (Kalimeri, 2006). Greek educators insist that in these open-type all day schools, open and flexible curricula should be adopted, with a view to reinforcing the educator's autonomy and responsibility when it comes to the planning and implementation of the programmes (Hadzigeorgiou, 1998, p. 107).

The idea of the all-day school was launched by the Greek Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs through a series of Legal Acts[2], which led to a law governing the operation of the flexible *holoimero school*. According to the Legal Acts, the basic targets of the operation of the *holoimero* school are as follows:

• The reinforcement of knowledge and skills that students are taught in the morning syllabus (study, additional teaching interventions in Language and Mathematics, consolidating teaching, individualised programmes by the schoolteachers of the afternoon classes); and

• The enrichment of the morning syllabus with more subjects of particular cultural and social importance (English Language, Sports, Music, Dance, Theatrical Studies, Arts, New technologies in Education), according to the students' needs and interests, taught by specialised teachers.

From a pedagogical point of view, emphasis is given on alternative learning-by-sharing, interdisciplinary, experimental teaching approaches and the undertaking of innovation for the successful application of the enriched syllabus. The proposals for the implementation of cross-curricular projects also contribute to this direction. The *holoimero* school is considered to be a place for the creation of authentic conditions for alternative learning, a parameter that is consistent with the basic principles of modern trends in education, such as environmental education, cross-cultural education, health education, and so on (Loukeris, 2005).

## Applying the idea of effectiveness in the Greek *holoimero* school

As we have seen, the Greek *holoimero* school constitutes a relatively new institution in Greece, and for precisely this reason, its evaluation in relation to its effectiveness is essential. The generation of relevant data can contribute to the achievement of the objective that inspired the initiative in the first place, namely the improvement of the quality of studies in all-day schools. If the evaluation shows that such an objective is being reached, than the initiative can be adopted by the remaining schools (Kalimeri, 2006).

The criteria identified by the school effectiveness movement are a key inspiration behind the evaluation. According to Rutter (1983), McCormack-Larkin (1985), Mortimer et al. (1988), Cheng (1993), Reynolds (1999) and Reynolds et al. (1996), school effectiveness is determined by a series of indicators among which the following have a predominant position: the implementation of the curriculum, the collaboration of school teachers, regular feedback to students regarding their progress, the involvement of parents and the community, the support of educationally challenged students, the leadership of the school headmaster and staff, adequate finance, resources and technical infrastructure, and finally, the cultivation of an improved pedagogical climate. A similar list of school effectiveness features was identified by Teddlie & Reynolds (2000; cited in Reviere, 2004), after a comparative study carried out in the USA and in Britain. They thus refer to effective leadership, effective teaching, a continued pervasive focus on learning, a positive school culture, creation of high expectations for all, an emphasis on students' responsibilities and rights, the monitoring of progress at all levels, the development of staff skills at school, and the involvement of parents in productive and appropriate ways.

In the present study, the evaluation of the all-day school programme effectiveness included the exploration of teachers' perceptions. While the school headmaster has the overall responsibility for the organisation and co-ordination of the morning and afternoon syllabus in all-day schools, s/he does so in

collaboration with the teachers. One of these teachers also has a specific role in ensuring the smooth running of the programme. The teachers' perceptions about the all-day school environment was sought in order to capture their every day experience of the programme. The recording of their experiences, through the completion of questionnaires, capture some of the problems encountered, and how these were faced. The issues they raise suggest a framework of quality criteria that can guide the effective operation of the all-day school.

## Other studies on the Greek *holoimero* school

Some studies have already been carried out in Greece in order to identify the challenges facing all-day schools, how these could be overcome, and the long-term prospects of the initiative. A recent review by Kyriakopoulou (2006) identified a number of studies, which tend to focus on geographic, social and familial criteria. Suffice it to mention in this context the research carried out by Nikolaou & Pamouktsoglou (2005), by Loukeris, Stamatopoulou & Alvertis (2005), by Loukeris, Karabatzaki & Stamatopoulou (2005), and by Papachristos (2005). A special evaluation of the all-day school was completed in 2005 on behalf of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs with the contribution of various agencies and entities.

The outcomes of the aforementioned studies have led to a number of conclusions, the most important of which have been summarised by Kyriakopoulou (2006), Loukeris & Markantonatou (2004), Loukeris & Syriou (2007) and Loukeris & Taboulari (2005):

• Parents think positively of the institution, are satisfied with the preparation of children's homework for the next day, and consider the collaboration with teachers essential.
• The all-day school contributes to the children's socialisation, the improvement of their personal behaviour, and the stimulation of their self-confidence and self-assurance.
• The provision of varying activities in the all-day school curriculum did not impede the majority of students from attending other extracurricular activities.
• Teachers do not have sufficient time to meet each other, and this limits their collaboration.
• There is a lack in the material and technical infrastructure of the all-day schools, with inadequate provision of pedagogic and teaching resources.
• Funding is also insufficient, and the recruitment of educational personnel is hampered by bureaucratic procedures.

## The current study and its research methodology

*Assumptions and exploratory questions*

Our basic focus was on the extent to which the all-day school fulfils its social and pedagogic role. What we wanted to explore was whether the organisation and the operation of the traditional school was truly transformed in the all-day school, in ways that impacted positively on the students' educational and social experience. Key questions we asked included the following:

- Do staff who teach the same or different subject matter in the morning and afternoon programmes work together to develop flexible curricula and attractive learning environments?
- What issues have a positive or negative influence on the pedagogic climate in the all-day school?
- What facilities are school teachers provided with to support them in fulfilling their administrative and professional roles?
- Is there sufficient funding, and are there enough resources to ensure that the all-day school operates effectively?

*Research tool*

The evaluation of the all-day schools was carried out through the use of a questionnaire, which helped us record the opinions, experiences and perceptions of school headmasters, deputy managers or teachers in charge of the afternoon programme. In this paper, reference is only made to a part of this questionnaire, and the list of variables concerning effectiveness which are investigated are listed in Tables 1 and 2 below.

These variables were generated in a pilot study carried out in all-day schools in the area of Piraeus (Loukeris & Markantonatou, 2004; Loukeris, Stamatopoulou & Alvertis, 2005). The school headmasters' and teachers' opinions were recorded in a questionnaire that included the following open question: 'In your opinion, what factors contribute to the most effective operation of all-day schools?' Respondents were asked to identify a maximum of four reasons. An analysis of the responses led to the formulation of the variables (as shown in Tables 1 and 2) which were used to draw up a questionnaire which was distributed to all-day school teachers all over Greece, and the results of which we are reporting in this research report.

*Process of data collection*

Our study was based on a random sample of 85 all-day primary schools. The school headmasters, their deputies, or the teachers-in-charge of all-day schools were targeted given that their opinion was considered to be of great importance, since they had first-hand experience of the initiative, and were best placed to identify and discuss the problems faced in its implementation. Of the 156 questionnaires that were distributed, 136 were returned to us.

*Description of the sample*

Basic information about the gender, age, and years of service of the respondents was collected. Of the 136 completed questionnaires, 65 were filled in by males, and 71 by females. The average age for the men was 45.8 years (*SD* 6.770) and 41.1 years (*SD* 8.514) for the women. Furthermore, the average previous experience was 22.45 years (*SD* 7.637) for the men and 18.16 (*SD* 9.751) years for the women. While several of the respondents had followed a range of in-service courses, only 4.4% of then had undertaken postgraduate studies.

*Statistical analysis of results*

SPSS was used to process the questionnaire data. The percentages of all the variables of the questionnaire were calculated and the relations between the variable *improvement of school effectiveness* and the dependent variables were evaluated. For the evaluation of these relations, Kendall's tau-b criterion, which concerns the cross-correlation of categoric data, was selected.

## Findings

Table 1 presents the percentage of the answers to the variables of the questionnaire which were examined in correlation with the variable *improvement of school effectiveness*.

*TABLE 1: Percentage of the answers to the variables of the questionnaire*

| Variables | Percentage | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *A Lot* | *Some* | *Little* | *Nil* |
| Interest in being involved in curriculum planning | 32.3 | 38.3 | 18.1 | 11.3 |
| Actual involvement in curriculum planning | 29.5 | 36.4 | 22.0 | 12.1 |
| Lack of special equipment in classrooms | 24.0 | 45.8 | | 30.2 |
| Problems with financing | 42.6 | 39.5 | 0.8 | 17.1 |
| Time demands made on the principal | 41.4 | 41.4 | | 17.2 |
| Reinforcement of contacts between teachers | 12.4 | 32.6 | | 55.0 |
| Cooperation of class teachers | 37.3 | 56.7 | | 6.0 |
| Interest in in-service training | 9.8 | 41.4 | | 48.8 |
| The creation of pleasant climate | 4.0 | 60.5 | | 35.5 |
| The adoption of new teaching methods | 7.5 | 49.6 | | 42.9 |
| Effectiveness | 3.0 | 74.3 | | 22.7 |
| Student drop-out | 5.2 | 67.2 | | 27.6 |
| Parental satisfaction with the activities organised | 14.3 | 80.5 | | 5.2 |
| Parental satisfaction with the study programme | 11.9 | 72.4 | | 15.7 |

| Variables | Percentage | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *A Lot* | *Some* | *Little* | *Nil* |
| Effective cooperation with the administrative authorities | 48.4 | 32.1 | 11.7 | 7.8 |
| Sufficient cooperation with the administrative authorities | 48.4 | 33.4 | 9.5 | 8.7 |
| Cooperation with the administrative authorities solved problems | 45.7 | 32.6 | 9.3 | 12.4 |
| Problems in the cooperation with the administrative authorities | 7.1 | 7.1 | 14.3 | 71.5 |
| Cooperation on professional issues | 38.5 | 32.5 | 19.6 | 9.4 |
| Improvement of the relationships within the school–parent association | 40.2 | 56.1 | 3.7 | |
| Improvement of the relationship between the school and the local authorities | 16.0 | 79.4 | 4.6 | |
| Improvement of the relationship between the school and other institutions | 15.5 | 84.5 | | |
| | **Yes** | | **No** | |
| Organising the management of the school unit | 39.4 | | 60.6 | |

Table 2 presents the values of the correlation coefficient Kendall's tau-b between the variable *improvement of school effectiveness* and the rest of the variables that were examined in the present work.

*TABLE 2: The values of Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient between the variable 'improvement of school effectiveness' and the rest of the variables*

| Variables | School Effectiveness |
|---|:---:|
| Interest in being involved in curriculum planning | 0.27** |
| Actual involvement in curriculum planning | 0.25** |
| Lack of special equipment in classrooms | -0.16* |
| Problems with financing | -0.19* |
| Time demands made on the principal | 0.18* |
| Reinforcement of contacts between teachers | 0.26** |
| Cooperation of class teachers | 0.21* |
| Interest for in-service training | 0.33** |
| The creation of pleasant climate | 0.56** |
| The adoption of new teaching methods | 0.29** |
| Student drop-out | -0.35** |
| Parental satisfaction with activities organised | 0.26** |
| Parental satisfaction with the study programme | 0.34** |
| Effective cooperation with the administrative authorities | 0.26** |
| Sufficient cooperation with the administrative authorities | 0.23** |
| Cooperation with the administrative authorities solved problems | 0.26** |
| Problems in the cooperation with the administrative authorities | -0.27** |
| Cooperation on professional issues | 0.17* |
| Improvement of the relationships within the school–parent association | 0.36** |
| Improvement of the relationship between the school and the local authorities | 0.29** |
| Improvement of the relationship between the school and other institutions | 0.19* |
| Organising the management of the school unit | 0.19* |

$* p < 0.05$, $** p < 0.01$

More specifically, one can observe in Table 2 a statistically significant positive relation – at the level of significance $p.<.0.01$ or $p.<.0.05$ – between the variable *improvement of school effectiveness* and a range of other variables. When these variables increase, school effectiveness improves respectively.

One can also observe a statistically significant negative relation – at the level of significance $p.<.0.01$ or $p.<.0.05$ – between the variable *improvement of school effectiveness* and such variables as 'lack of special equipment in classrooms', 'problems with financing', 'student drop-out', and 'problems with cooperation with the administrative authorities'. When these variables decrease, school effectiveness improves accordingly.

## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to record the opinions of the school headmasters and teachers in all-day schools in order to identify the factors which they considered to be closely connected with the effective operation of schools.

Firstly, school effectiveness appears to be connected with the teachers' display of interest in participating in the planning and implementation of the all-day school curriculum. As international research confirms (Reynolds, Muijs & Treharne, 2003), both the participative planning of the curriculum and the teachers' enthusiastic involvement influence positively the quality of education provision overall.

Effective education presupposes teacher collaboration, so that the consent of everybody involved in the educational process is ensured, facilitating the smooth running of the all-day school. All the above mentioned factors are explicit, since, according to Heneveld (1994, p. 39), the effective operation of schools is ensured when teachers collaborate together and share ideas, when there is trust in their teaching competence, when school activities are delegated to them, and when they are called upon to address emergent professional issues and challenges.

Several aspects that lead to effectiveness, such as collaboration between teachers and curriculum development, can be positively influenced by in-service training (Purkey & Smith, 1983; Levine & Lezotte, 1990). Certainly this study supports the notion that professional development opportunities have a positive impact on school effectiveness, as does staff collaboration on pedagogic and professional issues, and the adoption of innovative teaching methods. Such activities clearly make additional demands on educational staff, particularly so on the school director.

The latter is the one who is responsible for the coordination of his colleagues, when it comes to the implementation of the programme for creative activities

(Scheerens & Bosker, 1997). This study shows how important staff collaboration becomes when addressing issues and challenges that arise, and how crucial it is to ensure the effectiveness of the all-day school – a factor that has already been highlighted in school effectiveness literature. Rutter *et al*. (1979), for instance, pointed out the importance of democratic processes in the running of a school, with teachers' opinions being solicited and taken seriously in the development of the curriculum and in the planning and implementation of school activities. Mortimore *et al*. (1988), Teddlie & Springfield (1993), and Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore (1995) attest to the fact that school headmasters play a decisive role, since it is thanks to their administrative competence that communication and cooperation with all staff can take place, leading to an improved educational environment and outcome. Effective schools are therefore those that are led in such a way as to facilitate the sharing of responsibilities between all educational staff, with teachers being directly or indirectly involved in decision-making processes, including economic ones (Cresswell, 2004).

Furthermore, Louis & Smith (1990) note that the teachers' involvement in decision-making reinforces the sense of approval of their work by parents and the wider local community. This is also borne out by our own study, where we can report a statistically significant correlation between the improvement of the relations between the school and the parental association, the Local Authorities and the other institutions that are involved in the educational system on the one hand, and school effectiveness on the other. The positive regard in which the community holds the school motivates teachers to invest more effort in their work, leading to improved educational outcomes – a dynamic that was nicely captured by Reviere (2004) in his comparative studies of schools in the USA and Great Britain. It is factors such as these which have an impact on the physiognomy of the school, releasing what Scheerens (2000) calls its 'policy-making potential' and its 'self-renewing capacity'.

Parental involvement in the educational process also contributes to the effective operation of a school (Gaziel, 1996). Parents not only have the right to express their opinion on school matters, but they are actually resources that can contribute toward the solution of problems encountered by the school (Cotton, 1995). Sammons, Hillman & Mortimore (1995) actually consider parents to be educational partners, and supporters of the school project. In the present study, the variables 'parental satisfaction with homework assigned' and 'creative activities' implemented within the all-day school framework, are positively related to the effective operation of all-day schools. Such a finding is supported by other studies, including that by Purkey & Smith (1983), who conclude that the combination of parental involvement, the increase of time dedicated to learning, and the support of school by the local community all contribute to school effectiveness.

Successful economic management also contributes to the effective operation of schools, but this presupposes adequate funding. In the present survey, limited financial resources were also highlighted as a factor that, according to the interviewees' opinions, is negatively related to the effective running of the all-day school. Inadequate funding resulted in a dearth of equipment and resources in classrooms, which naturally had an equally negative impact on the smooth running of the all-day school. In a related study, Loukeris, Karabatzaki & Stamatopoulou (2005) also showed how insufficient funding, inadequate material and limited technical infrastructure, together with parental dissatisfaction with the all-day school curriculum, appear to be connected with the rate of student drop-out from the all-day school programme. Our study also confirms the negative correlation between low levels of financing and school effectiveness, emphasising the point that adequate funding is one of the most important parameters that contributes to creating a pleasant and attractive working environment for teachers and students alike (Louis & Smith, 1990).

In conclusion, the improvement of the effectiveness of the all-day school is linked to a range of factors that include high levels of teacher participation and cooperation, strong and positive relations between students, teachers, parents and the local community, and adequate funding providing the required resources, facilities and infrastructure – all of which contribute to the development of an improved pedagogic climate and a pleasant and attractive environment facilitative of learning and creativity. A context that is supportive of pedagogic innovation helps improve learning outcomes, reflected in parental satisfaction with the creative activities their children are involved in, and the efforts of teachers to help students prepare for their homework commitments. The all-day school programme thus functions as an attractive incentive, which manages to galvanise and retain student interest and motivation for learning.

## Notes

1. Funding support came mainly from the 2nd Operational Programme for Education and Initial Vocational Training (EPEAEK).
2. Legal Acts: 50/76/121153/G 1 (13-11-02); 50/57/26650/G 1/17-3-03; 50/58/26861/G 1/17-3-2003; 50/132/90416/ G 1/28-8-2003; 12/773/77094/G 1/28-7-2006.

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