

Original research paper

**MUTUAL SUPPORT AS A CHARACTERISTIC OF THE
“SCHOOL AS LEARNING ORGANIZATION” AND ITS EFFECT
ON DIMENSIONS OF TEACHERS’ JOB SATISFACTION**

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Abstract. *School as learning organization is a multi-level and multi-dimensional concept, incorporating characteristics of emotional climate such as trust, mutual support and respect, benefits to teachers and contributes to their job satisfaction. Given that the literature examines perceived support in the workplace and its relationship with job satisfaction, the current study focuses on teachers’ mutual support and its effect to their job satisfaction. 304 primary school teachers from Greece completed a self-reported questionnaire consisted of two scales. Mutual support was examined by 11 items from two research tools (School Success Profile Learning Organization Questionnaire; Bowen et al., 2007; Slegers et al., 2013). Also, two research tools (Bellingham, 2004; 11 items; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; 9 items) were used to examine teachers’ job satisfaction. The factor analysis indicated 3 factors (positive work environment, positive emotion and personal time). The results revealed that teachers expressed positive perceptions about mutual support in their school, as well as in terms of their job satisfaction dimensions. Path analysis revealed that support among teachers has direct and indirect effects on their job satisfaction. Results indicate that schools need to invest in teachers’ mutual support in several ways, as it seems to have positive effects on their work outcomes and their professional learning.*

Key words: *mutual support, job satisfaction, school as learning organization, primary school teachers*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Senge (1990) defined organizations as learning places where people continually explain their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together (p. 3). Moreover, learning organizations are considered as organic “systems” of shared learning rather than impersonal entities focused on individual self-interest and competition (Bui & Baruch, 2010).

School as learning organization is defined as “learning community in which all members acquire new ideas and accept responsibility for developing and maintaining the organization and members working together, mutually understanding each other, yet respecting the diversity of one another” (Hiatt-Michael, 2001; p. 115). It is also characterized as a multi-level and multi-dimensional concept (OECD, 2016), which appears to provide specific benefits to teachers (Kools et al., 2019).

Several studies have proposed different dimensions of learning organizations, based on different models. For example, Senge's (1990) theoretical model includes five dimensions: systems thinking, shared vision, team learning, personal excellence and mental models. Subsequently, Watkins and Marsick (1993) as well as Yang et al. (2004) in the field of Business Administration proposed specific dimensions at three levels: individual, group and organization.

A more modern model of the school as learning organization has been proposed by Kools and Stoll (2016) and the OECD (2016), which is based on the model of Watkins and Marsick (1993). The specific theoretical model proposes seven dimensions, such as:

- a) development of a common vision centered on the learning of all students,
- b) promotion and support of continuous professional and experiential learning for all staff,
- c) promoting team learning and collaboration,
- d) a culture of inquiry, innovation and inquiry,
- e) systems for sharing knowledge and learning,
- f) learning with and from the external environment and the wider system, and
- g) learning-oriented leadership.

A distinct differentiation is found in the studies of Bowen et al (2006, 2007), who proposed that emotions are equally important for the development of the learning organization and its members suggesting the following: common purpose, respect, cohesion, trust, mutual support and optimism.

In the present study, we focused on mutual support as a main component of school as learning organization, because supportive work relationships are associated with positive work-related outcomes such as employees' well-being and performance (e.g., Cross & Cummings, 2004; Bakker et al., 2005; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Additionally in schools, colleague support is also associated with positive outcomes, such as burnout (Halbesleben, 2006; Le Blanc et al., 2007) and increased work performance (Xanthopoulou et al., 2008; Schreurs et al., 2012). Given that there is not enough evidence regarding the role of colleague support in the school context, we specifically focused on support between teachers.

Job satisfaction as a popular research topic for the researchers in organization and management studies (Luthans, 2005), is defined by Taylor and Tashakkori (1995) as the feelings that employee hold toward their job. Research on job satisfaction in education

has explored the negative effects of lack of teachers’ satisfaction and it has been shown that it can lead to burnout and even absenteeism (Perrachione et al., 2008).

School as learning organization has been proposed as a crucial component to increase the professional satisfaction of teachers. Accordingly, there are findings which showed that schools which function as learning organizations increase teachers' motivation (Louis et al, 1995) and create the right conditions for teachers to feel more positive about their work (Darling-Hammond, 1996), thereby contributing to their job satisfaction (Chang & Lee (2007). Also, supporting and encouraging teachers to participate in decision-making in the frame of the latent organization lead them to greater job satisfaction (Zellars & Perrewe, 2001) and generally to greater commitment (Senge et al., 2012; Silins et al., 2002). Recently, research by Kools et al. (2019) confirmed the positive relationship between school as a latent organization and job satisfaction, while a similar finding was identified in the research of Papazoglou (2021). However, according to the overview and the relevant literature, it seems that in the Greek context no previous research has examined the effect of mutual support as a characteristic of school as learning organization on teachers’ job satisfaction.

Therefore, our study aiming to examine mutual support as a characteristic of the school as learning organization and its effect on dimensions of teachers’ job satisfaction formulated the following hypotheses:

- H1: Greek primary school teachers are expected to express themselves positively about their mutual support.
- H2: Greek primary school teachers are expected to express themselves positively about their job satisfaction.
- H3: There will be a positive correlation between teachers’ mutual support and their job satisfaction.

2. METHOD

For the needs of this research, the quantitative research approach was adopted and a self-report questionnaire was used. Convenience sampling was the method of collecting the research data (Robson, 2007), as the researchers, due to their status, they had direct access to Primary Education teachers in their network, which at the same time ensured the immediate response of the participants.

The sample consisted of 304 primary school teachers who answered all the questions in the questionnaire. 213 of the research participants, were women. 51 teachers aged under 30 (percentage 16.8%), 75 teachers aged between 31 and 40 (percentage 24.7%), 110 teachers aged between 41 and 50 years (percentage 36.2%) and 68 teachers aged over 50 years (percentage 22.4%). Of the schools that teachers served 5.9% were located in large urban centers, 60.9% in cities, 7.6% in towns and 25.7% in villages.

11 items were selected from the scales of Slegers et al (2013) and Bowen et al (2007) (School Success Profile Learning Organization), which refer to the relationships of trust and mutual support between teachers. In particular, the statements concern their views on the trusting relationships that develop at school, the support they receive from their colleagues but also offer them to themselves, the caring relationships and the advisory role they may exist between them professional relationship (Cronbachs’ $\alpha = .947$).

We also investigate teachers’ job satisfaction. The Likert-type scale initially included 17 statements with a five-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). In

order to measure the degree of teachers' job satisfaction, two research tools were used, namely Bellingham (2004) (Job Satisfaction Survey) (11 of the 30 proposals were selected) and Liu & Ramsey (2008) (9 proposals were selected). This choice was made in order for all the statements to respond to the Greek educational reality and to more comprehensively address to the research subject. The statements selected focused mainly on teachers' feelings, but also on their working environment. An exploratory factor analysis was performed, which initially indicated 3 factors: positive feeling, positive work environment and personal time.

The SPSS 23.0 statistical package was used to analyze the data, utilizing both descriptive and inductive statistics. For the normality of the distribution of the variables, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed, which resulted to the conduct of parametric testing.

3. RESULTS

School teachers express themselves positively regarding the existence of mutual support in the school setting they serve (Table 1). They also express themselves positively regarding their job satisfaction and their individual dimensions. In particular, they are more positive about having a positive feeling at work and less positive about having a good working environment and having personal time.

Table 1 Descriptive analysis

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Cronbach's α
Mutual support	3.99	.79	.947
Job satisfaction	3.76	.62	.892
Positive feeling	4.09	.68	.901
Positive work environment	3.29	.80	.729
Personal time	3.54	.94	.811

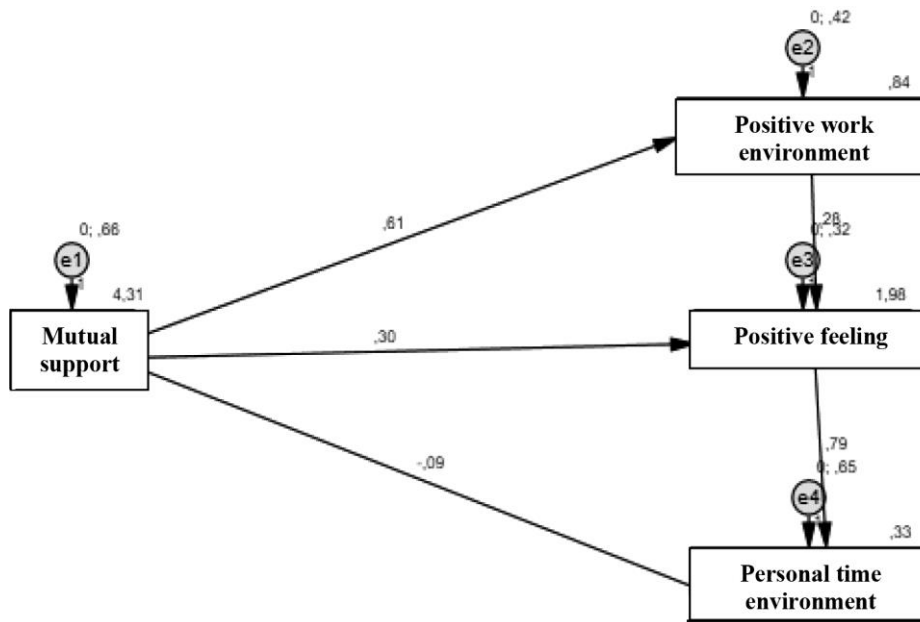
Weak to moderate correlations were found between the research variables (Table 2). Specifically, mutual support has a moderate positive correlation with job satisfaction dimensions, positive affect and positive work environment and a weak positive correlation with personal time.

Table 2 Pearson correlations between variables

Variables	Mutual support	Job satisfaction	Positive feeling	Good work environment	Personal time
Mutual support	-				
Job satisfaction (total)	.571**	-			
Positive feeling	.501**	.915**	-		
Positive work environment	.593**	.750**	.508**	-	
Personal time	.209**	.685**	.526**	.288**	-

Next, we wanted to test the direct and indirect effects between mutual support and job satisfaction dimensions.

Thus, a path analysis was performed using SPSS AMOS (Graf 1).



Graf 1 Path diagram

The model, which was finally qualified, had a very good fit ($\chi^2 = 1.5$, $p = 0.221$, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 1, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.039). Mutual support was found to have direct and indirect effects on positive emotion, while only direct effects were found among the remaining variables. In particular, it appears that a good work environment mediates between mutual support and positive affect. Mutual support through the work environment affects the positive feeling of the teachers (Table3).

Table 3 Direct and indirect effects between variables

Direction of effects between variables	Estimate	p	Direct effect	Indirect effect
Mutual → Good work environment	.615	< .001	.605	-.019
Mutual → Positive feeling	.300	< .001	.347	.181
Positive work environment → Positive feeling	.278	< .001	.327	-.010
Personal time → Mutual	-.089	.227	-.107	.003
Positive feeling → Personal time	.786	< .001	.566	-.018

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current study aimed to examine mutual support as a characteristic of the school as learning organization and its effect on dimensions of teachers’ job satisfaction. Support from colleagues was found to be an important factor of teachers’ job satisfaction. This finding agrees with the conclusions of existing research (Abós et al., 2018; Thoonen et al., 2011). Moreover, Van Den Berghe et al. (2014) argued that socialization and peer association make teachers become satisfied implying that mutual support in interpersonal

dealings among school teachers can prompt their work-related outcomes (Bukhari et al., 2021).

Mutual support between teachers could increase teachers' views concerning school as a positive workplace environment. This finding reflects and simultaneously endures Bui and Baruch's (2010) view of schools as learning organizations of shared learning rather than impersonal entities focused on individual self-interest and competition. Sharing as a term itself is related to a two-way process equivalent to mutualism. Thus, a positive workplace environment really meant to be a place where all the people involved feel as support givers and recipients. Moreover, according to the path model finding, mutual support through the work environment affects teachers' positive feelings. A favorable work environment seems to inspire and motivate teachers to get themselves involved in mutual support action. This kind of action sends to and receives feedback from a positive affect state which, in turn, is diffused to a corresponding workplace environment. Consequently, mutual support is highlighted as a key-characteristic which provide the framework for the school as learning organisation to get flourished.

The research could have implications for embracing individual as well as workplace factors in terms of enabling schools to transform into learning organizations and flourish as it. Undoubtedly, a school culture promoting a sense of community of sharing and caring could endure teachers' commitment and resilience as key variables which, in turn, reinforce positive organizational outcomes (i.e., job satisfaction, retention at school and teaching profession) promoting schools' endeavor to thrive as learning organizations.

A limitation of the study concerned the fact that the sample consisted overwhelmingly of female participants. Future studies should strive for a more gender-balanced sample. It would also be interesting for future research to consider a more extensive set of predictor variables expected to have an influence on teachers' mutual support perceptions, such as organizational commitment, school size and regional characteristics. Furthermore, other demographic characteristics (e.g., marital status) could have an impact to the results. Future research may consider the role of the mentioned variables.

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MEĐUSOBNA PODRŠKA KAO KARAKTERISTIKA „ŠKOLE KAO ORGANIZACIJE ZA UČENJE” I NJEN EFEKAT NA DIMENZIJE ZADOVOLJSTVA NASTAVNIKA POSLOM

Koncept škole kao organizacije koja uči je multidimenzionalan, uključuje karakteristike emocionalne klime kao što su poverenje, međusobna podrška i poštovanje, koristi nastavnicima i doprinosi njihovom zadovoljstvu poslom. Imajući u vidu to da su se dosadašnja istraživanja bavila ispitivanjem i sagledavanjem podrške na radnom mestu i njene povezanosti sa zadovoljstvom poslom, ova studija fokusirala se na međusobnu podršku nastavnika i njen uticaj na njihovo zadovoljstvo poslom. Uzorak istraživanja činila su 304 nastavnika osnovnih škola u Grčkoj koji su

popunjavali upitnik sastavljen od dve skale. Međusobna podrška ispitivana je pomoću 11 ajtema iz dva istraživačka alata (*School Success Profile Learning Organization Questionnaire*; Boven et al., 2007; Slegers et al., 2013). Za ispitivanje zadovoljstva nastavnika poslom korišćena su dva istraživačka alata (*Bellingham, 2004; 11 zadataka; Liu & Ramsey, 2008; 9 zadataka*). Faktorskom analizom izdvojena su tri faktora – dobro radno okruženje, pozitivne emocije i lično vreme. Takođe, analiza puta je otkrila da podrška među nastavnicima ima direktne i indirektne efekte na njihovo zadovoljstvo poslom. Rezultati su pokazali da nastavnici izražavaju pozitivne percepcije o međusobnoj podršci u školi, uključujući i dimenziju zadovoljstva poslom, kao i da škole treba da ulažu u međusobnu podršku nastavnika na više načina, jer se čini da to pozitivno utiče na njihov rad i njihovo profesionalno učenje.

Ključne reči: *međusobna podrška, zadovoljstvo poslom, škola kao organizacija koja uči, nastavnici osnovnih škola*