



An Evaluation of the Institution of the Greek Pedagogical Institute: Viewpoints of its Former Presidents

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Abstract

The analysis of the Greek Pedagogical Institute is part of the wider scope of the Greek educational policy. More specifically, the institution of the Greek Pedagogical Institute is treated and debated both theoretically and empirically. The theoretical analysis of the wider frame and basic aspects of the institution is complemented with a qualitative research approach. The purpose of the research was the examination of the views of former presidents of the Greek Pedagogical Institute on the institution itself. In particular, the views of six former presidents on the Institute's physiognomy, organization and operation, projects, framework of cooperation and contribution to education (curricula, textbooks, teachers' training) have been recorded through semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the material was achieved with the method of qualitative content analysis. The findings which resulted from this research illustrate a portrait of the Greek Pedagogical Institute. They comprise an all-embracing assessment of a long-lasting and multi-faceted institution, which contributed in the implementation of different educational policies, the endorsement of educational reforms, as well as the promotion and introduction of innovations in education.

Keywords: educational policy, educational reform, Greek Pedagogical Institute, content analysis

1. Introduction

Educational policy is described as a complex and dynamic process that aims to achieve a result [8]. It is defined as "discourse" and "practice" expressed in a theoretical (politics) and an applied level (policies) [7]. In particular, educational policy, as a field of study, is linked to educational goals and objectives, curricula, structure and function of the education system. As a relationship diagram, it is directly related to state policies and supports its regulatory and redistributive role. As a discourse, it is associated with carriers involved in the export of the educational outcome and the implementation of reforming efforts. Finally, as a practice it refers to the processes of changes in the educational systems resulting from the action of individual factor [1].

Its object is the carriers-parties and the way they participate in its design and formation. In particular, educational policy is in some cases linked to the choices of a person or a group of people, and in other cases constitutes a completed action plan, as a result of a collective effort. At the same time, educational policy proposals are produced at multiple levels that interact. In particular, in regard to a centralized education system, at an official level, it is mainly formed by scientific and bureaucratic carriers at the initiative of the state and is formalized once a law is drafted [11, 10]. Of course, from the production of a policy up to the corrective interventions and modifications, individuals and associated groups are activated in order to influence its formation [5]. This paper, therefore, falls within the broad field of educational policy. In particular, it is involved with one of the institutionalized institutions of Greek educational policy, the Pedagogical Institute.

2. Pedagogical Institute

The Greek Pedagogical Institute (PI) was founded in 1964 as a pioneer institution and the evolution of pre-existing consultative institutions of the Ministry of Education of Greece. During the period of the dictatorship (1967-1974) it was abolished, whereas in 1975 the Center for Educational Studies and Training was established, with a similar form and responsibilities to those of the PI. In 1985 the PI is re-established, as an independent public service which is directly attached to the Minister of Education and is based in Athens [9]. In the recent past, it merged with other organizations into the newly established Institute for Educational Policy (IEP). Over time, it has been the oldest and most long-lasting scientific and advisory institution on education issues. At the same time, it contributed to educational policy formation. The aim of the PI was to study the Greek educational system, to submit suggestions and opinions to the Minister for all educational issues, as well as the implementation of political decisions at an educational and pedagogical level. In particular, all of its extended

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competences scientific research was included, the study of primary and secondary education issues and the evaluation of the results of the educational act, the presentation of proposals for guidance and the planning of educational policy, the monitoring of the development of educational technology and the promotion of its implementation in practice, planning and taking care of the implementation of training programs and their evaluation, the elaboration of the curricula, the suggestion for the school textbooks and the adoption of measures to improve the educational process and the educational work in general.

3. Research

The review of the relevant literature has highlighted the contribution of the PI in the field of education: even if one contests this offer, they certainly cannot ignore its continued presence in the field of education. Therefore, it was considered appropriate to be examined as such an institution (physiognomy, organization and operation, projects), to evaluate its existence and its contribution in the field of education, and to examine the way it shaped –if it finally shaped– the educational policy that was being practiced.

3.1. Purpose of the survey and research questions

The purpose of the survey was to record, present and examine the views of former presidents of the Greek Pedagogical Institute on the institution itself. In particular, through their experiences, an "inward" image of its existence, function, role, action and contribution in the field of education was formed.

Research questions of qualitative research are usually highlighted and shaped over the course of time. From the review of the literature on the subject and the approach of the research material, research questions were raised on: the reasons for founding, the role, the form and the responsibilities, the dependence on political leadership, the organization and the operation, the projects (suggestions, opinions, curricula, textbooks, training, research, conferences, publications), the evaluation, the framework of cooperation, the valuation of the institution.

3.2. Method and conduct of research

The issue is approached qualitatively. The semi-structured interview was selected as a collection technique for the under investigation material [3]. In the present study former presidents of the PI participated. The material was collected in May and June 2015. The research material was the six transcripts of the interviews of the PI presidents who participated in the survey. The analysis of the material was achieved with the method of qualitative content analysis. The interviews were processed by the structuring technique [6] and at the same time, it was attempted to interpret the material with the interpretative method [2].

3.3. Findings-discussion

The views of the PI presidents that have been analyzed, outline and project an image, their own perspective, about a multidimensional educational institution, the PI. With reference to the assumption that in a qualitative approach the theory is not predetermined, but "emerges from the data" [4], basic findings have emerged:

- In particular, it was found that the physiognomy of the institution was in line with the state's intention to control the institution. Over the years, it has had a multidimensional role, determined mainly by how it is used by political leadership. In fact, reliance on political leadership ensured the convergence of PI action with the promoted educational policy. The dependence was enhanced by the selection and appointment of the president of the PI by the Minister of Education, while the limits of autonomy was undermined by the prevalence of the decision of the political leadership.
- The term of office of the presidents was determined by both governmental and ministerial changes. In fact, it has not –almost ever– taken into account the work that was being done. Also, several types of leadership have emerged in the PI, linked to the project and the profile of the institution. In the positions of the presidents over time no educators were selected. In addition, the quality and quantity adequacy of its members has not always been ensured in the PI.
- Its action is characterized by discontinuity, stagnation and dependence on wider political – national and European, social and economic conditions. Sometimes it has been strong and decisive in promoting changes and innovations in the field of education, and

sometimes it has been limited to a purely consultative, co-ordinating, even accomplishing role.

- In particular, the assignment of curricula, school textbooks, and teacher training to the PI, as a central institution, served the ideological control and promotion of selected policies.
- Dependence on the minister has overtaken every effort for scientific dialogue and research.
- It is noted that the lack of evaluation at all levels (leadership, staff, projects) was negative element for the profile of a scientific instrument.
- It was mainly used as a tool for legitimizing political choices, as a scientific adviser and coordinator, and as a tool for implementing educational policies.
- The general assessment of its offer is linked to the wider context and the prevailing circumstances, the degree of political intervention, EU funding, the term of office of the President, the qualitative and quantitative competence of the staff, and the expectations that were created for the institution. In general, it did not contribute to shaping but mainly to implementing the chosen educational policy.

4. Epilogue

Scientific research of educational institutions is usually centered on a historical analysis of the educational system and of the wider economic, political and social context in which it appears and functions. The interest of this study was extended to the promotion and understanding of the perspective of the protagonists themselves, the PI presidents, regarding the institution of the PI. Thus, through the empirical investigation of the Institute, a "new theory" was created, which complements the theoretical framework of this subject.

In summary, the PI was a "key player" on the pedagogical guidance axis. Within the framework of the centralized Greek education system, it held the position of the key factor in the management of pedagogical affairs and the executive, advisory, coordinating and scientific instrument at national level. At the same time, dependence on the political leadership is a basic way of interpreting its physiognomy, purpose, role, operation, action and its contribution in education.

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