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Administration and innovation in Cyprus

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ADMINISTRATION AND INNOVATION IN CYPRUS

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Abstract. The article manifests the implementation of completely new innovative actions having as main objective the overall acceleration of the reform of Public and Educational Management in Cyprus. Both the Public and Educational Administration in Cyprus, are slowly being modernized, but at the same time the target that needs to be reached is the chronological acceleration of the whole process. Alongside, it is necessary to promote new, productive and innovative methods which will match the country's Administrative data and not simply be applied to Cyprus based on their successful implementation in other countries, such as the European countries. The European Union has therefore defined and implemented a number of procedures for its member countries while also promotes reformations aiming at creating an overall single indivisible policy for both the Public Administration and the Educational system across Europe. So far things are doing well based on the general implementation of the aforementioned objective, but on the other hand the implementation of these reforms in Cyprus encounters significant obstacles and difficulties, concerning both the size of the country and the working culture cultivated between Public Employees and Educators in general. The present study proposes new, innovative and holistic actions that will respect and serve the data and the special Public Administrative Structures of Cyprus which is a relatively small Country, as far as its size and population is concerned, with relatively low competitive indicators and financial means.

1   Introduction

The article connects the idea of reforming both the Public and Educational Sectors and suggests innovative methods in order to success it. These methods will be used for Cyprus' Administrative Purposes in order to enhance the quality of services of the above two Sectors. Cyprus is a European island located in the eastern Mediterranean Sea whereas European Union has defined and implemented a number of procedures for its member countries to achieve an overall reforming. This reform differs from country to country because of the different characteristics.

2   Educational Administration

In educational policy and administration, the term innovation is very often associated or used alternatively with the term change and the term reform. The term change means the transition from one state to another when it is definitive and complete, while the term reform refers to all significant changes in a sector aimed at resolving problems, functioning properly, adapting to new data (en.wiktionary.org, 2019). More analytically, "with educational change" is considered "any educational transformation that is sometimes institutionalized with short-range arrangements, such as ministerial decisions and decreases, and sometimes occurs without necessarily being institutionalized" (Dakopoulou, 2008). As for education reform actions, as Yfantis puts it, "they are not intended to change some positions in education systems. Educational reform can even emerge as a symbolic act designed to show the interest of a strong group (for example the government) in tackling problems without actually making serious efforts to change" (Yfandi, 2000). What is important is to understand the importance of reform because they concern not only education but society as a whole. For this reason, reform is important to be based on a philosophy and a reason for change, "to be a problem-solving and challenge solution and / or a change of vision and orientation" (Koutselini, 2013).

Educational reforms, innovations and change have a lasting effect on society. Therefore they need to be properly studied and implemented by the right people. "Reforms are not just a set of changes. They are processes that require time, consensus, consistency and need for knowledge, not just what we want, but scientific knowledge of how we can deliver it and why" (Zisimos, 2017). The importance of educational research in citizens' perceptions of educational planning and reform is also emphasized by Mavrogiorgos (2010). "These perceptions are, to a large extent, linked to high social standing and the authority of educational research and experimentation as a process of knowledge acquisition and as a strategy for introducing innovation into education". According to Mavrogiorgos (2010), research and experimentation are a prerequisite for pursuing educational policy. "Educational policy is promoted as feasible as long as there is scientific planning of educational changes based on experimentation and research. That is, educational change is designed as a matter of research, method and 'management' of applications".

According to Bell and Stevenson (2006) and Athanasoula-Reppa (2008), in Therianos (2012), a number of external variables influence the organization and management of educational organizations. "Such variables are economic (values, institutions, ideologies, stereotypes, culture, morality, degree of social cohesion) political (educational system direction), technology (degree of development and incorporation of modern technologies), demographic". These factors influence and are influenced by efforts to change and reform.

At the same time, according to studies by major researchers, education systems innovation, reform, and change are also linked to various internal school effectiveness factors related to school improvement strategies. Leadership, teachers' expectations, the practices used, the cooperation of all stakeholders in the educational process, the proper management of climate resources and the provision of equal opportunities to students are important efficiency factors (Passiardis, 2004). The leader - manager is an innovative person himself. It introduces innovations that contribute to the modernization of the school and uses new technologies in its work to set an example for other teachers

while at the same time taking professional, pedagogical scientific training for teachers, knowing that in an ever-changing world there must be continuous improvement and education. "The school must provide modern and enriched education to its pupils in order to contribute to their comprehensive development, so that they will eventually be able to function effectively as responsible, active and creative citizens in a complex society where the human factor becomes all- embracing and more important" (Matsagkouras, 2002). More generally, according to recent literature, innovation in education relates to effective methods of disseminating knowledge and developing skills, such as the collaborative (and group-cantered), experiential and energetic method (which may include the project method), which methods are based on student collaboration, teacher-student collaboration, and collaboration with other stakeholders in a two-way relationship. This two-way relationship that builds, strengthens cooperation between these groups while at the same time cultivating the characteristics of active individuals working together to achieve their common goals.

At the same time, school effectiveness research has shown that teachers are an important component of a school's impact on student performance, while according to the OECD (2005, p.23)," raising teacher quality is perhaps the policy direction most likely to lead to substantial gains in school performance". This demonstrates that the educator must be constantly updated and trained to be able to use modern and effective practices.

In recent years, countries' efforts to improve schools have focused on change and reform in line with each national data and with European and global data (Masouras, 2019). According to the European Commission (2012), the research project entitled: "Effective School Improvement Project", funded by the European Commission in order to demonstrate effective school empowerment, demonstrates that the perception of empowerment and improvement of schools is firmly embedded in the education system of every country. As highlighted by the European Commission (2012) what is needed is "The development of key competencies that all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment. Partnerships are an opportunity to develop skills action plans in a targeted, innovative and sustainable way to include those directly involved in the delivery, implementation and updating of specific skills". E.U therefore, identifies "the need to investigate school management practices and educational priorities as they are constantly identified and renegotiated, both through national and European discourse, as well as at the level of daily practice and petty jurisdiction of the school" (Fragkoulis and Papadiamantaki, 2012, p.250).

The new developments created by the phenomenon of globalization and the development of technology and knowledge were recognized by the Lisbon European Council meeting in 2000, with the result that specific objectives related to the development of key lifelong learning skills were identified. employability, integration and rights of disadvantaged groups and active citizenship, with emphasis on the development of European identity which is considered a very important issue at European level as it relates to the concept of European citizenship. The development of European identity has been a key issue in education policy at European level, which ultimately seems to end up pursuing the broader concept of European citizenship (Fragkoulis and Papadiamantaki, 2012, p.236). Trends from the experiences in to programs of other countries of the European Union show that the goals that are promoted are based in the cultivation of basic values, attitudes and skills required by the modern society of knowledge in Europe today (Karatzia, 2002). At the same time, the implementation of European programs like Comenius and Erasmus plus have helped greatly to cooperation in the mobility and in the dissemination of languages among European countries, as part of the European education policy and the objective of implementing quality education in Europe.

The rhetoric on the importance of a common European education policy and its identification with the national curriculum of the countries is contradicted by various scholars. According to Gagatsis (no date), "there can be no countries whose educational systems can be identified ... no education of a country can be transferred, no matter how successful it is (for example Finland) or how narrow the

links are (Cyprus and Greece) ". That is, as he mentions, because the variables that can affect a country's education are numerous and vary from country to country.

Contrary, according to Koutselini (2013), this risk does not exist. As she says the risk of losing the national character of countries can be avoided. "To avoid national consciousness requires strengthening citizenship through shared values and developing a sense of belonging to a common the social and cultural area should encourage a broader understanding of citizenship based on active solidarity and a shared understanding of cultural differences that undermine Europe's origins and wealth".

3   The educational reform in Cyprus

Koutselini (2013), referring to efforts of the past to reform education in Cyprus,, states, that every effort for reform must focus on the credibility of our education system, focusing on quality education and effective and continuous self-regulation. Teacher education must have as priority the development of the sense of belonging of students, the adequate orientations, the conscious choice service of career, the schools connection with life and the challenges of a European and globalized Environment. As Koutselini (2013) underlines "The need to give importance in the rhetoric of curriculum and educational objectives which should focus on the most important and real problems, not only in the curriculum, which should not be identify with the curriculum". In addition, she stresses the importance of better and timely planning, before introducing changes to avoid amateurism and the need for reforms to be carried out by appropriate scientific staff and upgraded services.

Efforts for to continue educational reform in Cyprus have resulted in the 2016 curricula being reformulated on the basis of specific indicators, based on the results of external expert evaluations. Their restructuring was based on the theory and international experience of curriculum development, according to which the curriculum should not only refer to general and indefinite learning outcomes at the end of each educational level, but also to outcomes during a School year in each lesson and at the end of each year in a hierarchical and continuous way, from Pre-primary education to 3rd grade (Archeia.moec.gov.cy, 2019). Within this framework the Curricula was organized with emphasis on the learning outcomes and the corresponding tutorials. The indicators' content emphasizes all types of learning: information with an innate ability to generate new knowledge, cognitive and practical skills, strategies and ways of thinking, attitudes and values. These include the horizontal competences that are cultivated in all subjects, such as critical thinking, metacognition, collaboration skills and the cultivation of the Greek language, as well as the key attitudes and competences - keys offered in all European education systems, with particular emphasis on the development of healthy citizenship in a modern multicultural society" (Anon, 2019).

These indicators have been remodelled in some of the subjects in 2017, and a new remodelling has begun in 2018, with the goal of continually modernizing them, but based on the same principles. One of the major changes is the fact that new subjects such as Life Education, Health Education, and Environmental Education have been added, with emphasis on new European programs, student groups and student councils. New reforms being discussed at this time include, among others, the implementation of four months in secondary education, changes in student and teacher evaluation, the use of e-books and the thoughts for entering the use of student's personal tablet in the educational process, (something that has been successfully implemented in Finland since 2016). Another innovating action of this year, that is very important for the future employment of the students in Cyprus, was the opening of specific schools related to shipping and to Cyprus products. In addition to that, as the minister of education declares, many other issues are at the table of discussion for modernising and reform of education.

4   Obstacles and Difficulties

Mavrogiorgos (2010), referring to efforts for educational reform in Cyprus, emphasized the difficult task set by the committees from time to time for this purpose. "The work of committees is carried out, at all times, under specific socio-political conditions and embraces the impact of social dynamics and wider social and political-ideological conflicts). This fact, according to Mavrogiorgos (2010), raises questions as to whether these committees have the capacity and scope to act in any context. This is generally related to the fact that Cyprus is a closed society where individuals are aware of other people's movements.

Other factors that hamper the effort, according to Cyprus data, are:
- Low GDP (E per capita income and reduced EU funds)
- Limited resources due to a financial crisis from 2013 onwards
- Reaction to change by employees based on their acquits
- Digital gap between the elderly and the non-skilled in technology
- Slow implementation of reforms in time
- Difficulty in applying EU rules uniformly (culture, I want, sizes)
- Gaps in the legal framework (not easily dismissed, absent for a long time without scrutiny of the cause for example leave sick)
- Some inefficient decisions from public services (for example in cases of employment, review of complaints etc.).

In order to overcome obstacles and achieve the goals of any reform, there is a need for collectivity and support in scientific studies and research. As Mavrogiorgos (2010) states: "Educational policy becomes easier when a high degree of acceptance and consent is secured". In this field, dialogue, invocation of research data, participation, expert committees, negotiations, etc., are systematically exploited.

In addition to that, E.U must propose actions that will respect and serve the special data of Cyprus and the ministries in Cyprus must find the way to overcome internal and external factors that influence the efforts for innovation through national and European discourse.

5   European policy

The European Union has sole competence without any conciliation with its Member States to decide on matters relating to customs union, the rules governing competition within the single market, the monetary policy of euro zone countries, maritime conservation biological resources in the context of the common fisheries policy and finally the common commercial policy of   international agreements when this is provided by European Union law (Fontaine, 2014).

The twenty-eight Member States that participating in the Union have adopted the euro as a single currency whereas they constitute a single area without internal frontiers. A basic objective is the coherence and co-ordination of a common policy and strategy for member states by decision-making centers such as the European Council and the European Parliament.

The Cohesion Policy, based on the website of the Union of Municipalities of Cyprus, is implemented with co-financing from the European Union's Structural and Investment Funds and the Cohesion Fund through Operational Programs "Competitiveness and Sustainable Development" and "Employment, Human Capital and Social Security". A total of 784 million Euros has been allocated to Cyprus for the 2014-2020 Program Period, after negotiation with the European Commission, which will be

invested in Cyprus through the above Programs. The Union of Cyprus Municipalities participates with the right to vote in the Monitoring Committee of the Operational Programs "Competitiveness and Sustainable Development" and "Employment, Human Capital and Social Cohesion" (UCM 2019).

In addition, Policies that are implemented for major pillars such as Education and Public Administration aim at further enhancing cohesion and connectivity. It is important to highlight again that the Education' s programs such as Comenius, which among others contribute to enhancing the European dimension and promoting intercultural awareness, and Erasmus+ which enhances the mobility of students and teachers (MOEC, no date) are basic examples of reforms that strengthen human relations and of the states of Europe.

Concerning the Public Sector, the Department of Public Administration & Personnel of Cyprus states on its website that it participates in the European Public Administration Network (EUPAN) which implements policies aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Administration of its Member States, placing the citizen at the center of Public Administration, and workers on various thematic areas (human resources, innovation, quality, e-government). The overriding purpose of central European Public Administration is to effectively serve the European citizen to gain a competitive advantage over other colossal countries such as the US, Russia and China (EUPAN, 2019).

The minimum wage, the avoidance of cases that employees have different salaries (most posts are low-paid with the exception of a few high-paid posts) and the type of period of time that characterize the posts (permanent and fixed-term) are also major reform targets. The Civil Servants' Cypriot newspaper cites as examples that in Switzerland the 'Vpod' Civil Service is calling for measures to address the worsening working hours of nursing staff, voluntary work and low pay in the sector, especially for female civil servants, while in Ireland 'Forsa' Civil Service demands negotiations for a deal to demand pay increases in line with rising indexes and rising living costs as well as special benefits for skilled workers. Salary increases approved in 2008, but the union stresses that a 6% rise in the price index creates the urgent need for new increases for the Irish Civil Servants (UCM, 2019).

This basic effort for a unified system of regulation and functioning of the Union should take into account the geographical, demographic, social and economic situation of each Member State separately. Another important factor that needs to be taken seriously and evaluated in its correct dimension is the size of each country. The European Union is assisting appropriate aid to Cyprus is to be expected as provided in the context of the realities on the island. A semi-occupied homeland with a small geographic size and population, with a closed society, limited economic resources and low competitiveness it would be wise to deal it with a different lens than other countries.

Strong member states of the Union such as England, France and Germany, which operate on a solid footing and enjoy significant competitive advantage over other countries they are in no way resemble and compared to the Cypriot state. The productivity index of the three countries mentioned above in relation to their labor force is significantly higher than that of Cyprus. In addition, they have been paying particular attention to education and public administration since the beginning and mid-20th century in order to have a beneficial cost by investing in them (Goumas, 2006).

For Cyprus and the education sector, public expenditure for the financial year 2016 was € 1,186.4 million and accounted to 16.9% of the State Budget and to 6.3% of Gross Domestic Product (CYSTAT, 2019). A number of reforms have recently been initiated by the Ministry of Education so as to make this sector workable, which will further boost education and research in the country, while at the same time the universities will boost a boom in higher and highest education country by offering several programs and attracting a large number of international students (Mavrokefalos, 2016). In addition, there is a significant effort launched in 2016 by the then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs

and the current Minister of Interior, Konstantinos Petridis, to motivate the workforce in order to increase the efficiency and productivity of the for Public Sector and as well as citizens to enjoy fast, efficient and flexible service delivery (MOF, 2017).

As mentioned above any attempt to reform and change is often met with skepticism and reaction from officials and clerks. Some respond very strongly, others less, while a small percentage of them favorably respond to a controlled change. The labor acquits the habit and the certainty of permanence for work position that adopted by the Cypriot state make it difficult for reforms to take place. Of course, when there is adequate information and proper training, over time the reactions and the voices against the change will be absorbed (Persianis, 2017).

As referred in the article the innovation requires holistic actions and incisions. Innovative reforms should last as long as needed and return investment money at the appropriate time. There is needed no further waste of money and big plans, but significant innovations in neuralgic areas that will lead to the necessary progress. Cyprus could not remain uninvolved to this important process. Indeed, in many cases it appears that with less capital than the other countries' demanding, the required reform of the island can proceed more effectively and faster. In fact, holistic reform is the idea of offering a fully integrated solution that covers the innovative chain of the reform process from its start to finish.

6   Suggestions

We are living in a rapidly changing era in terms of technology and digital processes. The world has come very close, the land has become a neighborhood, yet problems are not lacking. Indeed, Cyprus in 2019 will need to invest in sectors beyond that of service delivery in order to keep up with the changes coming to its region and beyond. Areas in which there is a risk of stagnation if innovative reforms are not pursued are mainly education and public administration.

An institute could be set up to deal exclusively with the two fields, employing accredited scientists and providing regular training through organized seminars for teachers and civil servants. If the servants improve the level of their skills, then this will improve the level of services provided to citizens by them.

A record of the behavior and reaction of officials could also be made and based on the analysis of the collection data the state could invest in seminars to improve the general behavior and treatment of citizens by officials. This will contribute to making the state more friendly to its citizens and furthermore the general administration to give a better outward image. This bad image is something that is of great concern to the Cypriot citizen who is increasingly depreciating the state institutions over time.

In addition, an independent agency with a relatively low budget could be set up to oversee, upgrade and maintain of the government buildings as well as the fleet of cars for which a significant amount of money is being wasted which is given without result. Thus, the decentralization of the above-mentioned competence for which the Ministry of Education's technical departments are responsible so far, as well as the electromechanical service, will provide an important benefit that will increase the competitiveness and effectiveness of public and educational administration.

Laws and regulations could also be strengthened more to prevent future abuse of power, waste of public money, and also to exemplary punish those responsible for such conduct. Public and Education Services Committees have to hire qualified staff who be responsible for appointments, promotions and evaluations. In addition, incentives should give to reinforce the employees, who if they are adequately remunerated will work conscientiously whereas at the same time, they will not work slow and passive at work. Also, the Committees should change employees' evaluation criteria at work to

make them clearer and measurable. The implementation of all the above measures will increase the productivity of both the public and educational service.

Finally, digital technology should be developed more and more. This will be possible by creating universities which will be responsible for preparing and inventing start-ups that produce new and hybrid methods which will help the country administratively. Cyprus is lagging behind in new technologies most of its employees with high technology skills are foreign, whereas EU funds are lost by the country. A good example is the use of electronic cars in the public service to save fuel. For the production of the electric power it should be used the wide solar power that the island has.

7   Conclusion

To sum up, the reforms related to Administration are very important but they need to match with the characteristics of the state for which they are being promoted. Cyprus will avoid the crisis if the right actions are made and being exploited of its advantages. This can lead the island to a competitive advantage.

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