Teacher professionalism in Greek Primary Schools

By

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Abstract

This study examines teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools, focusing on how cultural, national, school, and personal contexts shape teachers' perceptions and practices of professionalism. It aligns with contemporary research advocating for more nuanced approaches to professionalism (Day et al., 2023), moving beyond its historical association with qualifications, a specialised knowledge base, a service ethic, and autonomy (Furlong et al., 2000; Sachs, 2003).

Employing an interpretive qualitative research design, this study explores the perspectives of 30 Greek primary school teachers from four schools through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The findings reveal considerable variation in how Greek teachers understand and enact professionalism. This variation stemmed partly from teachers' personal interpretations of professionalism and partly from external factors, including the role of school principals, the indirect influence of national policy, and broader Greek cultural values.

This research extends the limited scholarship on teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools, offering deeper insights into how professionalism is both experienced and enacted in the Greek context. It also provides new evidence on how principals can influence the experience of professionalism, but they cannot dictate teachers' professional perspectives or fully control their practices. Furthermore, this study contributes new evidence on autonomy as a component of teacher professionalism, highlighting its intricate relationship with agency and teacher identity.

This study challenges decontextualised and dichotomous views of teacher professionalism, emphasising the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive approaches. At the same time, the diverse interpretations of professionalism expressed by the Greek teachers in this study raise critical questions about the standards of pupils' education in Greek primary schools. This holds significant implications for policymakers, school leaders, and teachers, at a time when

many European and OECD countries are making increasing efforts to enhance the quality of teaching pupils receive.

Keywords: Greece, teacher professionalism, autonomy, teachers' work and lives

Contents

List of Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
IEP	Institute of Education Policy
JD-R	Job Demands-Resources Theory
MoE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
UoN	University of Nottingham

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study seeks to understand the nature and experience of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers within primary schools in Greece. This chapter introduces research on teacher professionalism internationally and in Greece, justifying the significance of the current research project and the research question and sub-questions explored in this study. It goes on to provide the researcher's positionality and concludes by outlining the organisation of the thesis.

1.1. Research on teacher professionalism internationally

Teacher professionalism is a field that has become a key area of research internationally, as teachers are widely recognised as one of the most important resources for education systems. The COVID-19 context and the recent advent of AI have exemplified and re-emphasised their importance. Although stakeholders agree on the importance of 'teacher professionalism', evidence of its nature, variations in its interpretation, its influences upon teachers' beliefs, values, and practices, and how these are resourced or constrained within a specific national educational context, etc., have made research on teacher professionalism a demanding field (OECD, 2021).

This relates to the unique nature of teachers' work, which cannot be seen with the historical view of professionalism in other professions—exclusive knowledge, code of ethics, and autonomy as freedom from control, such as law and medicine. Unlike such professions, teachers are not self-governing or self-regulated, able to define the frameworks in which they work (Ingersoll, 2009). As public sector professionals, in almost 90% of the OECD countries (OECD, 2021), teachers enjoy less autonomy than equivalent professionals like doctors or lawyers since governments govern and regulate these areas (Gewirtz et al., 2008). Neither do teachers as a professional group hold exclusive jurisdiction and independence of judgment to meet the unique needs of their service recipients, pupils (Friedson, 2001), nor can they be able to make decisions

related to their training, qualifications, and entry and exit requirements (Campbell, 2000).

Thus, the nature of teachers' work proposed the need for research to shift to broader areas of professionalism rather than apply a historical view of professionalism in other professions (Freidson, 2001). The research needed to extend to areas that focus more on teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices (OECD, 2016) and to areas more relevant to what teachers do in their daily lives and what they perceive and experience as professionalism in their everyday realities (Sachs, 2001). After all, scholars agreed that professionalism in teaching has much more to do with how teachers make sense of their roles through their professional identities, as it is through them that they inform their professional behaviour (Gee, 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day et al., 2006).

This is why, in the key research literature, beyond autonomy—part of the current study's focus—and other elements such as qualifications, teachers' professional knowledge, and responsibility, which were initially related to teacher professionalism and are still considered essential (Furlong et al., 2000), there are now many broader elements. The key literature covers at least three broader areas of professionalism. This includes research on the psychological attributes influencing a teacher's professional behaviour (e.g. teacher motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, agency, resilience, etc.). Research on the ethical principles influencing a teacher's professional conduct (e.g. care, educational values and beliefs). Finally, research on ways teachers can strengthen their professional capacities and capabilities (e.g. through professional development, professional collaboration, and reflection).

Notably, teachers do not experience these areas and elements of professionalism as detached from external factors. Instead, they experience these and generally 'professionalism' within their working and situated contexts, where they interact with various stakeholders, including pupils, parents, principals, and the broader educational community (Svensson, 2006; Helgøy & Homme, 2007).

Principals, in particular, have been identified in the key research literature as an important source of influence on teachers' perceptions of professionalism through what they do and what they do not, influencing teachers' views either positively or negatively within their school working environments (Harris & Jones, 2010; Day & Sammons, 2013; Ärlestig et al., 2016). This relates to what the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory has suggested in the broader academic literature, a psychological model which connects the work environment's demands and resources to professional behaviour. It indicates that principals can choose to either support or hinder the professional behaviour exhibited by teachers by influencing and balancing their job demands and resources (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Lesener et al., 2019; Van den Broeck et al., 2010).

Beyond this, international studies have provided evidence which suggests that not all teachers perceive or experience professionalism similarly within their national education system's realities, East and West. Through extensive international coverage of teacher professionalism across OECD countries, evidence suggests that cultural and policy factors together with personal and school factors, can influence teachers' understandings and enactments of professionalism in various ways within a national educational context.

In this regard, cultural factors matter. Evidence from teachers working within a range of European (Nordic countries, Central and Western Europe), Anglo-Saxon (England, USA, Australia), and Emerging Economies (China, Brazil) has identified the importance of studying and exploring teacher professionalism within its socio-cultural context. Teachers across these and broader OECD countries are experiencing professionalism within working contexts that are shaped by specific values about teaching, learning, or education in general, which can, in turn, influence what teachers perceive as professionalism (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Day et al., 2023; Maylor, 2019).

National policy frameworks in which teachers work also matter. Currently, teachers, East and West, share some similar, to an extent, accountability mechanisms, which shape their everyday working conditions (e.g. national curriculum, inspection of teachers' practices, measuring of pupils' performance,

etc.), influenced by the incorporation of more performative elements across education systems (OECD, 2023). Nevertheless, evidence from teachers across European, Anglo-Saxon, and Emerging Economies suggests that teachers have neither been impacted by similar accountability policies similarly nor have these impacted their understandings of professionalism uniformly (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020; Wermke et al., 2019; Salokangas et al., 2020).

School policy has also been recognised as a factor of influence internationally, consistent with what has been suggested in the research literature for principals' roles. Teachers, East and West, from North or Central to West Europe, USA to Australia, and China to Brazil, have identified principals' crucial role. Teachers have revealed that their principals are in a position to choose what national policies they would mediate to them, how they will translate them, and how through this, they can influence teachers' perceptions of professionalism in various ways (Day, 2020; Robinson, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

However, even if principals are in a position to exert influence on teachers' perspectives on professionalism, teachers' personal factors are equally important, consistent with what has been suggested in the research literature. Teachers across Europe (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Ireland, England), North and South America (Brazil), Australia, and Central Asia (China) were found to manifest their own beliefs, values, philosophies, and identities as the first point of reference, even if their principals introduced something in their schools and lives (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Wermke et al., 2019; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020).

Together, this suggests that teacher professionalism is a field where taking a nuanced, situated, and contextual research approach is important. Unlike this, in Greece, the scholarly field of teacher professionalism remains at a developmental stage. This is to a great extent because scholars in Greece focus on different areas of teacher professionalism rather than taking a broader view of exploring the nature of the professionalism of Greek teachers.

1.2 Research on teacher professionalism in Greece

Despite what was described in the global context, teacher professionalism is studied in a fragmented manner in Greece. From one point, research focuses on specific psychological elements of professionalism (e.g. motivation, satisfaction, etc.). A second strand of research explicitly focuses on the role of principals in influencing teachers' professionalism, yet again, in a detached way of focusing on specific leadership models and specific professional elements that principals influence. A third area of research focus, which is more relevant to the current research, looks at Greek teachers' perception of professionalism, nevertheless, in an un-nuanced, un-contextualised, and un-situated way.

1.2.1 Research on professional elements

In Greece, although academic research has started looking at more personal and professional elements of teacher professionalism, their focus is primarily on exploring these separately rather than on how these and the environments in which teachers work could influence Greek teachers' perspectives on professionalism.

Notably, there has been some research on psychologically oriented elements of teacher professionalism concerning teacher job satisfaction (Koustelios, 2001; Saiti & Papadopoulos, 2015; Koutrouba et al., 2017), motivation (Darra, 2013), self-efficacy (Gkolia et al., 2016), and resilience (Matsopoulos et al., 2018). There is also limited research on the ethical side of professionalism, exploring teachers' values (Frydaki, 2021). At the same time, there has been some research focusing on how teachers' professional development (Ifanti & Fotopoulopou, 2011; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2010) and professional collaboration (Arvanitis & Vitsilaki, 2015; Kougioumtzis & Patriksson, 2009), might also contribute to professionalism.

1.2.2 Research on principals' role

The role of principals in relation to teacher professionalism has also been explored in Greece. Nevertheless, the majority of previous studies in Greece have predominantly concentrated exclusively on the principal's influence concerning

teachers' professional development (Chalikias et al., 2020; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023), and exploring the use of specific leadership models such as transformational (Menon, 2021; Kouni et al., 2018; Gkolia et al., 2018) and instructional (Kaparou & Bush, 2015) to support either teachers' job satisfaction (Zacharo et al., 2018; Panagopoulos et al., 2023; Koutouzis & Malliara, 2017) and teachers' self-efficacy (Gkolia et al., 2018). There have been some exceptions, with a few studies adopting a broader perspective to explore principals' influence on teachers' views on professionalism, with two studies focusing on secondary education in Greece (Lourmpas & Dakopoulou, 2014; Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2015) and only one focusing on primary education (Dimopoulos et al., 2015), which is the focus of the current study. Nevertheless, these studies have focused on the influence of principals without recognising how personal influences and broader cultural and national factors identified in this review might need to be combined to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what teachers in Greece understand by 'professionalism'.

1.2.3 Research on Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism

Only three studies conducted in the Greek context take a broader view, exploring which elements of professionalism might be more relevant for Greek teachers (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou, 2013). They have provided empirical evidence that the elements more relevant to Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism included teachers' professional knowledge, responsibility, autonomy, values, care, professional development, and professional collaboration. However, these studies provided 'snapshot' accounts driven by the large-scale nature of their research design, which enabled them to only briefly survey Greek teachers' professional perceptions but not uncover their experiences within their realities.

Therefore, unlike the international evidence presented in this introductory section, which suggests the need for research to shift to more nuanced pathways in the field of teacher professionalism, research in Greece has so far approached the professionalism perceptions and practices of Greek teachers narrowly.

1.3 Significance and research questions

Considering what has been discussed, this study aims to address the significant gap in empirical research in Greece, taking into account that a range of internal and external factors might influence the nature of Greek teachers' views and experiences of professionalism. This research is the first to investigate the nature and experience of professionalism of Greek teachers by considering the unique sociocultural factors that shape the Greek context, the specific accountability frameworks in which teachers work regulated by Greek educational policy, the particular school contexts in which teachers work, and the various personal influences each teacher could have cultivated in their professional careers.

The current study is significant because it aims to investigate and understand what teachers in Greece understand by 'professionalism'. This can provide empirical and situated contributions to knowledge about the nature of Greek teachers' professionalism. In doing so, this study can potentially expand the academic field of teacher professionalism in Greece. At the same time, this study aims to inform national policymakers how the nature of Greek teachers' perspectives of professionalism is essential in their deliberations on future developments related to pupil learning entitlements and stimulate reflection on the role of principals and teachers themselves.

The research adopted an interpretive qualitative research design to achieve these broad aims. It examined the nature of professionalism among Greek teachers by studying the perspectives of 30 participants working in four primary schools in Greece, using a range of interview protocols.

The central research question was:

''What is the nature and experience of professionalism expressed by teachers in Greece?''

To address this core research question, four sub-questions were designed:

- How do cultural factors of the Greek context influence how teachers perceive their professionalism?

- How do national policy developments influence teachers' perceptions of professionalism?
- How do school factors influence teachers' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities?
- How do personal factors influence teachers' perception of and practice of professionalism in Greece?

1.4 Situating the researcher

As a primary teacher in Greece, it was during my master's studies that I engaged in research on teachers' working lives and recognised my aspiration to further explore the field of teacher professionalism.

My limited teaching experience in Greek primary schools, a prerequisite for my bachelor's degree, provided me with firsthand insight into classroom realities. Additionally, my teaching role in a civil non-profit organisation, where I taught English to adult immigrants, prompted me to further question what defines a professional teacher. These experiences deepened my interest in understanding the nature of professionalism in teaching and how it is conceptualised across different contexts.

Despite extensive international discourse on teacher professionalism, I observed that Greek teachers' perspectives remained largely underexplored empirically. This gap led me, both as a researcher and a teacher, to reflect on how the absence of a clear, shared understanding of professionalism among Greek teachers might affect teaching quality and, more broadly, the education received by Greek pupils. My growing concern about the implications of this ambiguity fuelled my decision to pursue this PhD. Thus, my motivation was not solely academic but also driven by a sense of responsibility toward the teachers I had worked with—dedicated professionals who, despite systemic challenges, remained committed to their work. Moreover, I saw the importance of this research for principals and broader stakeholders invested in teaching quality and pupil education in Greece. While this study captures the perspectives of a small

group of Greek primary teachers, it represents an essential first step in mapping how professionalism is understood within this context.

At the outset of my research, I viewed professionalism as a set of fixed attributes that teachers should possess, focusing primarily on the individual teacher, without fully considering the influence of school contextual factors, policy frameworks, and cultural dynamics on teachers' perceptions and lived experiences of professionalism. I also initially placed significant emphasis on autonomy, not recognising how broader elements were equally crucial to understanding Greek teachers' perspectives on professionalism.

However, through engagement with literature and empirical research, my perspective shifted. I came to understand professionalism as a dynamic, context-dependent construct—one shaped not only by individual teachers but also by broader school structures and systemic factors. It became clear that professionalism is interconnected with a range of elements identified in this introductory section. Recognising these multiple influences proved essential in shaping the direction of my exploration of Greek teachers' perspectives on professionalism.

1.5 Organisation of this thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Following this introductory section,

Chapter 2 describes how broader cultural influences unique to the Greek context and different policy levels surround teachers' professional experiences, considering that this short introduction section has made them relevant to the nature of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers.

Chapter 3 unpacks the concept of teacher professionalism. It first explores how professionalism in teaching is viewed and what elements have been associated with it in the research literature, emphasising the interplay of internal and external factors. Based on this, it then critically interrogates the 'forms' of professionalism found in scholarly discussions, presenting key international studies from a range of European and OECD countries that exemplify the range

of cultural, policy, school, and personal influences influencing what teachers experience as professionalism in their contexts.

Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive account of this study's research methodology. It begins by examining the conceptual foundations, particularly the ecological systems theory, which underpins the interpretive paradigm adopted. It then outlines the interpretive paradigm and its influence on the qualitative research design, detailing the sampling techniques and interviews used to explore Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism. The chapter further discusses data collection procedures, ethical considerations, and the stages of data analysis. It concludes by addressing methodological limitations and the lessons learned from the research process.

Chapters 5 and Chapter 6 present the empirical findings of this study.

Chapter 5 explores the factors that shape Greek teachers' perceptions and experiences of professionalism in their working lives, with the data highlighting the significant influence of their school principals.

Chapter 6 examines Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism, focusing on how their biographies, experiences, and professional identities shape these perceptions.

Chapter 7 discusses the core empirical contributions to knowledge in the field of teacher professionalism in Greece and internationally, engaging in a dialogue with previous research in the field.

Chapter 8 concludes this thesis by briefly answering the central research question and sub-questions. It draws crucial implications for future research in Greece and internationally, as well as implications for pupils' education in Greece and recommendations for Greek national policy, principals, and teachers.

Chapter 2: The Greek national educational context

2.1 Introduction

Considering what was introduced in the previous chapter regarding the range of factors that could influence the nature and experience of professionalism of Greek teachers, this chapter explores more implicitly the culture and different levels of policy surrounding teachers. Regarding culture, the focus is on key elements constituting the Greek culture and how these have been found in previous research to influence teachers as a professional group in Greece. Concerning the different levels of policy, it refers to national, regional, and school policy, and the focus is on legislation circumscribing teachers' experiences in public all-day primary schools in Greece, as reported in the introductory chapter, which refers to pupils aged 6-12 years.

2.2 Culture

Since the establishment of Greece as an independent country in 1834, school education has been a powerful tool for cultivating and promoting national identity among the Greek people. One of its primary goals has been to unify the citizens of the newly independent state through education focused on three key elements that continue to shape Greek culture: the Greek Orthodox Church, the Greek language, and the connection between Ancient and Modern Greece (Gallant, 2016).

Orthodox Christianity is so deeply embedded in Greek culture that, for some, removing Orthodoxy would equate to losing their Greek identity. This close association is evident in the naming of the Ministry of Education, which, unlike in other European countries, is called the 'Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs, and Sport' (Zervas, 2012). The Greek language is the next unifying element among Greeks and a core cultural influence. The modern Greek language has resulted from multiple variations and simplifications since 1900. The Greek language prevails and shapes Greek culture, from literature to music to scientific knowledge, shaping all social spheres of life for people living within the country

and those who have immigrated to others (Clogg, 2021). The final unifying aspect of Greek culture is the link between ancient and modern Greece, which was partly achieved through the use of the ancient Greek language. This was achieved by discovering the classical texts of Aristoteles, Thucydides, and other important figures of Ancient Greece. The promotion of Ancient Greek culture in Greece is done through schooling and broader spheres of social life such as theatres, museums, etc. (Tziovas, 2014).

Despite these elements shaping Greeks since the start of their life, they have not managed so far to achieve unity among the Greek people. Various historical events have reinforced the need of people in Greece for agency, to exert influence over their lives, which has become another core element of their culture (Kitromilides, 2013; Clogg, 2021; Gourgouris, 2021). Beyond the Greek War of Independence (1821–1830), during which the concept of 'eleutheria' (freedom) inspired Greek revolutionaries to claim their liberty after 400 years of occupation, such events include The National Schism, The Greek Civil War, The Greek military junta, and events during the Metapolitefsi period. The National Schism (1910–1922) was driven by the debate over whether Greece should enter World War I and marked by the disagreements between King Constantine I and Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos (Kitromilides, 2013). Then, the Greek Civil War (1946–1949) was a communist-led uprising against the established government of the Kingdom of Greece following World War II (Castoriadis, 1991). Following that was the Greek military junta (1967–1974), a right-wing military dictatorship that ruled Greece, overthrowing democracy in the country (Clogg, 2021). Even after the restoration of democracy in the Metapolitefsi period (1974–present), debates about the Europeanness of Greek identity and whether Greeks belong to the West were marked by the Economic Crisis and Austerity (2008–2018) (Gourgouris, 2021). At that time, mass demonstrations were happening in Greece due to monetary and economic measures imposing constraints on the country. In all these historical contexts, Greeks have consistently demonstrated a need to act independently, make their own choices, and exert influence over their lives and circumstances (Zervas, 2012; Fokas & Karagiannis, 2015).

This cultural need for agency seems to have historically influenced Greek teachers as a professional group, leading to their active participation in trade unions and professional associations since the Metapolitefsi, the period that followed the dictatorship (Stamelos & Bartzakli, 2013). Their role has been particularly significant during this post-dictatorship era, as teachers in unions played an essential part in the movement for a ‘democratic school’—a vision of an education system that serves the need for democratisation and modernisation of Greek schools (Traianou, 2023). Through unionism, teachers have been able to assert their professional autonomy, especially against the authority of the 'school inspector,' who had traditionally been responsible for inspecting teachers and their practices and had held a prominent position since the formation of the Greek state. The teachers' unions advocated for the modernisation of the education system. Their core demand was the replacement of the school inspector with a school counsellor who could offer scientific and pedagogical guidance to them based on their needs rather than monitoring their work. This advocacy replaced the inspector's role through Law 1304/1982 and the establishment of the institution of the school counsellor, with defined duties and responsibilities, by a presidential decree in 1984 (Kassotakis & Papagueli-Vouliouri, 2011). This achievement on the part of teacher unions in Greece is significant for the professional group of teachers, as it contributed to a mass engagement of teachers in unionism, asking for better working conditions since these days. Today, Greece has a total of 137 teacher unions that are part of the Greek Primary Teachers Federation (DOE), whose members continue to function as strategic social actors, striving to influence employment relations at the school level as well as national education policy, which regulates and frames their working conditions (Traianou, 2019; 2023).

Therefore, the cultural values of independent thought and action have influenced not only the Greek psyche but also the way Greek teachers function as a professional group within the frameworks established by national educational policy. This indicates that Greek teachers’ nature of professionalism might also

be relevant to these cultural influences even if it is surrounded by the policy frameworks defined by the Greek national policy.

2.3 Greek educational policy

Within its centralised structure, Greek educational policy is primarily governed by the Ministry of Education (MoE), the central administrative body responsible for making all key decisions regarding teachers' work, making its function highly relevant to teachers' experiences of professionalism (Presidential Decree 18/2018). Its authority is exercised through laws and regulations established by the Greek Government (Constitution of Greece, 2019), including national curricula, national syllabi, national textbooks, and teachers' guidebooks.

In Greece, teachers work within a specific national curriculum, a common practice across most OECD countries, to secure consistency in learning opportunities for their pupils (Gewirtz et al., 2009; OECD, 2021). This national curriculum (DEPPS) outlines specific objectives for every unit of each subject, mandating that teachers 'cover' these within specified time frames, with this national curriculum being utilised by all teachers in primary schools in Greece (Zambeta, 2012; Ministerial Decisions 303B/13-03-2003). Central educational policy also defines the national syllabus (APS), which can vary yearly. Thus, teachers need to stay informed of any changes in every subject every year (Ministerial Decisions 303B/13-03-2003).

In addition, teachers have national textbooks for all subjects mandated in schools to ensure uniformity, which can also be observed in some countries like China and Brazil (OECD, 2021). However, it is not the existence of national textbooks in Greece per se that can influence the work of teachers and thus be related to their lived experiences of professionalism. It is the amount that teachers in Greece, by law, are obliged to cover (Greek Government Gazette 303B/13-03-2003). At least 75% of the content of these national textbooks is expected to be used by all teachers working in primary schools. Teachers are additionally handed a teacher's guidebook from the central educational policy, which provides detailed lesson plan activities for each unit across all subjects,

aiming to ensure consistency of content and pedagogy (Greek Government Gazette 303B/13-03-2003; Greek Government Gazette 304B/13-03-2003/General Part). Therefore, Greek teachers seem to work within tied boundaries that are likely to influence their perceptions and experiences of professionalism (Hatzopoulos et al., 2015).

These policies, as outlined in legislation, are supported by training opportunities organised by regional bodies (PEKES), with the cooperation and support of the education consultant (formerly known as the 'school counsellor') (Law 1566/1985/Article 56; Law 1304/1982; Greek Government Gazette 353.1/324/105657/Δ1/8-10-2002; Law 3848/2010). However, various scholars in Greece have presented evidence of inadequate organisation of regular training opportunities for Greek teachers. They have also expressed broader criticism of the administrative-oriented role of regional educational policy, which serves as an implementer of central educational decisions regarding teachers' work, and of the role of education consultants (Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023; Kakana et al., 2017; Ifanti et al., 2017). This is important, as the extent to which teachers receive support from regional bodies and education consultants may be related to the nature of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers.

In addition to these, over the last decade, central policy has aimed at increasing the quality of teaching and learning in Greece by raising standards and strengthening accountability mechanisms to ensure transparency in school policies and teachers' practices, as in the case of many OECD countries (Zeichner, 2010; OECD, 2023). Specifically in Greece, this was influenced by the publication of two comprehensive reports by the OECD, highlighting key challenges within the Greek education system: centralisation, weak accountability measures affecting teaching quality, poor educational outcomes, and weak school leadership (OECD, 2011; 2017). Aligning with global trends and conforming to OECD suggestions, Greek policy's aims in education within the last decade centre around central policymakers' intention to strengthen the role of regional and school policy (Traianou, 2019) and increased oversight through external methods of measuring education outcomes.

Since 2011, these aims have been expressed through educational reforms as part of other reforms happening in its public sector to reduce its expenditures (Traianou, 2019; 2023), seeking to ensure the quality of pupils' learning within the Greek context in response to its declining position relative to other countries (OECD, 2011; 2017). These reforms centred around decentralising decisions at the school level and reinforcing the leadership role of principals, strengthening the role of regional-level bodies to support the continuing professional development of teachers, and introducing teachers' and schools' evaluation (Law 3848/2010; Law 4024/2011; Law 4142/2013; Law 4690/2020; Law 4823/2021; Law 4547/2018).

The central policy reflects an expectation that making the stakeholders surrounding teachers' experiences more engaged to support teachers' professionalism, along with increased oversight of teachers' practices, could secure and potentially improve teaching quality (Papakonstantinou & Kolympari, 2019; Chalkiadaki, 2019), enhancing the performance of Greek pupils (Sounoglou, 2022; OECD, 2023). This is important since the extent to which reforms have been introduced in teachers' lives may influence their experiences and perceptions of professionalism.

Introducing reforms in education is not unique, something happening only within the Greek education context. Over the last thirty years, many OECD and European countries have embraced 'neo-liberalism', 'performativity', and 'results-oriented' reforms in education, reducing national expenditure in response to economic crises (OECD, 2023). They have introduced reforms that aim to increase pupils' attainment, introducing or enhancing monitoring systems through various measures such as PISA and PIRLS (Sahlberg, 2006; Anderson & Herr, 2015; Gewirtz et al., 2009). This happens partly because national policies trust that through introducing educational reforms, they could achieve changes that could result in better pupil outcomes and standards, which could, in turn, be translated into economic competitiveness (Day & Smethem, 2009).

Nevertheless, specifically looking at the Greek context, many academics are still questioning whether reforms have been introduced to teachers' working lives (Traianou, 2023; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023; Kakana et al., 2017).

Although Greece has undergone a decade of reforms, their implementation and impact have varied. For example, studies in Greece still observe minimal teacher training opportunities by regional policy, as reported before (Kakana et al., 2017; Dimopoulos et al., 2015; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023). Furthermore, recent studies have questioned the decentralisation of decisions at the school level in Greece, with evidence suggesting that schools in Greece are still absent from decisions on school funding, textbooks, teachers, and principals (Stavrianoudaki & Iordanides, 2018; Hatzopoulos et al., 2015). The documentation of schools' national ranking system has yet to be implemented in all schools, with teacher evaluation being implemented thus far only for early career-appointed teachers (Traianou, 2023; 2019). At the same time, evidence suggests that principals are still absent from engaging in curriculum planning and enrichment activities and in offering in-school professional development opportunities for teachers despite the recent reforms aiming to increase the involvement of principals in those areas (Dimopoulos et al., 2015; Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020). These suggest that, as in other countries, principals of the schools in which Greek teachers work are likely to influence through their actions and inactions.

2.4 School principals

Within the Greek centralised education system, principals represent the MoE, the central educational policy body (Greek Government Gazette 1340/2002). The roles and responsibilities of principals in Greece concentrate primarily on administrative matters (Greek Government Gazette 353.1/324/105657/Δ1/2002). Their responsibilities include reviewing and correcting administrative documents and school records, updating pupils' assessments and registrations, planning and evaluating educational initiatives, providing school meal provisions if necessary, maintaining contact with parents,

and performing any other administrative task asked by central or regional policy (Eurydice, 2023). They also serve as presidents of teachers' boards, introducing the themes that are going to be discussed in meetings with teachers, and monitor the extent to which the specific administrative tasks they assigned to teachers are executed as decided in their meetings (Greek Government Gazette 1340/2002; Greek Government Gazette 353.1/324/105657/Δ1/2002). This administrative-oriented direction of principals' role in Greece has also been empirically confirmed by many scholars in Greece (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020; Papazoglou & Koutouzis, 2022; Dimopoulos et al., 2015).

This limited role of principals within the Greek context was one of the reasons why key reforms within the last decade focused on strengthening their role in taking a more active role in support of teachers' professionalism (Law 3848/2010; Law 4024/2011; Law 4142/2013; Law 4690/2020; Law 4823/2021; Law 4547/2018). However, as already reported, evidence suggests that teachers have not yet experienced changes in support of their professionalism, partly because their principals do not appear to have introduced these in their lives (Traianou, 2019; Stamelos et al., 2012; Dimopoulos et al., 2015). This exemplifies the crucial role of principals in choosing what to do and what probably not to do. This suggests that the current study needs to explore precisely how teachers' views on professionalism might be influenced by their principals.

Nevertheless, the current study acknowledges that despite central policies and reforms, whether principals introduce them into teachers' lives, the extent to which teachers implement them, how they position themselves concerning their educational values, beliefs, and practices, and how these factors might influence teacher professionalism in Greek schools also remain unexamined—an issue that the current study has addressed.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the cultural, central, regional, and school policy factors that may directly or indirectly influence Greek teachers' views on professionalism. It has revealed that Greeks appear to have an intrinsic

inclination for independence of thought and action. Moreover, it has been reported that central national policy might impose constraints on teachers' experiences of professionalism through detailed national textbooks. Yet, regional policy might or might not actively support teachers' perceptions of professionalism. School principals, too, appear to favour an administrative role rather than actively promoting professionalism.

Given that culture and different policy levels specifically function within the Greek education context have been articulated, the next chapter needs to engage with the academic literature on teacher professionalism, demystifying what it means and how it is practised and experienced across other European and OECD countries.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 has described Greek culture, policy, and organisational structures based on the research-informed assumption that these are likely to influence, directly or indirectly, Greek teachers' perceptions and enactments of professionalism. This chapter reviews professionalism in teaching and elements traditionally associated with professionalism, with a particular emphasis on autonomy. It then presents the broader elements found in the research literature, separating them into three broad strands of research: the psychological-oriented, the ethical-oriented, and the development-oriented, as presented in the Introduction of this thesis. The importance of internal and external factors in how teachers experience these is pointed out, emphasising the crucial role of principals. This provides justification for deconstructing the 'forms' of professionalism identified in the academic literature (democratic vs managerial, etc.), using empirical evidence found across a range of European and OECD countries within their cultural, national, school, and personal contexts. This literature review establishes the foundation for exploring the nature of Greek teachers' views and practices of professionalism in this study.

3.2 Professionalism in teaching

The term 'professionalism' in education has been related to improving service quality (Hoyle, 2001) and, more specifically, to the ideology, norms, and corresponding actions that professional group members employ to express their professional standing (Evetts, 2016). This suggests that the meaning of professionalism can evolve over time, that it is constructed within the specific social contexts in which it is applied, and that it is tied to the particular historical and cultural environments within which an occupation functions (Noordegraaf, 2015).

Historically, in teaching, 'professionalism' has been related to qualifications, participation, and success in a sustained formal training programme typically,

though not always, associated with higher education; theoretical knowledge integrated with practical expertise; an underlying ideology that encourages teachers' responsibility to pupils and society; and levels of pedagogical autonomy (Furlong et al., 2000) (See Picture 1, p.39).

Qualifications were and continue to be part of the ongoing discussion about the understandings and exercise of teacher professionalism across various national contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2000; OECD, 2021), as they help clarify the specific qualifications teachers have obtained within a particular education system, serving as a fundamental reference point for outlining what teachers understand and possess in terms of knowledge and skills (Toledo et al., 2017; Dodillet et al., 2019; Tatto, 2021; Murray, 2015).

The same applies to teachers' professional knowledge. Teachers combine their knowledge of content and pedagogy with their professional expertise, integrating content and teaching strategies to understand how specific subjects, problems, or topics are structured, presented, and tailored to pupils' diverse needs and abilities (Shulman, 1987; Linninger et al., 2015). Research has shown that the knowledge teachers gain through daily professional practice—by integrating their content knowledge with pedagogy—is crucial for linking the curriculum to their everyday work with pupils. Thus, teachers' professional knowledge is an essential element of professionalism (Hopmann, 2003).

Two important aspects of professionalism are responsibility and autonomy, with the latter being part of the current study's focus.

Responsibility typically refers to teachers perceiving themselves as responsible to pupils, parents, colleagues, principals, the community, and themselves (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011). Evidence suggests that teachers with a sense of responsibility and answerability go beyond what is expected of them. They are intrinsically motivated and eager to dedicate themselves to work-related duties without external supervision or constraints (Fischman et al., 2006). This is important, as there is a distance between devoting oneself to meeting

expectations and being formally accountable as a condition of one's work (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014).

This relates to the nature of teachers' work, which is always circumscribed by numerous accountability mechanisms to secure the quality of teaching pupils receive (Evetts, 2003). These mechanisms are usually embedded in the decision-making powers of governments, school districts, and principals across various national contexts, East and West (Ingersoll, 2009). The degree of control exerted over teachers' work and the measures for imposing that control can vary across different times, political and economic circumstances, and national educational contexts (Hall, 2004). Nevertheless, governments have often been reluctant to transfer authority over the content and goals of teaching to teachers, as granting teachers more control over policies or social issues would necessitate a fundamental restructuring of the distribution and balance of control between teachers and governments within a national context (Ingersoll, 2009). Similarly, teachers do not hold exclusive jurisdiction to meet the unique needs of their service recipients, the pupils (Hordern, 2024; Hoyle & John, 1995). Monitoring teachers' practices and pupils' performance is an integral part of their work, with governments setting the targets, discussing the outcomes, and planning interventions to ensure teaching quality and improve pupils' learning (Hall, 2004). Thus, unlike other professionals such as doctors or lawyers, public school teachers' professionalism, in most countries, has never been related to autonomy as 'freedom from external control, plus 'self-government,' 'self-regulation,' 'exclusive jurisdiction,' and 'independence of judgment' in other professions (Freidson, 2001; Evetts, 2014; Campbell, 2000).

These aspects of teachers' work and broader critiques related to teachers' knowledge have been used to characterise teaching as a 'semi-profession' (Etzioni, 1969). This is because teaching does not meet the criteria for this kind of autonomy, a code of ethics, exclusive control over knowledge and professional practice, or a knowledge base grounded in scientific research, as defined by classical theories of professions (Abbott, 1993). This has led various scholars in the field of teacher professionalism to call for different perspectives

equally important to examine ‘professionalism’ specifically in the work of teachers.

3.3 Teacher professionalism through a different lens

Recognising the unique nature of teachers' work, scholars have indicated the need for broader understandings of teacher professionalism that surpass the limits of an adaptation from the classic view of professions tied to an 'expert knowledge base’, 'specialised skills’, 'intellectual strength, ‘a deep commitment to the public good’, and 'autonomy' as freedom from control, as these are detached from underlying values and actual teachers' practices (Furlong et al., 2000). They have emphasised that these elements might be notions linked to an ‘old view’, expressing the need for a more nuanced understanding of professionalism (Sachs, 2001; Evetts, 2003; Svensson, 2006; Helgøy & Homme, 2007). From focusing solely on qualifications, competencies, and skills to considering more personal and implicit aspects of a teacher attached to the specific tasks, performance, and the specific contexts in which teachers work (Svensson, 2006; Helgøy & Homme, 2007).

In this regard, Hargreaves (2000) has suggested that, depending on the time and national context, the development of conceptualisations of teacher professionalism may be more appropriately related to different phases. In the pre-professional age, teachers’ professional knowledge and expertise might be considered relevant to teacher professionalism because, in this phase, teaching may be seen as a technical job, and teachers may be expected to carry out the directives of their superiors. In the age of the autonomous professional, autonomy might be important, emphasising pedagogical freedom and the ability to choose methods based on professional judgment. In the age of the collegial profession, the focus of professionalism might shift to elements of professional culture and collaboration, common purposes, and responses to changes. In the post-professional age, the nature of teacher professionalism might become more flexible, wide-ranging, and inclusive, necessitating closer relations

between professionals inside the school and beyond, with a focus on improving teaching, learning, and caring for pupils (Hargreaves, 2000).

Considering that the notion of ‘phases’ can bring some limitations in its conceptualisation, Sachs (2001) has, more clearly, indicated that it might be more relevant to view teacher professionalism as a concept where elements tied to an ‘old view’ of professionalism (e.g., qualifications, knowledge, responsibility, autonomy) can equally sustain their status along with ‘new’ elements that focus on inclusive membership, enquiry-orientation, knowledge-building, collaborative practices, adaptability, flexibility, and responsiveness to change nature (Sachs, 2003). In this context, she has suggested that teachers’ professional practice does not exist in a vacuum. It is inherently influenced by how a teacher makes and is able to make sense of their roles, as there is a profound connection between a teacher’s professional practice and their identity (Sachs, 2001), with the latter serving as a vital framework through which teachers navigate their professional roles, though identity itself is subject to external influences (Gee, 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Notably, teachers’ identities do not just provide "a framework for teachers to construct their ideas of ‘how to be,’ ‘how to act,’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and their place in society" (Sachs, 2005, p. 15). They are not just the process of the mixture of their personal and professional perceptions and values that shape how an individual thinks and acts (Day et al., 2006), through which a teacher understands themselves as members of a community of practice (Day & Kington, 2008). Literature suggests that teacher identity does not exist outside of the context in which teachers work. Rather than being internal, coherent, and fixed, it is socially mediated (Reeves, 2018) and dynamic (Beijaard et al., 2004) in its nature. In this manner, a teacher’s professional behaviour can be influenced by their professional identity, though identities are not stable or unchangeable over time; they can vary and fluctuate based on teachers' experiences (Day et al., 2006). Thus, although teachers' professional behaviour can be influenced by their attitudes, values, perceptions, and other internal elements of their professional identity, it is also influenced by how these elements interplay with

various external influences shaping their working context (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011).

Hence, in terms of autonomy as an element of professionalism, the extent to which teachers perceive and exercise autonomy in their work is influenced by a teacher's identity, together with how broader influences tied to the environment in which teachers work may also influence their understandings and enactments of autonomy (Frostenson, 2015).

3.3.1 Autonomy

Using Frostenson's (2015) work, the forms and levels of autonomy teachers might perceive depend upon a range of personal, school, and national factors.

The personal influences relate to what he has termed 'individual autonomy level' (Frostenson, 2015), which is grounded in individual teachers' ideas and ideals that can influence how they perceive and enact autonomy in their everyday practice (Pitt, 2010). It relates to teachers choosing pedagogical and teaching methods within the boundaries of the national and local policies in which teachers work (Ingersoll, 2009). This has been identified in the research literature either as 'pedagogical freedom' (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015) or 'pedagogical autonomy' (Furlong et al., 2000), or 'classroom autonomy,' meaning teachers' ownership of how they perceive their ability to make decisions in their classroom practices concerning choosing teaching methods and approaches (Vangrieken et al., 2017). Thus, this form of autonomy relates to each teacher's interests and internal abilities and is connected to their biographies and professional identities. These can influence their capability and desire to establish environments for autonomy and can also influence what they choose to do with these spaces of autonomy (Benson, 2016). In that way, for others, this autonomy raises its status to that of a psychological need (Parker, 2015), where autonomy can mean different things for teachers (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005), and different teachers have different needs for autonomy (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012). This is why they have shifted their focus to psychologically oriented research (e.g. agency, etc.), as discussed later.

However, the forms and levels of autonomy teachers perceive also depend upon the school contexts in which they work, a form of autonomy to decide on practice at the local level that Frostenson (2015) has termed 'collegial professional autonomy' (Frostenson, 2015). In this form of autonomy, principals can encourage teachers to collaborate and share their expertise in local environments, also expressed as 'engaged autonomy' (Gabriel et al., 2011). Thus, it relies on the leadership capabilities of the principal, who needs to be inclined to promote local-based interpretations of the curriculum and ultimately depends on teachers' interest in engaging with these interpretations to cater to the specific needs of pupils (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015). This means that local and contextual influences might facilitate or hinder a teacher's motivation for achieving autonomy, as Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a theory of motivation, suggests (Legault, 2020; Meyer, 2014; Deci et al., 2017). According to SDT, teachers are likely to experience increased motivation for autonomy if working in school environments where their principal has cultivated a sense of connection, care, and belonging with others (Deci et al., 2017), which makes teachers feel valued and appreciated at work (Meyer, 2014). In addition, in cases where their principal promotes constructive feedback, provides opportunities for choice, encourages personal responsibility, and provides adequate resources to fulfil their tasks and goals (Meyer, 2014), together with the support of their professional needs (Slemp et al., 2021). However, teachers are less likely to experience increased motivation for autonomy if they work in local school environments where their principal promotes a culture that makes teachers not feel valued, appreciated, and connected with others (Deci et al., 2017; Legault, 2020). In cases where their principal promotes rewards, punishments, deadlines, judgemental assessments, and other controlling actions, teachers experience additional constraints or neglect of their professional needs, which might undermine their perceived competence (Slemp et al., 2021). At the same time, this form of autonomy is tied to the idea of local responsibility as it relates to the crucial issue of what kind of autonomy should be afforded at the local level and how it should be managed within a national context (Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015).

Thus, the national conditions in which teachers work can also influence the degree to which they perceive themselves as autonomous, referred to as 'general professional autonomy' (Frostenson, 2015). This form of autonomy concerns the frames of teachers' work, such as the school system's organisation, legislation, entry requirements, teacher education, curricula, procedures and ideologies of control (Frostenson, 2015), which decisions are usually made by governments who control their work (Ingersoll, 2003). Thus, in this form of autonomy, teachers, as public sector professionals in many countries, enjoy a 'restricted autonomy' (Wermke & Höstfält, 2014), as teachers cannot often participate in decisions about their theoretical knowledge, training, qualifications, and entry and exit requirements (Smyth et al., 2000; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015; MacBeath, 2012). Moreover, they enjoy a 'regulated autonomy' (Lundström, 2015) as their autonomy is limited by various control measures, accountability mechanisms, and standards for their work across different countries.

Although national policies regulate teachers' work and can influence their perceived autonomy, in many European and OECD countries, teachers have reported feeling autonomous in their work, often focusing on what has been previously referred to as the 'individual autonomy level' (Frostenson, 2015). For example, studies of Finnish, German, and Irish teachers have reported that teachers perceived themselves as autonomous working within accountability frameworks, perceiving them as just the frameworks of their work (e.g., national curriculums) (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020; Wermke et al., 2019; Salokangas et al., 2020). Notably, evidence from Finland (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021), Germany (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021), and Ireland (Salokangas et al., 2020) suggest that teachers perceive themselves as independent in choosing what to do in their classroom practices, considering this as a positive quality of their work.

Therefore, in the context of this research, Greek teachers may regard autonomy as an element of their professionalism based on their professional identities, even if they work within national and school contexts that are regulated or shaped by others. Moreover, they could consider autonomy as an aspect of their

views of professionalism, even if these external influences may influence the degree to which they perceive themselves as autonomous professionals (Frostenson, 2015).

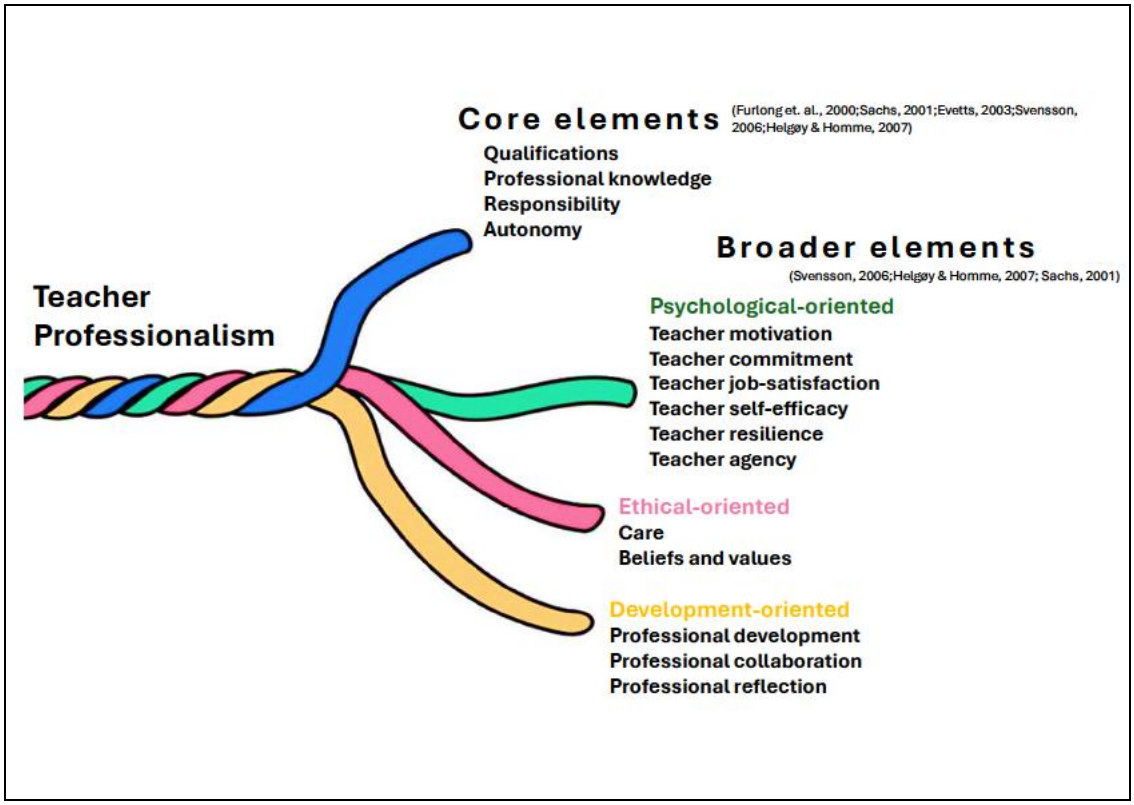
The same applies to broader elements associated with professionalism in the research literature, which, much like autonomy, are influenced by a teacher's identity through which teachers make sense of their professional roles. However, how these interact and are influenced by the national, local, and school environments in which teachers work in complex ways.

3.3.2 Broader elements of professionalism

The research literature has identified several broader elements of professionalism—extending beyond qualifications, professional knowledge, responsibility, and autonomy. This study classifies the wide range of professional elements found in the research literature into three key categories (See Picture 1):

- Psychological-oriented – Encompassing the psychological, mental, and emotional attributes that shape a teacher's professional conduct, such as motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, agency, and resilience.
- Ethical-oriented – Including the ethical and moral principles that influence teachers' professional behaviour and decisions, such as care, beliefs, and values.
- Development-oriented – Focusing on teachers' ongoing professional growth, encompassing professional development, collaboration, and reflection.

The research literature suggests that through the interplay of these elements with external influences, different teachers may cultivate varying views on professionalism, which may affect their professional behaviour differently. Thus, it makes them relevant to the nature of professionalism of Greek teachers' perspectives in this study.



Picture 1 Teacher Professionalism - Elements found in the research literature

Psychological-oriented

The research literature suggests that a teacher's professional behaviour is influenced by various psychological, mental, and emotional factors, including motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, agency, and resilience.

As an aspect of professionalism, teacher motivation is the driving force that makes them engage and stay engaged with their work (Richardson & Watt, 2018). Teacher motivation may relate to intrinsic motivators, such as altruistic values, social values of contribution to society, shaping children's future, and extrinsic motivators like salary, rewards, etc. (Richardson et al., 2014). It is closely related to social, national, and school contextual influences, as these can impact a teacher's motivation to stay engaged with their work and pupils either positively or negatively (Han & Yin, 2016; Börü, 2018).

Motivated teachers can become committed to the profession and their pupils (Hong, 2012). This aspect has been identified as another aspect of professionalism, as it refers to striving for a goal and pursuing it over time (Locke & Latham, 2002). Like teacher motivation, teacher commitment can be

influenced by external factors. It has been found that teachers who maintain their commitment can better handle the interplay between personal and external influences (Ingersoll, 2001; Day et al., 2007).

The research literature has also identified teacher job satisfaction as an aspect of professionalism since it refers to a positive and pleasant emotional state arising from an individual teacher's appreciation of their job and professional experience (Locke, 1976). Thus, teachers who perceive themselves as satisfied professionals experience an alignment between their job expectations and their actual professional experiences (Ho & Au, 2006). A teacher's job satisfaction can fluctuate through their careers and be influenced by external influences. Issues of teacher workload, teacher cooperation, and pupil discipline (Demitras, 2010; Toropova et al., 2021), but also societal influences of recognition or other influences of salaries, etc., have been found to positively or negatively influence a teacher's job satisfaction.

Self-efficacy has also been regarded as an aspect of professionalism since it refers to teachers' belief in their ability to achieve desired outcomes and prevent undesired ones (Bandura, 1997). Similar to previous aspects identified, a teacher's self-perceived efficacy as a professional can fluctuate over their career and be influenced by external stimuli. Even if teachers possess confidence in their abilities to produce desired outcomes —and avoid undesired ones— as professionals, their working environment can influence the extent to which they can achieve or prevent these outcomes (Chesnut & Burley, 2015; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Another emerging element in the research literature is resilience, which refers to teachers adapting to their professional roles despite challenges to prevent undesired outcomes and help them perform better professionally (Beltman et al., 2011). Resilience is deeply rooted in teachers' core values, such as a commitment to pupil welfare, equity, etc., and is essential for teachers to maintain their professional standards and values (Gu & Day, 2013). Since the pandemic, this element has become even more relevant for teachers (Day et al., 2023), as it is not merely a personal attribute of professionalism. It is a complex

construct resulting from a dynamic relationship between risk and protective factors (Mansfield et al., 2012). Thus, teachers' capacity for resilience can fluctuate due to the influences of personal, relational, and organisational settings in which they work and relationships both within and outside their everyday working context (Mansfield et al., 2016).

The same applies to agency, which the research literature sees as an important dimension of teachers' professionalism. Much has been written about agency in the sociological literature, referring to one's belief in one's capacity and capability to act independently and make one's own choices, even within the constraints of social structures (Giddens, 1984). More recent work on teacher agency sees it as an emergent phenomenon. In this view, agency is concerned with how teachers shape their responses to situations, something they achieve through their actions rather than hold as a capacity (Biesta et al., 2015). This is why agency has recently been linked to autonomy, suggesting that it relates to how teachers express their agency using their autonomy based on their interests, internal abilities, biographies, and broader identities (Benson, 2016). Research has also found that teachers use their autonomy, expressing agency, to align their actions with their views and beliefs (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020) and that teacher agency motivates teachers to adopt autonomous behaviours (Teng, 2019). In that way, agency becomes much more relevant to external influences as it is practised when teachers exert influence, make choices, and take stances in ways that affect their work (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015). This means a teacher's agency can be resourced or constrained by external influences, contextual factors, material conditions, cultures, or social interactions (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Etelapelto et al., 2013). Considering this discussion and the fact that this study has a partial focus on the element of autonomy as part of professionalism, agency might be relevant to how teachers perceive their autonomy.

Ethical-oriented

Research literature suggests that a teacher's professional behaviour and decisions are also shaped by their ethical and moral principles, including their beliefs, values, and sense of care.

The ethical side of professionalism is filled by another element in the research literature, care (O'Connor, 2008). As an aspect of professionalism, care can be separated into caring 'about,' which refers to caring for pupils in social or affective terms, and caring 'for,' which underlines teachers accepting the need for continuing self-improvement to be able to meet the needs of their pupils (Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002). Even though external stimuli cannot impose on teachers the responsibility of caring about or for their pupils, the social rules, structures, and cultures in place, e.g., in their school environments, can influence teachers' social and professional capacities to meet the needs of their pupils (O'Connor, 2008).

The need for teachers to transmit their core educational beliefs and values through their teaching has been identified in the research literature as another element filling this ethical side of professionalism. Teachers' beliefs inform their practice, mental representations, and reflections of the individual's conscious and unconscious thoughts (Schutz et al., 2020). Thus, they provide an interconnection between the personal and the professional self, between themselves and their professional practice (Wenger, 1998). This belief system is not stable or unchangeable over time, as the context in which teachers work and their biography can influence their values as well as their values can influence the way they negotiate the social, cultural, and organisational professional environment in which they work (Day et al., 2006).

Development-oriented

According to the research literature, a teacher's professional behaviour can also be influenced by the extent to which they engage in continuous development to become a better professional, through professional development, collaboration, and reflection.

Professional development has been regarded as an important aspect of professionalism (Thompson, 2009; Lawrence & Chong, 2010; Desimone, 2009). It involves all learning activities a teacher can undertake based on their professional needs and personal interests (Hilton et al., 2013). Teachers can enhance their pedagogical knowledge and assess its effect on pupils' learning by engaging in continuing professional development (Thompson, 2009). In this way, it is a continuing process throughout a teacher's professional career, influenced by a teacher's characteristics and contexts in which they work (Sancar et al., 2021). Thus, where teachers work and the extent to which this environment offers opportunities for continuing professional development, e.g., principals or other administrators, can influence the extent to which teachers are motivated to engage in becoming better as professionals (Lawrence & Chong, 2010; Desimone, 2009; Sancar et al., 2021).

The same applies to professional collaboration. This aspect of professionalism refers to a teacher's inclination to forge alliances, exchange ideas for teaching, etc., to become a better professional (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015; Hargreaves, 2019; Campbell, 2018). Like all previous elements discussed, it relates strongly to teachers' working contexts and the extent to which these contexts offer or hinder opportunities for professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021).

Finally, another element of professionalism found in the research literature is professional reflection since it can empower teachers to reflect on their practices and adjust them to meet the needs of their pupils (Schön, 2017). Through continuing reflection, teachers can reflect on past and new situations, making them better adapt to new situations (Schön, 2017). Like previous elements, external influences, such as rules, regulations, and mandates, can exert limitations or facilitators on teachers' potential to reflect on their professional practice so that they can adapt their teaching to meet their pupils' needs (Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

Together, the above highlights the importance of national, local, and contextual influences on teachers' perspectives on professionalism and, in particular, underscores the crucial role of principals in providing resources or imposing constraints on teachers. Considering that the principal's role might also be crucial for the nature and experiences of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers, the following section explores more comprehensively how principals can influence teachers' views on professionalism and in what ways. This links back to what was discussed in the introduction of this thesis, of school principals being in the position to influence teachers' professional behaviour positively and negatively through the choices that they make, linking to the JD-R model (Gagné et al., 2015; Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Lesener et al., 2019).

3.3.3 Principal's crucial role

Principals can choose between putting teachers under extra workload and pressure (Crawford et al., 2010) or reducing them so that teachers can focus on their work (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). They can decide between encouraging interaction, cooperation, and care among teachers or hindering connections and interactions of teachers within a school environment (Gagné et al., 2015). Thus, school principals are the ones to choose whether they would reduce job demands, which could help teachers focus on more important tasks and sustain their physical and psychological resources to be able to meet the needs of their pupils (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). They are the ones to decide to offer resources to teachers so that teachers can achieve their professional goals and meet their needs as professionals for professional learning and growth (Demerouti & Bakker, 2011; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Indeed, the research literature has revealed how principals in local school environments have been found to either support or hinder teachers' views on professionalism in various ways (Sancar et al., 2021; Harris & Jones, 2019). Since school principals are the key people who shape cultures within a school, and structures reflect preferred cultures, the principals' role emerges as crucial (James & McCormick, 2009). Through who they are, what they do, and how and when they express their leadership (Deal & Peterson, 2016), principals can play

a pivotal role in the direction and mindset of teachers that guide their actions (Day & Sammons, 2020). They can wield significant influence over individual and collective understandings of beliefs, values, and behavioural norms, which can eventually become deeply rooted as basic assumptions that unconsciously influence teachers' actions (Schein, 2010). This also means that principals may influence teachers' professional lives differently through the culture they have established via their leadership.

Teachers could work within a collegial culture present in their schools (Kelchtermans, 2006; Hargreaves, 1995; Peterson & Deal, 2009). In a school where policies are typically whole-school initiatives that require substantial consensus and commitment, the school's collective focus is underpinned by collaborative relationships which enable teachers to work together towards shared goals (Hargreaves, 1995). Here, teachers' practices may prioritise teamwork and mutual support, and relationships with parents are characterised by openness, confidence, and trust. Moreover where, in some cases, principals have adopted teacher leadership approaches by developing structures for curriculum planning and development, providing opportunities to teachers for in-school professional development, and encouraging teachers to take on leadership roles for instructional-related practices (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Muijs et al., 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2011). Thus, through cultivating a positive school culture via their leadership, principals can create an environment that significantly influences not only the daily experiences of teachers but also their understandings of professionalism (Stoll et al., 2006; Day et al., 2007; Day & Sammons, 2013). Here, teachers may perceive themselves as valued school community members where their knowledge and expertise are trusted (Stoll et al., 2006). They may feel empowered by their principals to pursue innovation actively and willingly share their practices (Harris & Jones, 2019). Teacher's professional needs may be valued through CPD and other interventions principals can introduce, such as common planning, joint problem-solving, and joint responsibility for pupils' learning and support through professional

development opportunities, collaboration, mentoring, and observation of teaching practices (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, teachers could also work within fragmented school cultures (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Hargreaves, 1995; Deal & Peterson, 2010). In this scenario, teachers could work independently, isolated, and lack a shared vision (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). In such environments, there could be a notable lack of visionary leadership approaches adopted by the principal and hierarchical imposition placed on teachers by the principal (Deal & Peterson, 2010). Teachers may lack common purposes, feel disconnected from the school's mission, and lack motivation for the school's improvement (Peterson & Deal, 2009). In such environments, a lack of joint planning of teacher practices may lead to inconsistent teaching methods and, thus, differentiation of pupil experiences (Deal & Peterson, 2010). There could be minimal development opportunities and even collaboration and sharing of practices among teachers. Teachers may experience a workload that extends beyond their classroom practice because of the weak leadership approaches of the principal. Thus, teachers' perceptions, behaviours, and responses may become heavily influenced by this fragmented culture (Harris & Jones, 2019; Day & Sammons, 2013; Ärlestig et al., 2016; Sancar et al., 2021).

Taken together, teacher professionalism concerns areas and elements that are inherently influenced by how teachers experience them within their working environments. These areas and elements are situated, historical, and context-specific. Therefore, although academic discussions have long before debated the ideal 'form' of professionalism, the reality of teachers suggests this cannot reflect their experiences of professionalism. Given this, the following section deconstructs the 'forms' of professionalism found in the academic discussions by synthesising key international studies from a range of European, Anglo-Saxon, and Emerging Economies that reveal how professionalism is shaped by the specific cultures, conditions, contexts, and personal influences of teachers.

3.4 ‘Forms’ of professionalism

In scholarly discussions, teacher professionalism has been associated with various forms, often perceived as opposing to each other, e.g. democratic vs managerial, collaborative vs. hyperactive, and enacted vs. demanded (Sachs, 2016). Evetts (2003) separates them into those expressed ‘within’ the occupational group, reflecting teachers' interests, values, and ideologies (e.g. democratic, collaborative, enacted). The ones expressed ‘from above’ by external stakeholders such as governments and governors reflect their values, interests, and expectations regarding teacher professionalism (e.g. managerial, hyperactive, demanded).

However, contested and dichotomous views of teacher professionalism impose numerous limitations on its understanding (Alexander et al., 2019; Sachs, 2016; Day, 2020). To overcome these challenges, the current study synthesises and explores the potential connections and differences among the dominant forms of professionalism identified in the literature (e.g. democratic, collaborative, hyperactive, enacted, demanded, and managerial). In addition, it moves beyond its limitations by providing empirical evidence from teachers working in a range of OECD countries that underscores the necessity for more nuanced and situated understandings of teacher professionalism.

For example, the form of ‘democratic professionalism’ has been associated with various meanings in the literature. Among its core notions, the first emphasises the need for collaboration, cooperation, and action between teachers and other educational stakeholders of broader society to inform pupil’s learning (Sachs, 2000). The focus is on a system of rules and standards informed by collective goals that shape teachers’ actions and professional behaviours, ensuring consistency, accountability, and quality of service (Day & Sachs, 2004). Its attention is given to the need for continuing professional development of teachers, a collegial-driven culture within the profession with shared values, expertise, and goals, and an activism nature, meaning taking an active role to advocate for change and improvement within the teaching profession (Day &

Sachs, 2004). Whereas the second form questions the legitimate right of governments to regulate the frameworks in which teacher professionalism is expressed (Whitty & Wisby, 2006). It argues that governments have long disrupted the trust between teachers and pupils, parents, and broader society, suggesting that these tensions can be overcome by developing collaborative cultures of these stakeholders within society (Zeichner, 2020). By establishing such cultures, they indicate that government control over the nature of teachers' work can be limited (Whitty, 2008), allowing teachers, with the support of stakeholders, greater autonomy to exercise their professional judgment guided by values of social justice and democracy, responsibility to serve public education, and understanding of teaching as a process of social transformation (Stevenson & Gilliland, 2015).

Even if these forms of democratic professionalism differ in their ways, aspects, and outcomes, they share a common agreement on the importance of engaging broader stakeholders interested in pupils' learning within the discussion of the nature of teacher professionalism. To achieve this, it could be argued that each of these forms of democratic professionalism found in the literature relate to 'collaborative' and 'enacted' professionalism respectively, because both these focus more on the practical everyday reality of teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015; Hargreaves, 2019; Campbell, 2018).

'Collaborative' professionalism acknowledges the need to develop new joint working relationships among teachers, administrators, and governors in ways that are responsive to and inclusive of the cultures of their pupils, themselves, and the community (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015; Hargreaves, 2019; Campbell, 2018). To do this, this form of professionalism centres its focus on using evidence to inform decisions, suggests an open dialogue across the stakeholders, emphasises the importance of feedback, and promotes a continuing collaboration across the stakeholders involved in pupils' learning (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). This indicates that this form of professionalism can mean different things in different contexts, and what might work within one context might not work in another (Harris & Jones, 2019). Meanwhile, enacted

professionalism exclusively focuses on strengthening the role of teachers to individually and collectively influence the nature of their professionalism in their everyday lives (Evans, 2008; Hilferty, 2008). This suggests that even though teachers cannot change the legitimate right of their governments to regulate areas of their work, they can influence the enactment of professionalism in their daily practice while fulfilling their professional roles (Evans, 2011). In that way, it emphasises how teacher professionalism can be constantly reshaped through teachers' individual and collective actions, which are informed by relationships, experience, knowledge, theory, organisational settings, and policy frameworks in which teachers work (Vanassche et al., 2019).

Indeed, risks are associated with both forms of professionalism, interpreted in the literature as 'hyperactive' and 'demanded', respectively (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015; Evans, 2008; Vanassche et al., 2019). For instance, although collaborative professionalism promotes interaction among stakeholders, facilitating access to learning support through networks and professional learning communities, this is a risk of evolving into a form of 'hyperactive professionalism' (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). This can be the case if teachers work in cultures of collaboration which have turned into contrived collegiality, meaning that teachers are forced to work with each other on agendas they are given, carrying out actions for the benefit of someone else, as determined by others, e.g. their principals, governors etc. (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). Alternatively, if teachers work in a school environment where they are forced to participate in hurried meetings and use quick-fix solutions to achieve pupil achievement results. Sharing and analysing more information on pupils can impact teachers' workload, even if it will likely inform their practice. At the same time, the emphasis on data-driven results may sometimes overshadow teachers' individual needs (Datnow, 2011).

These can lead to the form of 'demanded professionalism', where the focus is on how stakeholders such as governments, principals, etc., can introduce new demands for teachers' work while aiming to secure and potentially raise pupil achievement results (Evans, 2008; Vanassche et al., 2019). These new demands can be expressed through educational reforms, new standards, and initiatives,

which, in this form of professionalism, are perceived through a lens of imposed expectations on teacher professionalism (Evans, 2011; Hilferty, 2008). Regarding teachers setting high standards for themselves and their pupils, they are taking ownership of their professional growth and subject expertise enhancement, engaging in collaborative efforts with colleagues across different schools, remaining receptive to input from parents, businesses, and external stakeholders, and demonstrating proactive readiness to anticipate and embrace change while fostering innovative practices (Goepel, 2012). They argue that these expectations, along with the new demands, standards, and initiatives introduced into teachers' lives, can influence the extent to which teachers can shape and enact their professionalism in their everyday lives (Vanassche et al., 2019; Goepel, 2012; Evans, 2008).

Some scholars adopting a critical theory research perspective—a framework that examines power relations, ideological control, and the socio-political structures shaping education—argue that these obstacles to teachers' potential to influence and shape the enactment of their professionalism contribute to what is termed 'managerial professionalism', another fundamental form of professionalism identified in the literature (Whitty & Wisby, 2006; Sachs, 2001; Apple, 2012; Mockler, 2013). Here, the focus is on the increasing levels of bureaucracy, standardisation, assessment, and performance review which are being introduced in teachers' work by governments worldwide, corresponding to their view that private sector enterprises can also be applied to the public sector (Evetts, 2011; Sachs, 2001). They perceive that governments' expectations for teachers to adopt new forms of accountability, engage in evidence-based decision-making, and collaborate with school staff, parents, businesses, and other external stakeholders not only threaten teachers' potential to exercise their professionalism. Additionally, they argue that they can impact the fundamental element of professionalism, in their view, autonomy, which can lead to their de-professionalisation (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012; Ball & Olmedo, 2023).

However, as reported previously, autonomy can take different forms, with these scholars focusing on the 'general autonomy level' (Frostenson, 2015), which has,

in most countries, traditionally been regulated by governments rather than by teachers. Despite this, and as already reported, teachers in numerous European and OECD countries still consider autonomy an aspect of their professionalism (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020; Stone-Johnson, 2014; Keddie et al., 2014).

Beyond the discussion of autonomy, which has already been deconstructed, these forms of professionalism do not consider that historical cultures, working conditions, and organisational and personal factors are important for how teachers view and experience professionalism. Considering that the significance of these factors has already been pointed out and that these factors may influence Greek teachers' professionalism, it is important for the rest of this chapter to present key texts from studies, East and West, that exemplify how teachers experience professionalism.

3.5 How 'professionalism' is experienced East and West

This section employs Bronfenbrenner's ecological theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1981), which underpins this study and is comprehensively detailed in Section 4.2, to review key empirical evidence on teacher professionalism across a range of OECD countries, both in the East and the West.

The publications reviewed in the following sections were sourced from Google Scholar, following specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The study focused on ten countries from both Western and Eastern contexts, including Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway), European countries (Germany, Ireland), Anglo-Saxon countries (England, Australia, USA), and emerging economies (China, Brazil). The search used keywords such as "teachers," "professionalism," and "teachers' professional lives," along with country-specific terms like "Swedish teachers" or "Finnish teachers." Only empirical studies, rather than conceptual papers, were included. Additionally, all selected publications were required to be peer-reviewed published within the past 20 years (2004–2024). The total number of empirical studies reviewed was 28. All the resources used were in English.

	Country	Publications selected
European	**Finland**	(Savolainen, 2009; Paulsrud & Wermke, 2020; Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Salokangas & Wermke, 2020)
	Sweden	(Merchant et al., 2012; Paulsrud & Wermke, 2020; Frostenson & Englund, 2020)
	Norway	(Imsen & Volckman, 2014; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021)
	Germany	(Cortina & Thames, 2013; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021; Terhart, 2013)
	Ireland	(O'Flaherty & McCormack, 2022; Salokangas & Wermke, 2020; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021; Salokangas et al., 2020)
Anglo-Saxon	**England**	(Maylor, 2019; Wilkins, 2011; Day, 2019)
	Australia	(Harrison & Skrebneva, 2020; Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018; Mockler & Stacey, 2021; Robinson, 2012)
	USA	(Merchant et al., 2012; Stone-Johnson, 2014; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Buchanan, 2015)
Emerging economies	**China**	(Day et al., 2023; Lin et. al. 2012; Ye & Wang, 2024; Wang, 2016)
	Brazil	(Alves-Mazzotti, 2012; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Rothen & Santana, 2015)

Table 1 Publications selected for review

3.5.1 Cultural influences

Distinct sociocultural factors influence teachers' experiences according to empirical studies undertaken in European countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Ireland), Anglo-Saxon countries (England, Australia, USA), and Emerging economies (China, Brazil).

In the Scandinavian context, Finnish, Swedish, and Norwegian teachers have been found to share some similar exposure to Nordic cultural values of equity and inclusivity manifested in a shared responsibility to ensure that all pupils,

regardless of socio-economic background, receive high-quality teaching (Savolainen, 2009). Moreover, they share some common cultural values, e.g., respecting a pupil's intrinsic values and promoting cultural norms of generosity, tolerance, and justice (Merchant et al., 2012). In addition, common values of egalitarianism are promoted within society and shape their education systems (Imsen & Volckman, 2014). However, comparing teachers' experiences could reveal that Finnish and Norwegian teachers enjoy more social recognition as professionals than Swedish teachers, which might influence them differently (Paulsrud & Wermke, 2020). At the same time, Norwegian teachers enjoy additional participation in broader pedagogical, social, and school decisions as a professional group compared to their Nordic counterparts (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020), which may also influence their experiences and views on professionalism differently.

In the broader European context, there are also sociocultural differences across different countries. German teachers, for example, are experiencing an East-Wide divide, which, historically, has influenced German society and the cultures and educational policies surrounding them (Cortina & Thames, 2013). On the other hand, Irish teachers' experiences of societal influences differ from Germany and much of Europe, as teachers there experience a strong influence of the Catholic Church shaping the curriculum and many other aspects of their work. This, particularly, places strong expectations on Irish teachers to act as moral educators responsible for imparting religious values to their pupils (O'Flaherty & McCormack, 2022).

Different sociocultural values and influences in Emerging economies such as China and Brazil also shape teachers' experiences differently compared to the previous countries discussed. Chinese teachers are widely esteemed and occupy a significant position in society and frequently bear substantial responsibilities in advancing the nation's educational initiatives (Lin et. al. 2012). Another study revealed that the professionalism of Chinese teachers was closely aligned with their cultural Confucian philosophy that promoted values of altruism and shared moral responsibility (Day et al., 2023). Conversely, Brazilian

teachers operate within a society marked by social inequalities, cultural diversity, and historical influences. Teachers are often perceived as figures of authority, moral guides, and knowledge providers; yet, they also struggle with a lack of societal appreciation and support. They work in a highly diverse educational system, with significant disparities between urban and rural schools, public and private institutions, and different socio-economic backgrounds (Alves-Mazzotti, 2012).

Finally, in the Anglo-American context, English, American, and Australian teachers also experience different cultural values among them and in previous national contexts explored. British values emphasise mutual tolerance and respect for equal rights within a multicultural society comprising diverse cultures and identities, which shapes their education system (Maylor, 2019). However, in the USA, the education system is influenced by a national culture that promotes values of individualism and a philosophy of personal responsibility for success or failure (Merchant et al., 2012). Conversely, in Australia, cultural values promote the need for the national curriculum to be inclusive and representative of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, which also shapes teachers' experiences and their need to be familiar with these (Harrison & Skrebneva, 2020; Cuervo & Acquaro, 2018).

Thus, relying solely on one manifestation of professionalism found in the literature is insufficient to fully capture the cultural values that may shape teachers' experiences of professionalism differently, whether in the East or the West. This indicates that the professionalism expressed by Greek teachers might also be closely relevant to their unique cultural values, as reported in Chapter 2.

However, not just the socio-cultural values that differ across countries, East and West, might influence teachers' views on professionalism. The working conditions regulated by governments within which teachers experience professionalism, sharing similarities and differences across countries, might also influence teachers' perspectives.

3.5.2 National policy influence

Empirical evidence suggests that not all teachers within the European and OECD contexts discussed work under the exact government-regulated accountability mechanisms that shape their working conditions and professional experiences. Yet, even if they do, based on evidence, how policies have influenced or impacted teachers' lives and perceptions of professionalism have not been found to be uniform.

Today, the countries discussed, from East to West, have adopted some similar accountability policies to circumscribe teachers' professional experiences. Some of these policies are closer, and some are more distant from policies followed in Greece. A national curriculum exists in most of the European countries examined (e.g., Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Ireland), as well as in Anglo-Saxon countries (England, the USA, and Australia) and the Emerging economies discussed (China and Brazil), including Greece (OECD, 2023). National textbooks are widely used in China and Brazil, as they are in Greece, but not in the other countries under review.

Teacher practice inspections are in place in Sweden, Germany, and Ireland within the European context, in England, the USA, and Australia within the Anglo-Saxon context, and in China and Brazil among the Emerging economies discussed in this thesis (OECD, 2022). However, in Greece, evidence suggests that such inspections have only been partially introduced, as previously noted (Traianou, 2023; 2019).

National testing of pupils for performance-based assessment is a reality for primary teachers in Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, and Ireland), Anglo-Saxon countries (England, the USA, and Australia), and Emerging economies (China and Brazil) (OECD, 2023). In Greece, as mentioned in the previous chapter, a national ranking system has been implemented in some schools, but there is no nationwide testing for primary pupils (Traianou, 2023; 2019).

The decentralisation of decision-making authority—transferring control over aspects such as textbooks, funding, and the selection of teachers and principals

from central educational policies to regional educational bodies—has been implemented in various European countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, and Ireland), Anglo-Saxon countries (England, the USA, and Australia), and Brazil (OECD, 2021). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, there is no evidence of such decentralization in Greece (Stavrianoudaki & Iordanides, 2018; Hatzopoulos et al., 2015).

Beyond the similarities and differences, the core goal behind those policies is the belief of governments that with these measures in their education systems, they could secure and, potentially, improve their education results in cross-national comparative testing, e.g. PISA, PIRLS (Sahlberg, 2006; Anderson & Herr, 2015; Gewirtz et al., 2009).

However, evidence suggests that these accountability mechanisms, or the strengthening of those accountability mechanisms in which teachers work, have not uniformly influenced teachers in all those countries, even if many share similar frameworks.

Teachers across Nordic countries such as Finland (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Salokangas & Wermke, 2020) and Norway (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021), broader European countries such as Germany (Wermke et al., 2019; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021) and Ireland (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021), but also in Emerging economies such as China (Ye & Wang, 2024; Wang, 2016) and Brazil (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Rothen & Santana, 2015) have only reported that they experienced an indirect influence from national policy through regulations and accountability mechanisms.

However, a more direct influence of accountability measures on teachers' views of professionalism has been expressed by teachers working in Sweden (Frostenson & Englund, 2020) and the Anglo-Saxon countries such as England (Wilkins, 2011), USA (Stone-Johnson, 2014), and Australia (Mockler & Stacey, 2021), potentially related to the performative cultures in their education systems being more prevalent.

For example, Wilkins (2011) conducted a qualitative study in England. Based on his findings, he argued for the emergence of a 'post-performative' teacher — one who is still motivated by affective rewards, has clear career ambitions and manages to balance the demands of accountability as a result of performative management systems and government initiatives introduced in their work (Wilkins, 2011). Similarly, in their qualitative study in Sweden, Frostenson and Englund (2020) found that teachers, marked by performative rationality cultures in education, began to view performative elements and professional values as compatible aspects of their work (Frostenson & Englund, 2020). Similarly, Stone-Johnson (2014), in the USA, explored to what extent teachers' views of professionalism had changed due to decades of educational reforms in America that focused on performativity. Her study uncovered that those teachers expressed both performative and occupational elements as part of their professionalism, suggesting the presence of a 'parallel professionalism'. Likewise, in Australia, a qualitative study found that teachers considered 'data' something they care about and has become part of their nature of professionalism. Although some teachers disagreed with the ways of control, suggesting more 'intelligent accountability' ways, they relied on evidence, while others viewed these mechanisms as a way to validate their professionalism (Mockler & Stacey, 2021).

The above suggests that the specific working conditions in which Greek teachers work matter as the way regulations may influence teachers' experiences and perspectives on professionalism can vary.

Nevertheless, specifically in Greece, as reported comprehensively in the previous chapter, it is essential to note that there is limited evidence that the strengthening accountability mechanisms have actually been introduced in teachers' lives in Greece by their principals (Stamelos et al., 2012; Kakana et al., 2017; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023). This links to the crucial role of principals, who are the ones to choose how and what they might introduce to teachers' lives, indicating the distance between national policy's expectations through accountability measures and whether or how these are being introduced to

teachers by their principals (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Day et al., 2023). This again underlines why focusing exclusively on a single form of professionalism found in the academic literature can become problematic.

3.5.3 School influences

Qualitative studies of teachers in Nordic countries, Central Europe, Emerging economies, and Anglo-Saxon countries discussed have confirmed that principals play a crucial role in translating—and not just mediating—policies and initiatives to teachers. Through their established culture and the mediation of policies, they influenced teachers' understandings of professionalism differently, providing resources (e.g. mitigating external risks, teacher's potential to participate in broader decisions, promoting teacher's agency, etc.) or constraints (e.g. heavy workloads, inadequate support for professional development, etc.) to teachers.

In the Nordic context, a qualitative study revealed that Finnish and Swedish teachers regarded their principals as pivotal in establishing school rules and routines for interpreting national policy regulations (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021). Beyond interpreting regulations, principals were also perceived to mitigate risks in teachers' lives, such as handling parental intrusions and managing teachers' administrative burdens (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021). Similarly, in another qualitative study, Norwegian teachers emphasised the trust placed in them by school leaders and the presence of a school culture that fostered trust alongside collective oversight through group meetings, shared teaching, and classroom observations by colleagues. They underscored the critical role of principals in providing resources, facilitating participation in professional development activities, and allowing flexibility in teachers' work schedules (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020).

Likewise, in Central Europe, German teachers perceived their school principals as instrumental in establishing and enforcing rules and routines and interpreting national policy regulations in various ways (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021).

Similarly, in Western Europe, Irish teachers perceived their school leadership to influence their ability to perform their roles significantly and have a voice in broader school-related decisions (Salokangas et al., 2020). Consistent with findings in other national contexts, Irish teachers also viewed their principals as capable of mitigating external pressures facing their schools by acting as intermediaries, conveying messages and directives (Salokangas et al., 2020).

Analogous to previous countries, in the context of Emerging economies, Chinese teachers identified several school factors associated with a decline in their commitment, notably influenced by their principals. These factors included heavy workloads (due to numerous school activities), inadequate support for professional development, lack of collegial commitment, and insufficient protection from principals during conflicts with parents (Day et al., 2023). Correspondingly, Brazilian teachers experienced varying influences on their professionalism depending on the leadership profiles of their principals (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020). Especially in cases where teachers experienced a school culture characterised by power dynamics, low trust, and surveillance imposed by their principals, teachers also perceived restricted autonomy and limited opportunities for initiative (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020).

In line with previous findings, in the Anglo-American context, a small qualitative study highlighted the pivotal role of principals not only in mediating but also in translating policies. How principals interpreted regulations significantly influenced teachers' perspectives on professionalism. According to Day (2019), the exercise of professionalism depends not only on their knowledge, skills, and moral purpose but also on how principals use their pedagogical authority to establish collective values within school cultures (Day, 2020). Correspondingly, in the Australian context, a small qualitative study demonstrated that the presence of cohesive solid values and cultures, a dedication to social values of education, and well-established collegial relationships among teachers enabled teachers to exert their agency by adapting and adopting specific policy requirements to align with existing practices and modifying others (Robinson, 2012). More extensively, in the USA, a large qualitative study revealed that

teachers in schools where principals promoted a culture of trust and adopted flexible leadership approaches were more likely to demonstrate high levels of commitment, exceeding minimum expectations to meet pupils' needs (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Conversely, teachers in schools where principals fostered controlling environments and promoted a culture of distrust were less likely to exceed minimum expectations with pupils (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

The above international evidence aligns with what was discussed previously in the research literature for principals' crucial role in influencing teachers' perceptions of professionalism either positively or negatively (Harris & Jones, 2010; Day & Sammons, 2013; Ärlestig et al., 2016).

This evidence suggests that, similar to principals in European and OECD contexts, the role of principals in Greek primary schools is crucial in influencing teachers' views on professionalism. This is mainly due to how principals translate Greek national policy regulations and, based on the established rules in their schools, how they might support or hinder teachers' views on professionalism.

However, even if principals are in a position to influence teachers' perceptions of professionalism, international evidence across the various national contexts discussed suggests a distance in how principals translate regulations to teachers and how these are enacted by individual teachers (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Wermke et al., 2019; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020). This signals the importance of teachers' personal influences on the nature of Greek teachers' views on professionalism and, again, highlights why narrowly concentrating on one specific form of professionalism can pose risks to its understanding.

3.5.4 Personal influences

Empirical studies across the Nordic region, Central Europe, Emerging economies, and Anglo-Saxon countries have revealed that teachers did not just implement policies their principals introduced to them. Some of these studies showed that teachers resisted or navigated policies introduced by principals and

others that they adapted, reinterpreted, and reshaped those policies. The core reason behind their actions was whether these initiatives would benefit their pupils and to what extent they aligned with their identities, visions, philosophies, beliefs, views, values, judgments, and teaching styles.

In the Scandinavian context, researchers found that the initiative came second after teachers' visions in a small qualitative study in Finland, which focused on implementing a cross-curricular school initiative (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021). Teachers regarded their professional identities and philosophies to influence their teaching practice, perceiving their philosophies as their main frames of reference, with the initiative having only a secondary and supportive role (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021). Correspondingly, Swedish teachers considered their classrooms spaces to develop and express their identities (Wermke et al., 2019). Similarly, Norwegian teachers were identified to navigate policies introduced by their principals in their schools in various forms to fit their needs, beliefs, and those of their pupils in their classrooms (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020).

In the broader European context, Irish teachers, in another qualitative study, despite some policies requiring school-wide application of rules and regulations, it was up to individual teachers to follow these policies. Based on their findings, teachers expressed having the choice to opt in and out of school decisions, which their principals had introduced, if they wished to (Salokangas et al., 2020). More extensively, Terhart (2013) in Germany, explored how German teachers responded to the introduction of reforms building on previous empirical evidence. He suggests that teachers tend to focus on their professional reality, their classes, and their colleagues as a background for interpreting an innovation, as it is through their own experiences and values that they evaluate an innovation's value, usefulness and scope. In that way, he suggests that teachers did not simply apply new knowledge and practices but used it creatively. It was not a matter of adaption or resistance but of teachers' mixed experiences, reactions and attitudes (Terhart, 2013).

Correspondingly, in Emerging economies, Chinese teachers' influences challenged or supported their willingness and abilities to fulfil their commitment, progressing their pupils' academic progress and attainment and cultivating their moral values (Day et al., 2023). Likewise, Brazilian teachers were identified to navigate policies in various forms to fit their needs, beliefs, and those of their pupils in their classrooms (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020). They chose how to respond to introduced changes based on their willingness and capacity to reflect on and develop their classroom practices, using their creativity to achieve their goals and meet their needs (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020).

Analogous to previous evidence, in the Anglo-Saxon context, in England, Day (2019) found that even when a change was introduced in the school studied by the principal, it came second after teachers' views. This resulted in some teachers adapting to the introduced change as it aligned with teachers' educational values, while others resisted the change because it contradicted their educational values. According to the teachers of this study, the driving force behind their actions was their moral values and dedication to positively impact their pupils' learning progress in their classrooms, with their motivations and actions expressing their professional identities (Day, 2020). In Australia, in a previously reported qualitative study with an introduced change in teacher's lives, Australian teachers were found to reflect and rely on their professional judgment. While their practices were somewhat altered and only partially followed policy requirements, teachers remained committed to their strong beliefs and educational values. They creatively embraced and adjusted the requirements by interpreting and reshaping them to fit their teaching practices in line with their philosophy (Robinson, 2012). Comprehensively, in another small-scale qualitative study in the USA, teachers whose identities aligned with the school's values and cultures presented agency by taking the initiative and going above and beyond the perceived expectations of their role (Buchanan, 2015). However, teachers who disagreed with the school's practices, as they did not match their values, resisted, expressed concerns, rejected, or partly negotiated the school policies they disagreed with. Teachers did not respond uniformly but

demonstrated their desired teaching style consistent with the identity established from their previous experiences, values, and beliefs and its interplay with their working contexts that also shaped their identities and actions (Buchanan, 2015).

This relates to why key research literature on professionalism has related it to personal and professional elements and how these interact and interplay with external factors, in this case, the principals. Thus, according to this international evidence, Greek teachers' views on professionalism might be influenced by their principals in various ways.

3.6 Implications for this study

Considering what has been discussed in this chapter, previous research on teacher professionalism has suggested the need for nuanced, situated, and contextualised approaches. Unlike this, the Greek scholarly context, as reported in the introduction of this thesis, is limited to specific areas. This includes research on specific professional elements identified in this literature review, principals' role and influence, yet with a limited scope, and research that takes a snapshot of teachers' perspectives of professionalism.

Therefore, Greece lacks a study that considers the ecology of the influences on the nature of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers. While considering existing research in Greece, the current study aims to advance beyond previous work by interpreting teachers' perceptions, meanings, and experiences of professionalism, considering that their cultural heritage, national policy frameworks, school environment, and personal influences do matter.

This links to the key research question of this study, as presented in the chapter of Introduction — ''What is the nature and experience of professionalism expressed by teachers in Greece?'', followed by the four sub-questions:

- How do cultural factors of the Greek context influence how teachers perceive their professionalism?

- How do national policy developments influence teachers' perceptions of professionalism?
- How do school factors influence teachers' perceptions of their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities?
- How do personal factors influence teachers' perception of and practice of professionalism in Greece?

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that professionalism in teaching extends beyond a stable set of specific criteria to encompass a range of personal and professional elements. These elements can be perceived and experienced differently by different teachers as cultural, national, school, and personal factors matter. Opposed to rigid conceptual 'forms' of professionalism identified in the academic literature, the evidence from teachers in a range of European and OECD countries discussed in this chapter has shown that teacher professionalism needs more ecological interpretations.

The next chapter details the ecological theoretical framework underpinning this study, which informed methodological decisions. It details the qualitative research design adopted in this study to approach the empirical realities of Greek teachers, an approach followed by most studies presented in this literature review.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological design adopted to explore the nature and experience of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers. It first introduces the conceptual underpinnings that informed the methodology, ecological systems theory, guided by the research sub-questions. Based on this, the study adopted an interpretive paradigm, and a qualitative research design consistent with previous research in the field presented in the previous chapter. The sampling methods and the interview protocols used in the research are then detailed. This is followed by a timeline of the data collection process and an analytical presentation of the application of thematic analysis to the data. Ethical considerations and methodological limitations are also considered at the end of the chapter.

4.2 Conceptual underpinnings

The range of the research sub-questions constituting the parts of the nature of professionalism of Greek teachers -concerning the cultural, policy, school, and personal influences- led to ecological systems theory informing the research methodology. It is a theory from the developmental psychology field, expressed as ecological human systems theory, which acknowledges contextual variations in human development, approaching individuals within their natural environment (Darling, 2007). The reason for selecting this theory, commonly used in education research currently, is that it recognises the importance of internal and external influences, seeing them as inter-connected layers able to influence the person in various ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1981).

In the early versions of this theory, four layers constituted the ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994): The microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. In these early writings, the microsystem was conceived as a collection of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by individuals within their immediate environment. The person

could influence their immediate environment by interacting with family, friends, and people at school. Simultaneously, those within the immediate environment could also influence the person. In his early view, the mesosystem is the linkage and process between these microsystems in a given setting. In the mesosystem, interactions, e.g., among family members, friends, and people at school, could indirectly influence the individual, showcasing the dynamic interconnectedness among individuals who share an environment (Darling, 2007). Bronfenbrenner (1981) further argued that the person is not only influenced by those in their immediate and broader environment but also by factors that are not directly visible to them, e.g., guidelines, directions, and rules. He termed these indirect influences as the exosystem. Within the exosystem, he posited that all these layers were influenced by the broader cultural and societal values of the society the person inhabits, a concept he referred to as the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1981).

This early version of the theory received several critiques. The first was related to focusing on the influences of the environment but missing what an individual person can bring into this interaction, such as previous experiences, knowledge, beliefs, etc. (Darling, 2007). Moreover, another critique was related to the model's focus on how an individual interacts with each layer separately rather than as a whole of nested layers influencing and interacting with the individual at all times (Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Elliott & Davis, 2020).

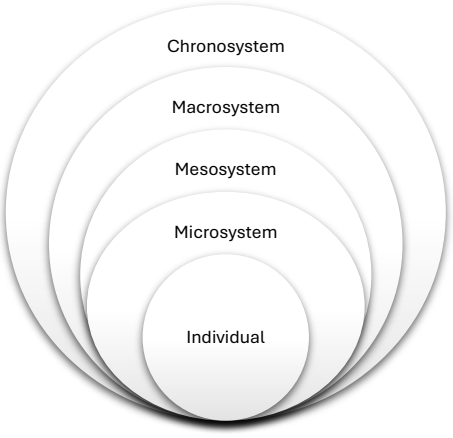
In the early 1990s, Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues addressed some limitations in their systems theory. They emphasised individuals' characteristics in any social situation (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Recognising that each person could interact and interplay with the layers in diverse ways, they acknowledged that distinctive characteristics of a person, such as temperament, personality, and belief systems, might influence how a person influences and is influenced by the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). They also placed the person in the centre of the system, shifting the focus from viewing a person interacting with the environment to understanding the person nested within the ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994;

Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Darling, 2007). This led to the development of the bio-ecological model, wherein the person is central to the ecological system, with intrinsic values and beliefs influencing how individuals perceive and interact with their surroundings. Additionally, they recognised that different environments might offer different influences and produce various responses from other individuals. Considering this, they recognised that an individual could find ecological niches, meaning that different individuals could interact with the environment in various ways, producing different outcomes from the same environment (Darling, 2007).

Furthermore, they revised the macrosystem, defining it as the structure and context of constituent layers shaped developmentally by the beliefs, resources, patterns, and lifestyles of social exchange and the life course embedded within all layers. The macrosystem is pervasive in this revised bio-ecological model, influencing all other layers (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Finally, they introduced the term 'chronosystem' as a crucial aspect of the system to denote a time-based dimension that influences all layers of the ecological system. The chronosystem encompasses short- and long-term temporal changes affecting the individual.

Therefore, this revised model views the ecological environment as a series of interconnected, nested layers, with none potentially affecting the individual in predetermined ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). It recognises that interactions occur both within and between these layers in complex ways, with the potential to both influence and be influenced by the individual.

Table 2 Ecological model



Applying this revised ecological model in this study suggests placing the individual (in this research, the teacher), rather than the environment, at the system's centre (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In line with the literature review, this recognises that individual teachers in Greece and their personal influences, such as distinct knowledge, biography, experiences, values, beliefs, and identities, could influence how they perceive and interact with the various layers and stakeholders of the ecological system in diverse ways (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Wermke et al., 2019; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020). Thus, this acknowledges that the ecological system teachers work in cannot have predetermined and specific outcomes for each teacher (Darling, 2007). This implies that different teachers may derive different outcomes from their interactions with the ecological system, even while operating within contexts defined by others and sharing the same layers of influence (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Considering this, the perceptions and experiences of professionalism might be different based on how they interact with their ecological environment.

The influence of the microsystem could incorporate their interactions with pupils, parents, colleagues, and the principal (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This is in line with previous international studies presented where different teachers with their different knowledge, experience, values, attitudes, philosophies, etc. interacted and were influenced by their working environment in various ways, producing diverse responses (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021; Day et al., 2023; Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

Their understandings of professionalism could be influenced by the dynamic culture in their school environment, the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). This aligns with the research literature (Harris & Jones, 2010; Day & Sammons, 2013; Ärlestig et al., 2016), implying that different school environments with distinct dynamic cultures cultivated by their principals may

impact teachers' perceptions differently. This means that even if working within the same school environment, teachers may perceive and interact with it in various ways, producing various outcomes on their views of professionalism.

Moreover, the accountability frameworks in which teachers in Greece work could also influence their perceptions and experiences of professionalism, referring to the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In this study, this influence could relate to how Greek national educational policy's mechanisms circumscribed their working conditions. This may range from central regulations referring to national curriculum and textbooks to general regulations in which principals were primarily trusted to mediate to teachers, as outlined in Chapter 2.

Additionally, the broader sociocultural influences shaping Greek society could also influence their experiences of professionalism, referring to the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). In this study, these could refer to the elements and factors shaping the Greek culture, as identified in Chapter 2.

Finally, teachers' views on professionalism could be shaped by the chronosystem, referring to short-term or long-term changes within and between the layers of the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In the current study, this may refer to changes as perceived by individual teachers that could refer either to changes over time within the Greek national context, changes within the school contexts teachers operate in, or changes within a teacher's professional journey, all of which could potentially influence Greek teachers' perceptions in diverse ways.

At the same time, this ecological emphasis on contextual influences and various factors that can shape Greek teachers' perceptions and experiences of professionalism can better be represented if an interpretive paradigm is adopted, as the current study did. This study aimed to approach and interpret teachers' realities rather than to describe them objectively (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

4.3 Interpretive Paradigm

The current study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, as this could better serve the need to understand the subjective meanings individual teachers assign to their perceptions and experiences of professionalism within the context of Greek primary schools (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2018).

This paradigm recognises that the perspectives and experiences of Greek teachers are context-specific and cannot be applied universally. It is because it acknowledges the situated character of teachers' views and experiences that this paradigm was selected. The aim of this study is to approach and interpret the realities of Greek teachers by exploring their perceptions, driven by the belief that their working lives and reality are socially constructed (Willis, 2007). Thus, the study intentionally avoids post-positivist paradigms, given their conceptualisation of a distant relationship between the researcher and the participant, rooted in objectively measuring reality using specific tools (Cohen et al., 2018). Such perspectives conflict with the qualitative intentions of the current study, which recognises that the reality of professionalism experienced by Greek teachers and their views cultivated within this reality cannot be quantified or generalised. Instead, the study considers that teachers' understandings are tied to the specific contexts in which they work and can only be approached and interpreted through their words by me as the researcher of this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, by adopting an interpretive paradigm, I make specific ontological, epistemological, and positionality choices that need to be identified.

4.3.1 Ontology

Choosing the interpretive paradigm is driven by its ability to capture the nature of the 'reality' primary teachers in Greece experience as professionals, shaped and constructed by their perceptions and understandings of this reality (Wellington, 2000). This means that this study aims to approach and interpret the realities of primary teachers in Greece by acknowledging that this reality is subjective and tied to each teacher's views and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore,

the study understands that each teacher may have cultivated various perceptions of this reality, making it inherently unique. This suggests that teachers are placed as core social actors of this reality, able to influence what this reality represents and what it means, and they are also able to influence it in various ways (Niaz, 2009).

Applying the ecological view, teachers' views of their reality might be influenced by their personal experiences, previous knowledge, values, beliefs, and biographies in different schools and classrooms (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These realities are further influenced by their relationships with stakeholders such as pupils, parents, colleagues, and principals. Their constructions of reality might also be influenced by the working conditions in which they work, regulated by Greek central policy. What they understand as reality may also be constructed and shaped by the broader social and cultural values shaping the Greek context (Van Manen, 2016).

Therefore, to understand the professional realities of teachers, it is important to explore how they see their realities and how others, part of their realities, might also influence their views (Bryman, 2008). The emphasis here lies in constructing teachers' professional realities by amalgamating the diverse individual perspectives of those involved as they interact with others within the same environment. As such, the aim is to contribute new knowledge to the cultural, conditional, and contextual understandings of teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.3.2 Epistemology

What the researcher can know about teachers' reality and how the researcher can know about teachers' realities pertains to epistemology; in simple terms, epistemology is about the knowledge this study aims to produce (Willis, 2007). Considering the interpretivist paradigm adopted in the current study, where the social reality of primary teachers in Greece is constructed based on individual teachers' interpretations of that reality, the knowledge the current study aims to produce is subjective (Niaz, 2009). Hence, the study acknowledges the

subjective nature of the knowledge produced, tied to the unique experiences shared by participants. In that way, the knowledge will be empirical and value-added from participants, meaning that participants' perceptions, values, and beliefs will be part of the knowledge produced (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Thus, this thesis acknowledges that it cannot provide general interpretations of the nature of professionalism of all primary teachers in Greece, which was not its original intention. This study's evidence will only apply to the views and experiences of professionalism of the primary teachers who participated in this study, being subjective and unique (Niaz, 2009). This also implies that the insights the current study aims to offer are limited, not only tied to the subjective knowledge of teachers but also to their limited scope of knowledge, which, whilst makes the study's knowledge original, it also highlights its limits (Willis, 2007; Bryman, 2008).

4.3.3 Reflection on the researcher's view of reality and knowledge

Adopting an interpretivist viewpoint of Greek teachers' realities means that I am responsible for interpreting teachers' professional realities (Check & Schutt, 2011). This also means that my subjectivity becomes part of the design, indicating that the study needs to be clear in how I interpret teachers' reality (Bryman, 2008).

To minimise both conscious and unconscious bias, I engaged in self-reflection, thoroughly exploring previous research, theories, and methodologies before determining those most suitable for this study, as discussed in the previous and current chapters. Consequently, my selection of a qualitative empirical study with an interpretative approach is grounded in how I perceived Greek teachers' realities—as phenomena that can only be approached and interpreted, rather than objectified or quantified (Cohen et al., 2018).

Thus, I distanced myself from the notion of value-free knowledge, recognising that my perspectives, values, and prior readings inevitably influence my interpretations of teachers' data (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). In this way, my

interpretation of Greek teachers' understandings of professionalism is shaped by the theoretical framework of this study—ecological systems theory—which posits an interconnection among stakeholders who co-construct social realities, influencing and being influenced by one another (Bronfenbrenner, 2009). This theoretical underpinning is reflected in the study's research questions, which frame teacher professionalism as a concept shaped by cultural, policy, school, and personal influences.

Moreover, my conceptualisation of teacher professionalism is closely linked to how the literature, as reviewed in the previous chapter, portrays it as a situated and context-dependent phenomenon. Hence, while the literature review acknowledged broad elements of professionalism, this study builds upon three prior empirical studies on teacher professionalism in Greece (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou, 2013) (See section 1.2.3), continuing their exploration of how professionalism manifests in the Greek context.

At the same time, this study remains open to a wide range of perspectives from participants regarding their perceptions and experiences of professionalism. It does not confine itself solely to the findings of previous Greek studies but embraces diverse viewpoints, recognising that participants' understandings may align with or diverge from those studies.

In addition, I acknowledge that the professionalism experienced by teachers in Greece may be similar or different to an extent to that experienced by teachers in other OECD countries explored in the previous chapter. In that way, I distance myself from making pre-assumptions, ensuring openness to interpretations, acknowledging the influence of the Greek national educational context on teachers' lived experiences of professionalism.

4.4 Research design

Considering the interpretive nature of this study, a qualitative research design was regarded as an appropriate research approach to yield rich evidence crucial to fully comprehending what influences Greek teachers' views on

professionalism and what Greek teachers understand by ‘professionalism’ (Willis, 2007; Nind & Todd, 2011). This is in line with most previous empirical research presented in the literature review (See Chapter 3), with most employing a qualitative approach to explore the nature of professionalism of teachers in other countries. Much of this previous research employed a qualitative comparative approach, yet this is outside the current project's aims, so it was not considered appropriate.

The interconnection between the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative study design is also linked to their reflective nature. Employing a qualitative research design means that there is reflection and flexibility at every stage of this research (Atkinson et al., 1993). This was a crucial element in this study since forming exploratory research questions, collecting and analysing initial data, and elaborating or modifying research questions were essential. Thus, the final research questions are inevitably linked to the data collected and analysed, which was only feasible in a flexible qualitative research design (Maxwell, 2008).

In that way, the study first used exploratory questions regarding the working lives and conditions of primary teachers in Greece, with a particular focus on autonomy. The previous relevant literature was employed to structure that question, a common practice in qualitative design (Check & Schutt, 2011). However, during this exploratory phase, the design remained flexible regarding changes, reconsiderations, and modifications based on Greek teachers’ lived experiences and perceptions. After this first exploration phase, it became clear that it was necessary to rename the study more specifically to ‘teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools’. It also became clear the need to separate the empirical research into two stages to understand Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism and how various factors could influence them. This was related to the difficulty that emerged in this pilot phase to explore a range of themes with each participant (Maxwell, 2008).

The first stage of this study focused on external influences on Greek teachers' views of professionalism, with particular emphasis on school-related factors that shape teachers' perspectives and experiences of professionalism.

More specifically, it focused mainly on how different stakeholders involved in teachers' lives, such as pupils, parents, colleagues, the principal, etc., could influence their experiences. The influence of national policy at this stage was explored through the regulations principals chose to mediate to teachers, as it was indicated in the literature review (Salokangas et al., 2020; Day et al., 2023; Robinson, 2012), and as outlined in Chapter 2. This stage, to a small extent, also explored if the education consultant had any role to play in teachers' experiences, as outlined in their roles and responsibilities (Law 1566/1985/Article 56; Law 1304/1982; Greek Government Gazette 353.1/324/105657/Δ1/8-10-2002; Law 3848/2010).

The second stage of the study primarily focused on personal influences on teachers' perceptions of professionalism, while also integrating the insights gained in the first stage regarding external influences.

Especially, it uncovered how personal factors, such as a teacher's biography, experiences, and professional identity, influenced their perception of their roles and elements of their professionalism, aligning with the literature review for the importance of teachers' identities (Sachs, 2001; Gee, 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Moreover, it examined whether national policy could exert a more direct influence on individual teachers beyond the mediated effect of principals in the first stage, which emerged from the much-detailed national textbooks Greek teachers were found to work with a 75% need to cover, as outlined in Chapter 2. This stage also provided an opportunity to explore more explicitly the elements of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers, identifying commonalities that could be linked to Greek cultural values, as reported in Chapter 2.

Although this choice risked depicting the ecological theoretical framework underpinning this research (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), it still produced quality

evidence to answer the core research question and the range of sub-questions. Thus, in the end, this measure can be considered as a measure taken to strengthen the study's validity, being responsive to answering the broad sub-questions and to the unique experiences and perspectives of professionalism of the primary teachers in Greece without losing significant evidence (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005; Atkinson et al., 1993).

4.5 Sampling

Two sampling strategies were utilised in line with the two-stage approach of this qualitative study. Purposive sampling was employed to explore the aims of the first stage of this qualitative study, with a focus on school contextual factors, as outlined previously (Cohen et al., 2018). An additional sampling strategy, progressive focusing, was adopted to enable concentrating more on specific teachers (Stake, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2016). This approach facilitated a more comprehensive exploration of how a teacher's personal and external influences, as reported previously, influenced them.

Table 3 Sampling

Purposive sampling		
N=30 participants		
Schools	Primary School A - (7 participants)	Six primary teachers, of whom one also serves as the assistant head; + The principal
	Primary School B - (7 participants)	Seven primary teachers, of whom one also serves as the assistant head
	Primary School C - (7 participants)	Seven primary teachers
	Primary School D – (9 participants)	Eight primary teachers, of whom one also serves as the assistant head; + The principal
Stage of a qualitative study	The first stage of this qualitative study	
Progressive focusing		
N= 8/30 participants		
Schools	Primary School A - 2 primary teachers (n=2/7)	
	Primary School B - 2 primary teachers (n=2/7)	
	Primary School C - 2 primary teachers (n=2/7)	

	Primary School D - 2 primary teachers (n=2/9)
Stage of qualitative study	The second stage of qualitative study

4.5.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling involved selecting participants most likely to provide rich and diverse data relevant to exploring the nature of professionalism expressed by teachers working in primary schools in Greece (Check & Schutt, 2011). Two primary criteria were employed to select participants to meet the aims of the first stage of this qualitative study (Cresswell, 2007):

- Primary school teachers in Greece who work in the same school environment;
- Teachers who work in school environments that share similar characteristics in terms of pupils' type, size, and socioeconomic background.

In addition, optional criteria were employed to meet the aims of the first stage of this empirical study, which were:

- Principals or assistant heads serving as heads in these school environments;

The study first submitted the necessary documents and received ethical approval from the University of Nottingham's Ethics Committee before approaching potential participants. I filled in the ethics document provided by the University of Nottingham (UoN), and the information sheet and consent form were attached. Importantly, the study received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee without essential revisions to its ethical application. In addition, the study applied and received approval from Greek national policy. The organisational body responsible for approving and conducting empirical studies within the context of Greek primary schools is the Institute of Education Policy (IEP). I completed the necessary documents needed and submitted them to IEP.

The outcome was to get ethical approval from IEP, meaning data collection could start.

The total number of participants who filled the purposive selection criteria and would like to participate in the study was thirty, working in four primary schools in Greece (See Table 3). Twenty-eight were primary teachers, of whom three were also assistant heads in these schools, while two were principals in those schools.

Considering the qualitative nature of this empirical study, thirty participants serve as an appropriate number to capture how stakeholders shaped the experiences and perceptions of professionalism within the context of Greek primary schools (Suri, 2011). The criterion of selecting primary teachers who work in the same school environment was related to uncovering whether similar influences could produce similar outcomes on teachers' perceptions of professionalism, in line with previous studies (Wermke et al., 2019; Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Day, 2020). For the same reason, the criteria for employing participants who work in similar schools in terms of type, size, and socioeconomic background of pupils was adopted (Atkins & Wallace, 2015). These four primary schools in Greece are public all-day schools with an extended school programme running. They are considered big schools within the Greek context, meaning pupils range between 150 to 250 pupils. The living standards of pupils are considered to be high according to the socio-economic standards of the areas in which these schools in Greece are part. Two schools are located in semi-urban areas in Northern Greece, one in an urban area in Northern Greece and the other in a remote area of a Greek island in Greece. The selection of the geographical regions was random since the priority was to find participants who filled out the essential criteria.

Furthermore, the optional criteria for employing participants who are part of school policy were based on the literature review, which indicated that school policy might significantly influence teachers' views on professionalism (Stoll et al., 2006; Day et al., 2007; Ärlestig et al., 2016). Thus, having at least five

participants in their school's policy was considered a way to collect more precise data (Cresswell & Poth, 2016).

As a researcher, professional contacts were employed to reach out to participants in Greece who fulfil the purposive selection criteria and would like to participate in the project. This means the purposive selection strategy entails convenience sampling characteristics commonly used in qualitative studies (Cohen et al., 2018). The principals were sent an invitation email with the attached information sheet and consent form for participation in the study (Creswell et al., 2007). In addition to this, the principals also helped me by distributing the necessary documentation to potential participants in their schools. Two principals also gave access to their school environment, with the other two invoking the COVID-19 context as a prohibition to school access. In the two cases where principals agreed to a school visit by me, it was a planned visit arranged at the time defined by the principal. This measure ensured that I would not disrupt the school's operation (Cohen et al., 2018). My visit to the schools happened only at times when the principals agreed upon and approved it (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.5.2 Progressive focusing

To meet the aims of the second stage of this qualitative research study, a second sampling method was used, namely progressive focusing (Stake, 2010; Atkinson et al., 1993; Cohen et al., 2018). According to Stake (1981, p. 1), "Progressive focusing requires that the researcher be well acquainted with the complexities of the problem before going to the field, but not too committed to a study plan. It is accomplished in multiple stages: first observation of the site, then further inquiry, beginning to focus on the relevant issues, and then seeking to explain."

The decision was to employ two teachers from each of the four primary schools in Greece that participated in this study. This decision was assumed to explore and compare whether similar external influences could similarly influence teachers' understanding of their professionalism. The reason for selecting only two teachers within each school was to ensure the accuracy of data collection

and analysis by a single researcher, considering the additional data of thirty participants coming from the first stage of this empirical study (Stake, 2010).

Besides, the decision was to compare the data from the eight participants and not only compare the two selected teachers from each of the four primary schools (Cohen et al., 2018). This was a decision related to understanding the elements shaping teachers' personal perceptions of professionalism and comparing teachers to whether they shared a common emphasis on specific elements.

Particularly concerning the criteria for selecting progressive-focused teachers, these were pre-defined. The criteria concerned the following:

- their willingness to participate in the second stage;
- the information they provided in the first stage and the extent these seemed that they could offer rich data for the second stage;
- to have at least one teacher from each career phase (Early, Mid, Later).

When the criteria were applied to potential participants for this second stage, two teachers from each school were found, leading to eight teachers for progressive focusing (See Table 4). Thus, it can be argued that measures were taken to select progressive-focused teachers (Cohen et al., 2018; Stake, 2010).

Moreover, employing a two-stage qualitative study approach and using two sampling techniques meant that several interview protocols needed to be produced and used in this study. This referred to the need for the data collected to be able to answer the broad range of sub-questions. The ways these protocols were constructed and applied, along with limitations and issues of transcription and translation, are detailed in the next section.

4.6 Methods: Interviews

It is common in interpretative paradigms and qualitative research designs, research to employ interviews as data collection methods (Willis, 2007). Only through this method could the current study gather information to answer research questions based on participants' perceptions, beliefs, values, and

experiences (Check & Schutt, 2011). Through interviews, this study collected data from each participant on their perceptions and then depicted their perceptions of their realities, producing knowledge situated in their constructions (Cohen et al., 2018). The study utilised two interview formats: online interviews and face-to-face interviews (Cresswell & Poth, 2016).

4.6.1 Online interviews

Since COVID-19 was the context in which the study took place, and primary teachers in Greece were working from home using distance learning for an extended period, online interviews were a necessary form of data collection. Online interviews mean participants must have adequate technological equipment to conduct an online interview (Cohen et al., 2018). The online interviews were conducted on MS Teams, following the ethical recommendations of the UoN. Teachers consented to be recorded so that the interviews could be transcribed. The interviews were recorded by an external device, a phone, and not from the MS Teams app since the Greek language is not supported for transcription on this app. The online interviews were conducted at the preferred date and time of participants, so it was reassuring that the research was not interrupted by their professional or personal lives. All online interviews were uploaded to OneDrive, provided by the UoN, right after completing the online interviews (Cresswell & Poth, 2016).

There are inherent risks associated with using online interviews as a data collection tool, such as poor internet quality, which could cause missing important data, and issues associated with noise or interruptions from the interviewee's external environment (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). Notably, there were no significant technical issues during the online interviews conducted, and any minor issues were promptly resolved without any data loss.

Moreover, the lack of in-person interaction during online interviews has been related to the missing nonverbal aspects. It is more difficult for the researcher to understand body language to understand interviewees' emotions better (Kendall, 2014). Nevertheless, I considered this limitation and endeavoured to

capture the complete stance of each participant during the interviews. Further, this study acknowledges that online interviews have restricted control over the online research environment (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). This limitation arises from the spatial separation of the interviewer and interviewee during online interviews. This risk is associated with potential interruptions or distractions that are outside the researcher's control. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that there were no such issues during the online interviews with participants.

4.6.2 Face-to-face interviews

Face-to-face interviews were also used for data collection. The recordings were made using a personal device and a mobile device, and all interview data were uploaded to the safe OneDrive environment provided by the UoN right after the interviews were completed (Cohen et al., 2018).

The face-to-face interviews allowed this study to establish personal contact with participants. They were an opportunity for me to cultivate a feeling of trust with participants so that they could share their views, perceptions, and experiences. They were also an additional opportunity for me to observe body language and nonverbal aspects, which were not possible in online interviews (Roulston & Choi, 2018).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the date and time preferred by participants, either in the school environment (if principals approved) or outside of schools in an environment chosen by me (if approval was denied due to COVID-19). If the interviews were planned to be conducted outside of school, I selected the environment to ensure that it was a safe space with no interruptions or noise (Cresswell & Poth, 2016).

Interviewing in person shares some limitations, such as my potential bias and the cost challenges associated with arranging in-person meetings. Regarding the first challenge, this chapter clearly explains my standpoint as a researcher and all the measures taken to minimise bias. Concerning the second, it is important to acknowledge that the UoN covered many of the expenses associated with this

research project in relation to travelling to different geographical regions within Greece to interview participants (Potter & Hepburn, 2012).

4.6.3 Semi-structured interviews

The type of interview is semi-structured interview. This selection relates to having a specific set of interview themes and questions but remaining open to new phenomena that may arise during the interview (Check & Schutt, 2011). Thus, there were open-ended questions for each item of the interviews' themes as depicted in the tables (See Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, See Appendices 1,2,3). The interview protocols were adjusted to every teacher and their perceptions, meaning that the sequence of the interview questions was different at times, that elaboration questions were added in case they seemed interesting to be explored, and that the interviews were open to receiving competing views of participants (Adams, 2015).

Additionally, the interviews were conducted in Greek, the participants' language, so that they could express their life realities in their own words. The interviews were then translated into English, keeping the uniqueness of the words they used to describe their worlds (Cohen et al., 2018).

Firstly, a pilot interview protocol was constructed based on Chapters 2 and 3 and applied during the exploratory phase of this project. As reported previously, the decision was to separate the research into two stages, which was a decision that emerged after undertaking a pilot interview with four participants in Greece. Thus, adjustments were made to have different interview protocols for the different stages of this study (Cohen et al., 2018), leading to the final interview protocols (See Table 4, Table 5, Table 6). The modifications of the research tool can be considered a way to enhance its validity, meaning that measures were taken so that the data collected could answer the research questions (Maxwell, 2017).

The first interview protocol was constructed for the first stage of this qualitative study, which mainly focused on how stakeholders surrounded teachers' experiences and influenced their perceptions of professionalism, with particular

attention paid to school-contextual factors (See Table 4). The themes explored in this interview protocol were: Theme 1 - How different stakeholders could influence their professional practice and perceptions (pupils, parents, colleagues, the principal, the education consultant); Theme 2 - Theme 2 - School contextual factors (topics/areas/regulations of discussion in meetings, quality of management, management of emergency issues, ways of making decisions, ways of working with colleagues, monitoring pupil's progress). The length of the first interview protocol was around twenty minutes.

Table 4 First interview protocol

First interview protocol (for the first stage of this qualitative study)
Theme 1 - How different stakeholders could influence their professional practice and perceptions (pupils, parents, colleagues, the principal)
Theme 2 - School contextual factors (topics/areas/regulations of discussion in meetings, quality of management, management of emergency issues, ways of making decisions, ways of working with colleagues, monitoring pupil's progress, role of education consultant)

As described previously, the second stage of this empirical study focused more on uncovering how personal and external influences might influence teachers' views on professionalism. This was a decision made considering that the data from the first stage would be combined with this evidence to reach a better understanding of teachers' nature of professionalism. In addition, after the pilot phase, it became clear that for the second stage of this study, it was necessary to have two interview protocols to collect data from teachers, which was related to the broad range of the research questions. This was also consistent with the progressive focusing technique adopted at the second stage of this qualitative study, which suggests the need to collect more data for those selected participants to portray their portraits better (Stake, 2010). This led to the second interview protocol for the second stage of this study, exploring themes related to

personal influences (See Table 5): Theme 1 - Biography (professional experiences since starting of teaching career, key moments in teaching career, qualifications); Theme 2 - Teacher's identity (educational values, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, agency); Theme 3 - Perceptions of professionalism (teachers' professional knowledge, responsibility, etc.). It additionally led to a follow-up interview protocol which focused primarily on national policy's influence on teachers' views, including the following themes (See Table 6): Theme 1 - Perceptions of national policy's regulations (national curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, pupil evaluation criteria); Theme 2 - Use of regulations in their classrooms (examples of classroom practice using the national curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, pupil evaluation criteria, general examples, etc.). The second interview protocol lasted around thirty minutes, and the follow-up interview was approximately twenty minutes long (Willis, 2007). Copies of the protocols can be found in Appendices 1,2,3.

Table 5 Second interview protocol

Second interview protocol (for the second stage of this qualitative study)
Theme 1 - Biography (professional experiences since starting of teaching career, key moments in teaching career, qualifications)
Theme 2 - Teacher's identity (educational values, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, agency)
Theme 3 - Perceptions of professionalism (teachers' professional knowledge, responsibility, autonomy, etc.)

Table 6 Follow-up interview protocol

Follow-up interview protocol (for the second stage of this qualitative study)
Theme 1: Perceptions of national policy's regulations (national curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, pupil evaluation criteria)
Theme 2: Use of regulations in their classrooms (examples of classroom practice using the national curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, pupil evaluation criteria, general examples, etc.)

4.6.4 Limitations of interview protocols

In this section, it is essential to acknowledge some limitations related to the interview protocols I constructed. Not all interview protocols reflect the ecological model since some layers seem more prevalent than others (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For example, none of the interview protocols evidently show the macro- and chrono- layers. In addition, the first interview protocol focuses more on the interplay of a teacher with the school layer, while the second and follow-up interview protocols focus more on personal influences and the interplay with the national policy layer.

It is essential to note that the current study acknowledges that this might be a limitation to the knowledge it can provide about the nature of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers in this study (Maxwell, 2017). If the interview protocols had not been used as described, several changes would have been made to reflect the ecological framework better. However, since this is not possible, as the current study used the protocols provided, the only thing that can be done is to acknowledge this limitation (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.6.5 Transcription and translation

After completing the interviews with teachers, online and face-to-face, the audio files were uploaded to the safe environment of OneDrive provided by the UoN (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). I manually transcribed and translated the interviews since a free and adequate tool for transcription and translation from Greek is non-existent. Considering this, the process of transcription and translation took almost three months. Regarding the process, Word documents provided by the UoN's Office package were used for transcription and translation. The Word documents were uploaded to OneDrive to ensure their safety, with myself being the only person with access to them. In terms of accuracy of the transcription, after finishing the procedure of transcribing the interviews, teachers received a copy of their interview to confirm their statements While in terms of accuracy of the translation, a critical friend from Greece checked examples of the translation to verify their accuracy (Check & Schutt, 2011).

4.7 Data collection

Table 7 Timetable of data collection

Sep 2020	Ethics form sent to Ethics Committee of UoN, preparation of research tool
Oct 2020	Approval from the Ethics Committee of UoN, Documents sent to IEP
Nov - Dec 2020	Pilot interview protocol and adjustments to the research tool Approval from IEP
Jan 2021	Invitation email to principals of Primary Schools B and C
Feb 2021	Interviews with purposively sampled participants of Primary Schools B and C Selection of progressive-focused teachers from Primary Schools B and C
March 2021	Interviews with the selected progressive-focused teachers of Primary Schools B and C (first and follow-up interviews) Invitation email to principals at Primary Schools A and D
April 2021	Interviews with purposively sampled participants at Primary Schools A and D Selection of progressive-focused teachers from Primary Schools A and D
May – June 2021	Interviews with progressive-focused participants of Primary Schools A and D (first and follow-up interviews)

To provide the larger context, this project's data collection timeline started in September 2020 and lasted until June 2021. This was related to the delay in receiving ethical approval from the responsible body in Greece, disruptions in primary schools in Greece during the pandemic, and additional geographical restrictions imposed by the Greek government.

To start with, the study submitted all the necessary documents to the Ethics Committee of the School of Education of the UoN in September 2020. This same month, I prepared the first pilot interview protocol. The study received approval from the ethics committee in October 2020 (See Appendix 8). In that month, I prepared and submitted the required documents for ethical approval to the IEP. I received this approval in December 2020. To use this time, I piloted and made adjustments to the interview protocol, separating the study into two stages, as reported earlier.

After receiving the confirmation email from IEP, in January 2021, I sent invitation emails to school principals at Primary Schools B and C so that they could help

give access to their schools and distribute information about the study to teachers willing to participate (See Appendix 6). At that time, schools in Greece were working remotely, and there were also restrictions from the Greek government to visit different geographical areas. Thus, I could not visit the schools in person. The principals in those schools distributed the information sheets to teachers, and there were willing teachers to participate in this research, even though these principals did not agree to participate in the project. The data collection with the participants of those schools lasted from February to March 2021. This was related to the number of participants and the need to select participants for progressive focusing. Moreover, this was related to the need to conduct two interviews with the progressive-focused teachers.

In March 2021, I also sent an invitation email to the principals of Primary Schools A and D. In this case, the principals approved my school visit when the schools in Greece reopened in April 2021, a time when restrictions imposed by the Greek government were also lifted. Considering this, I visited these two schools during April and June 2021. The range of months of data collection, in this case, was related to the actual need to travel and visit these areas. The number of participants also meant that the researcher needed to spend some days in different geographical areas in Greece to complete the in-person interviews with participants, according to the convenient date and time for both schools and teachers. It was also related to the need to select teachers for progressive focus from these schools and the need to conduct two interviews with them.

Considering all this, the data collection process of the current study within Greek primary schools took around six months, from February to June 2021 (See Table 8). Information for participants and schools can be found in Appendix 7.

4.8 Ethical considerations

This empirical study followed specific ethical guidelines to ensure the ethical treatment of participants, and the data collected.

4.8.1 Related to participants

4.8.1a Formal ethical procedures

As already reported, participants were approached either indirectly through their gatekeeper, the principal, or through participants who introduced me to other participants in their schools. The study approached participants within their national and cultural context, which was part of its richness (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Teachers were approached in their native language, which is also my mother tongue. This means that I had the advantage of approaching the intended participants most conveniently while sharing similar cultural and professional characteristics as a primary teacher in Greece.

All participants received the Information sheet and Consent form, signed by the participants and returned to me (Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). Both these forms were approved by the UoN's Ethics Committee and stored along with the rest of the current project's data. The templates of these forms can be found in Appendices 4 and 5. With the Information sheet, participants were informed about the purpose and the focus of the study, along with the methods, the intended uses of participants' data, the risks, and the benefits of their participation (Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). This consent form was informative for participants as it detailed how their data would be processed, consistent with GDPR principles (British Educational Research Association, 2018).

Participants were also guaranteed that their anonymity would be respected and their information would be protected (Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). Primarily, even after obtaining the Consent form from the intended participants, or even after I interviewed participants, they had been informed that they had the right to withdraw at any point of the research without needing to clarify the reasons for that action (British Educational Research Association, 2018). The Information sheet and Consent form had my contact details to secure that right for teachers. It is important to note that no participants withdrew from the current study (British Sociological Association, 2017).

Further, to minimise concerns over overburdening participants' working lives, participants were informed by the Information sheet and me that they needed to dedicate only the necessary time for the interviews to participate in the study (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Additionally, as already reported previously, I adjusted the schedule of every participant, whether undertaking an online or a face-to-face interview, to ensure that their professional lives were not affected (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Especially in the case of in-school visits, I followed the necessary guidelines suggested by the school principals, recognising that my presence in the school may indirectly affect other people in their working environment, such as teachers who were not part of the study and pupils. Notably, I did not receive any complaints and was reassured by the principals of the schools that the school visits did not interrupt their regular school running (British Sociological Association, 2017).

4.8.1b Relational ethics

Apart from the formal ethical procedures that needed to be followed, as the researcher of this qualitative empirical study—aimed at providing rich data on Greek teachers' perspectives and lived experiences of professionalism—I encountered several ongoing dilemmas that warrant discussion in a separate section.

These dilemmas were primarily related to my stance as a researcher when participants shared sensitive information about their school environments, including details about their colleagues and principals. Since I conducted in-person visits and online interviews with participants about their school environments, I asked numerous questions about their work, their relationships with colleagues, and their perceptions of school leadership. Throughout these interactions, maintaining neutrality as a researcher was essential. Even when I received similar responses from multiple teachers within the same school, I had to ensure that no information from previous interviews was disclosed or referenced. This challenge was particularly pronounced when participants

shared insights about their principals or colleagues, as it required me to carefully navigate ethical considerations surrounding confidentiality and impartiality.

Another ongoing dilemma concerned the selection of data that would be most relevant to the study's aims—interpreting Greek teachers' experiences of professionalism—while ensuring that certain personal details remained excluded to avoid unintended implications regarding individual shortcomings for their working environments. It involved selecting the most appropriate data to accurately represent Greek teachers' experiences of professionalism while avoiding an unfair portrayal of their colleagues and, in particular, their principals. This challenge became even more complex in cases where I directly observed interactions within schools during my visits or received recurring positive or negative perspectives from multiple participants. Striking a balance between faithfully representing the data and maintaining ethical integrity was a continuous concern throughout the research process.

4.8.1c Sharing findings

In this section, it is important to acknowledge and discuss how the findings were shared with participants, outlining the reasons for these decisions and their implications.

Since the study aimed to interpret Greek teachers' lived experiences of professionalism, each participant received a summary of the key findings. This allowed them to reflect on the interpretations and provide additional insights if they wished. Sharing these findings with participants was an ethical decision aligned with common qualitative research practices, ensuring that teachers were accurately represented and enhancing the credibility of the study (Bryman, 2016).

However, school principals were not provided with reports on the findings. This decision was made after careful consideration, as the study focused on how teachers experience their professional realities, rather than evaluating school leadership or management. Providing findings to principals could have unintentionally suggested critiques of their performance, which was not the

study's purpose. Instead, the research sought to explore teachers' perceptions of their professional lives and the extent to which their principals influenced these experiences, without positioning the principals' actions as the central subject of analysis (Goldblatt et. al., 2011). Moreover, teachers shared some personal and professional experiences that could be considered sensitive and thus sharing findings with them could have risked this information. This means that without proper contextualisation, findings could be misinterpreted or even misused by school leaders in ways that might not align with the research's ethical stance.

4.8.2 Related to data collected

According to the British Educational Research Association (BERA), researchers should comply with the legal requirements regarding the storage and use of personal data as specified in the UK by the Data Protection Act (1998) and the subsequent similar act from May 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (British Educational Research Association, 2018).

To ensure the anonymity of the schools, there are no indications of the specific areas in which schools are located in Greece. The only thing provided is the general geographical characteristics of the regions, like semi-urban/urban/remote, the size, type, and socioeconomic background of pupils, which fit the sampling needs (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). Anonymisation techniques were used to store and present the schools using the terms 'Primary School A', 'Primary School B', etc. (British Sociological Association, 2017).

Additionally, I respected participants' privacy and rights to confidentiality and anonymity at all stages (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Participant's personal information, such as name, age, etc., is treated with confidentiality, using only the personal information related to the current project's aims, such as years of teaching experience and years of being in their school (University of Nottingham, 2019). Further, I fictionalised participants' names while storing and presenting their data using names different from their real ones (British Sociological Association, 2017).

Regarding storing the data, I avoided storage methods such as computer files on laptops or hard drives and portable devices such as USB sticks and databases (Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). Accordingly, I avoided sending data relevant to participants via email and other vulnerable methods that could be hacked (British Educational Research Association, 2018). Considering the recommendations of the National Foundation for Educational Research, I used secure networks provided by the UoN to store and access the data collected. All data were stored in OneDrive, which the UoN provided to avoid data loss, unauthorised access, and modification of documents. Further, storing the data in OneDrive complies with legal, ethical, and intellectual property protection obligations (University of Nottingham, 2019). Additionally, data were only accessed through a laptop device provided by the UoN, which had established encryption requirements and was updated against security vulnerabilities, sharing up-to-date anti-virus protection.

Alongside that, hardcopy materials used for the analysis were always kept in a safe place. The UoN secure disposal service will destroy these hard copies by providing a deletion statement (University of Nottingham, 2018). Accordingly, the data storage media, such as the audiotapes of the interviews with participants, will be deleted by the retention plan (7 years) and deletion statement. In addition, all data will be permanently electronically wiped from the OneDrive provided by the UoN, a service provided by the IT Helpdesk service of the UoN (University of Nottingham, 2018).

Finally, this PhD thesis will be disposed for archive, allowing future researchers to identify, understand, and validate data (University of Nottingham, 2019). In that way, the current PhD thesis will be allocated with a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and a Digital Object Identifier (DOI). Following the University's Records Retention Schedule, current research data will be kept for at least seven years after closure (University of Nottingham, 2019). The PhD thesis will be available on the online platform of UoN NUsearch (University of Nottingham, 2019).

4.9 Data analysis

The current research acknowledges that the interpretive paradigm adopted to explore Greek primary teachers' perceptions of professionalism qualitatively shares many limitations regarding the knowledge it can produce, which will be situated, specific, and value-added (Niaz, 2009). To strengthen the study's trustworthiness, meaning the rigour and credibility of the study, this thesis provides a comprehensive and analytical approach to every stage adopted to analyse the data gathered (Stahl & King, 2020).

Data analysis was a demanding process in this research project. This was related to the data from interviews with thirty purposive sampled participants in the first stage of this qualitative study and the additional data from the two interviews with the eight progressive-focused teachers in the second stage.

The data's analytic purpose, meaning the expected outcome, is an exploratory ‘content-driven’ approach to qualitative analysis (Guest et al., 2012). This means that the study aims to describe and interpret the professional perceptions of the primary school teachers who participated in the current study. Thus, it cannot offer evidence supporting a general understanding of primary teachers in Greece's understanding of professionalism.

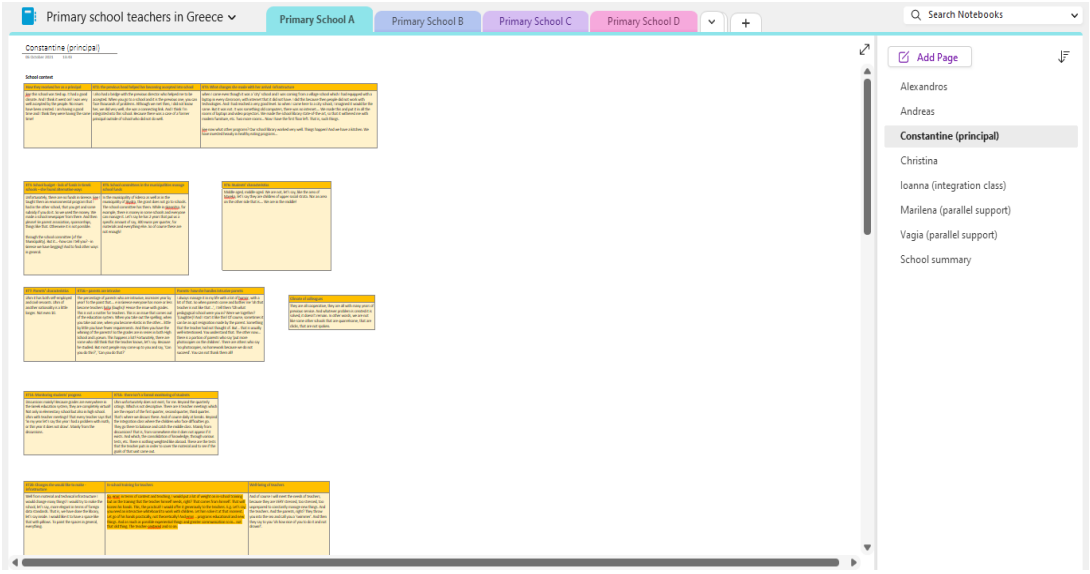
In terms of the method of analysis, the study used thematic analysis because this method could capture the variations in participants' perceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Considering this, I identified and described the key themes that emerged in the interviews with participants and then developed codes to represent them and apply or link them to the rest of the data. In that way, inductive content analysis was used, meaning the themes were derived from the interview data with participants and not from pre-constructed categories derived from the literature review (Guest et al., 2012). Moreover, a semantic approach was used to identify the themes emerging from the interview data. This means that the analysis moved beyond description to interpretation of the data, finding patterns and relating the evidence from participants to previous empirical research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Braun and Clarke (2021) steps for thematic analysis were used in this study. 1. Familiarising with the interview data. In this step, transcription and then translation from the Greek language to the English language were completed. Reading and re-reading the interview data and noting down initial ideas started. 2. Generating initial codes. Here, quotes of participants started to be coded systematically across the entire interview data set, comparing interview data relevant to each code. 3. Searching for key theme categories. At this point, the initial codes started collating into the development of potential key theme categories, combining all data relevant to each theme. 4. Reviewing themes. This step was crucial since it took some time to uncover which themes work concerning the coded extracts of each participant, as well as across the entire interview data set. 5. Defining and naming key themes. After generating a thematic map of analysis, it was important to name and refine, if necessary, the specifics of each key theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each key theme. 6. Producing the findings chapters. In this final step, the aim was to select the quotes that best represented the key themes identified in order to be able to write the two chapters of findings.

Considering that thematic analysis has been described, the following sections explain the systematic approaches adopted to analyse the data collected for each stage.

4.9.1 Analysis of interviews coming from the first stage of this qualitative study

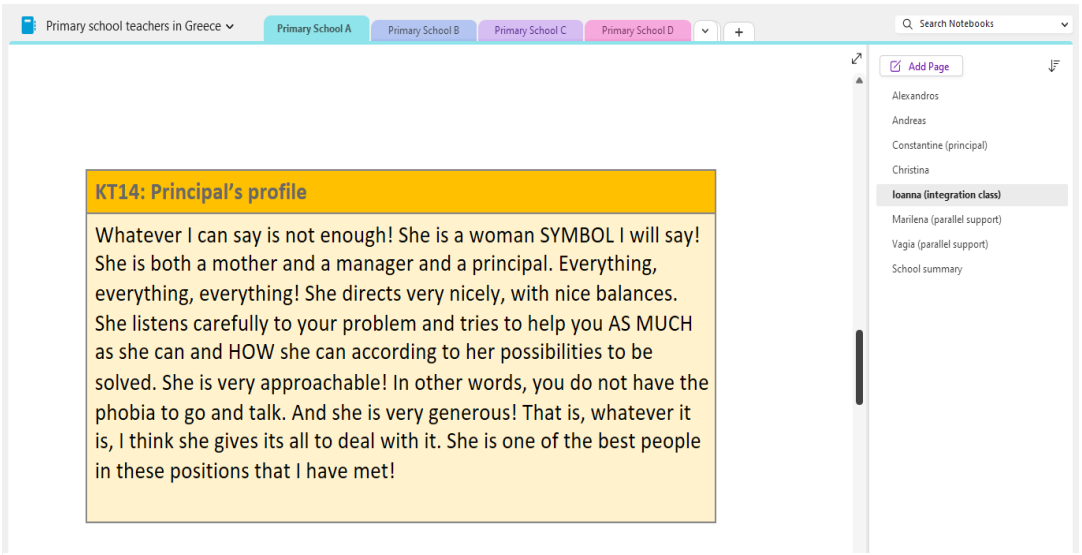
To classify this amount of data and prepare for the data analysis procedure, OneNote, provided by the UoN, was employed (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). The interview data were first classified into four sections representing the four schools. Participants working within them were inside each section, representing a page (See Picture 2).



Picture 2 Procedure of data analysis (1/6)

Then, the study used Wellington's (2015) guidelines for analysing the qualitative data, following the same procedure for the interview data from purposively sampled participants and the two interviews from progressive-focused participants.

Within each school's section where a page represented a participant in OneNote, their interview transcription started to be divided into units of meaning, arising from a part of the text where a participant talks about something specific, e.g., the principal's profile (See Picture 3). This formed a unique theme with a particular meaning that was then applied to every transcription of other



Picture 3 Procedure of data analysis (2/6)

participants within and across all schools (Guest et al., 2012). Within it, many codes were assigned to it, different for each teacher's transcripts.

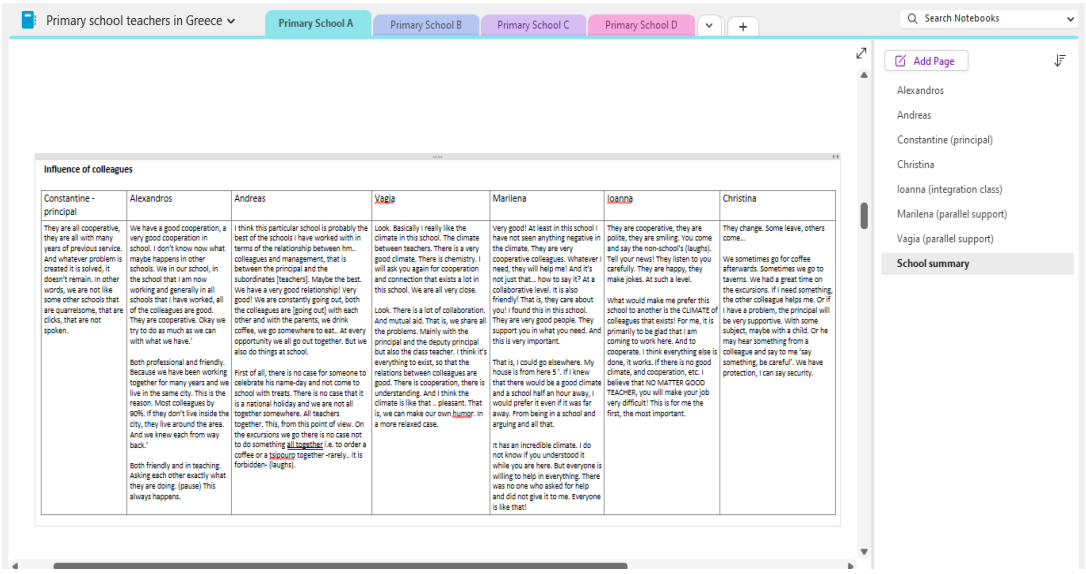
When this process was finally carried out for all teachers across the four primary schools, some themes started forming broader key themes since they could be applied to all interview transcripts of all participants at the first stage of this qualitative study. These themes were: working in their classrooms, working with colleagues, pupil population, relationship with pupils, parents' population, relationship with parents, colleagues' profile, relationship with colleagues, principal's profile, relationship with the principal, teachers' board functioning, principal's influence on teachers' board, issues they discuss at teachers' board meetings, extra-curricular projects, frequency of meetings, how they make decisions, monitoring pupil's progress, management of emergent issues.

The next step was to classify and group these themes and codes within them since many shared similar notions, which could form a broad key theme category. After consideration, the key theme categories were:

- **Key Theme 1. Influence of pupils:** which incorporated the sub-themes 'pupil population' and 'relationship with pupils',
- **Key Theme 2. Influence of parents:** which included the sub-themes 'parents' population' and 'relationship with parents',
- **Key Theme 3. Influence of colleagues:** which included the sub-themes 'colleagues' profile', 'relationship with colleagues', 'working with colleagues',
- **Key Theme 4. Influence of principal,** which included the sub-themes 'principal's profile' and 'relationship with principal',
- **Key Theme 5. Influence of quality of management** which incorporated the sub-themes 'teachers' board functioning', 'principal's influence on teachers' board', 'issues they discuss at teachers' board meetings', 'extra-curricular projects', 'frequency of meetings', 'how they make decisions', 'monitoring pupil's progress', and 'management of emergent issues',

- **Key Theme 6. Influence of education consultant** included the sub-themes ‘education consultant’s profile’ and ‘relationship with education consultant’.

When this process was completed, the next step was to apply these key themes and sub-themes to all participants who worked within a specific school to understand better the influences teachers experienced in their school context. A new page within the section of each school in OneNote was made, named ‘School summary’, and participants’ quotes were moved there (See Picture 4).



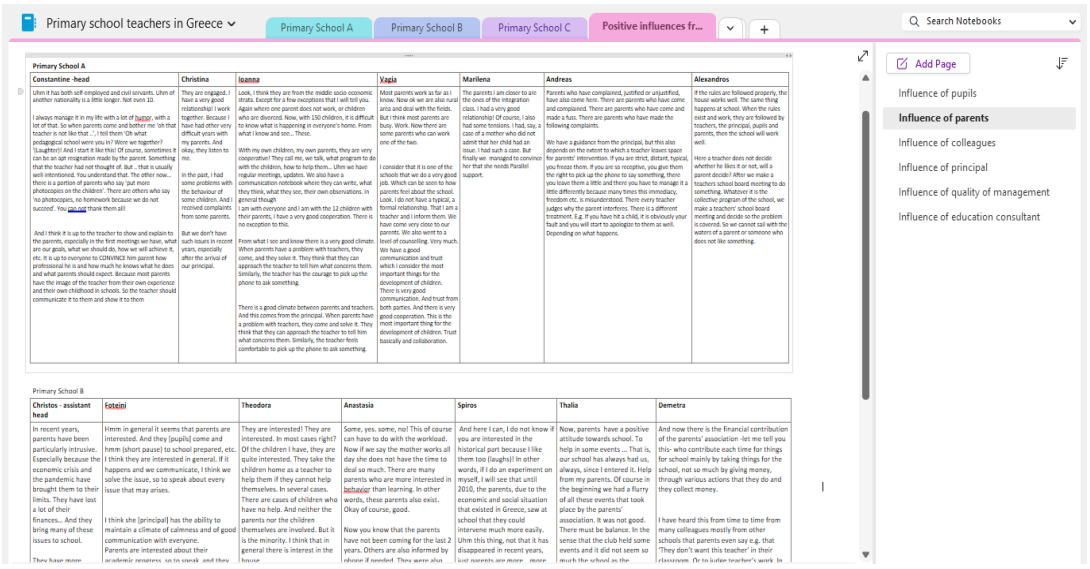
Picture 4 Procedure of data analysis (3/6)

When this procedure was completed for all teachers who worked within a specific school and across all schools, it was clear that teachers shared similar experiences inside their schools. Especially looking at the ‘School Summary’ section in each school, there seemed to be a specific school culture present in all schools, which was influenced by the principal’s profile and which influenced teachers sharing similar responses and experiences.

The next step was to read the whole data set across all four schools to identify similarities across teachers' experiences in different schools. Indeed, this procedure helped identify teachers in two schools who experienced positive influences related to the school culture cultivated by their principals. At the same time, teachers in the two other schools shared similar negative influences

related to their school culture, which they attributed to their principals. However, at that time, it was not easy to understand whether it was just a school culture present in their schools influenced by their principals or something more than that.

Thus, a decision was made to move to the following analysis stage. Two new sections were developed in OneNote, named 'Positive influences from principals on teachers', where all data from participants from the two schools where teachers experienced positive influences were moved. The other was named 'Negative influences from principals on teachers', where all data from participants from the two schools with negative influences were transferred. Since there was a significant amount of data, the decision was to prepare a section for each key theme identified before and transfer the relevant data. For example, for the theme 'influence of parents' (See Picture 5).

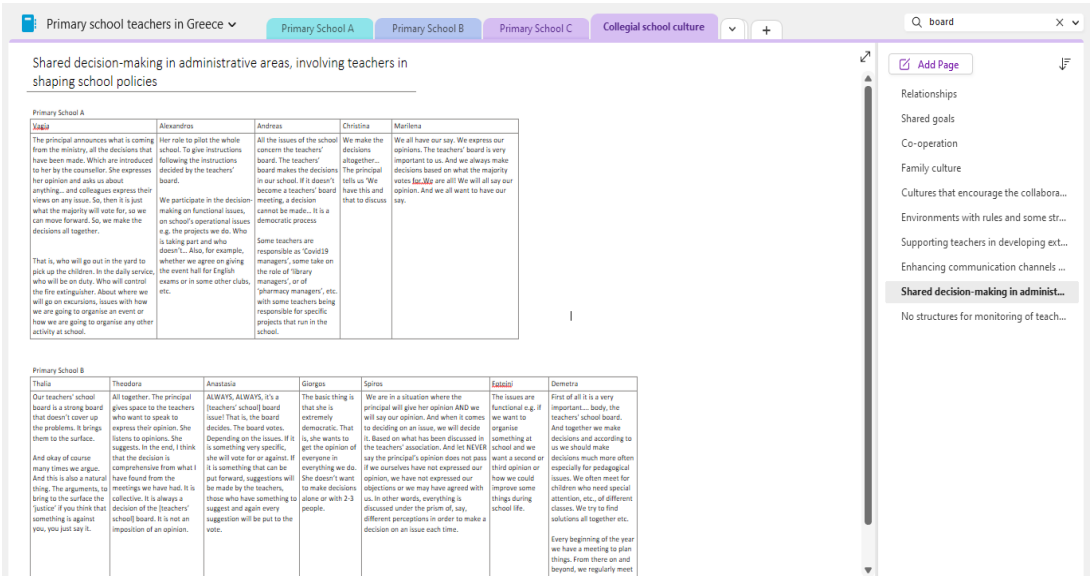


Picture 5 Procedure of data analysis (4/6)

By familiarising myself more with the data, reading teachers' experiences as a whole, and reading teachers' experiences in the two positive and negative-related schools, it was clear that new key themes needed to be developed in two new sections of OneNote. The first key theme that emerged in the two positive-related' schools was a 'Collegial school culture' fostered by principals with new codes related to 'relationships', 'shared goals', 'cooperation', and a 'family

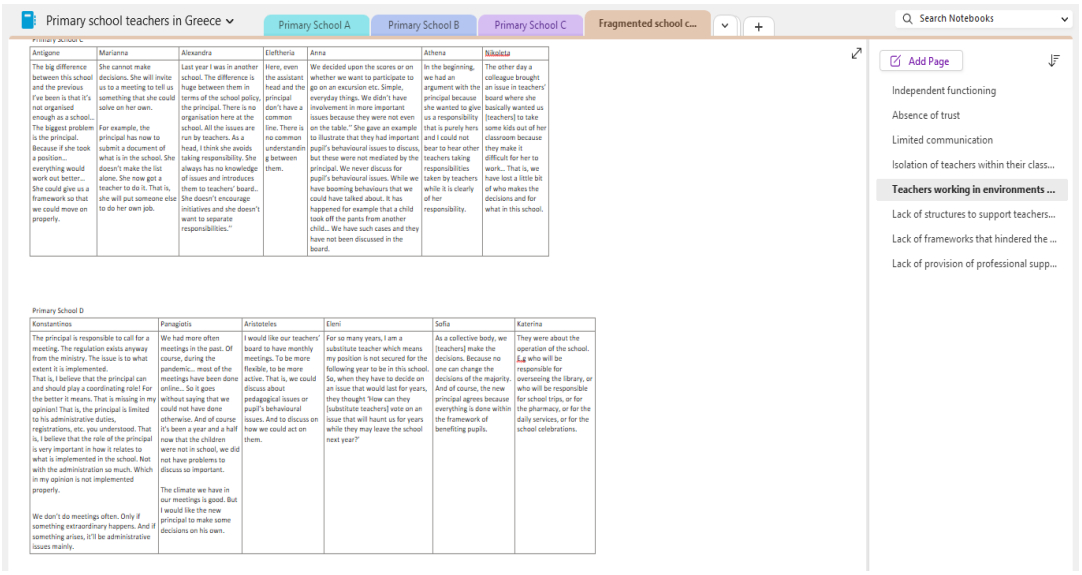
culture'. The second key theme that emerged in the two negative-related schools was a 'Fragmented school culture' fostered by principals with the new codes of 'independent functioning', 'absence of trust', and 'limited communication'. Thus, quotes relevant to these new key themes were moved from both the participants experiencing positive experiences in two schools and from participants experiencing negative experiences in the two other schools.

However, the analysis moved beyond that at that stage. By reading participants' quotes, primarily related to the key theme 'Quality of management', it was clear that principals in those schools did not just cultivate a school culture but also influenced teachers' perceptions of professionalism in many aspects. The following codes that were identified in the 'Collegial school culture' new key theme were 'Cultures that encourage the collaboration of teachers', 'Environments with rules and some structures to address the diverse learning, social, and special needs of pupils', 'Supporting teachers in developing extra-curricular projects that promote the development of pupil's social and academic skills', 'Enhancing communication channels with parents', 'Shared decision-making in administrative areas, involving teachers in shaping school policies', and 'No structures for monitoring of teachers' practices', (See Picture 6).



Picture 6 Procedure of data analysis (5/6)

The same procedure was followed for the new key theme, 'Fragmented school culture,' in a new section in OneNote, where it was clear that principals in those schools did not just influence the school culture but also teachers' perceptions of professionalism in many ways. The additional themes that were identified in that section were 'Isolation of teachers within their classrooms', 'Teachers working in environments where decision-making is fragmented and limited to administrative areas', 'Lack of structures to support teachers in organising extra-curricular projects that could foster the holistic development of pupils', 'Lack of frameworks that hindered the communication channels with parents', and 'Lack of provision of professional support from regional policy', (See Picture 7).



Picture 7 Procedure of data analysis (6/6)

4.9.2 Analysis of interviews coming from the second stage of this qualitative study

The same procedure was followed for the interview data from the second stage of this qualitative study from the eight progressive-focused teachers (Wellington, 2015). However, in their case, before the start of this data analysis procedure, their two interviews were merged inside each teacher's page in OneNote. It was necessary to build a profile for each progressive-focused participant to explore how each teacher's personal influences, including their biographies,

experiences, and identities, might have influenced their views on professionalism.

To achieve that, themes and sub-themes were developed for each teacher's transcripts, as in the first stage. After finishing this procedure for all eight teachers, specific key themes started to emerge, leading to the following:

- **Key Theme1. Teacher's professional path,** which included the sub-themes 'career path', **'**key teaching moments', 'qualifications',
- **Key Theme2. Elements of a teacher's identity**, which incorporated the sub-themes 'motivation', 'self-efficacy', 'commitment', 'agency', 'educational values', 'job satisfaction',
- **Key Theme3. Perceptions of professionalism** included the sub-themes 'teachers' professional knowledge', 'responsibility', 'autonomy', 'passion for subjects', 'continuous professional development', 'professional collaboration', 'professional reflection', and 'care'.
- **Key Theme4. Perceptions on classroom regulations,** with sub-themes including 'perception on curriculum', 'perception on textbooks', 'perception on guidance on teaching methods', 'perception on guidance on pupil's evaluation',
- **Key Theme5. Classroom examples** included the sub-themes of 'use of national curriculum', 'use of textbooks, 'teaching methods', 'pupil's evaluation criteria', and 'general classroom examples'.

These key themes and sub-themes were then systematically applied to each teacher's profile. After completing this process with all eight teachers' transcripts, each teacher's profile was compared to others, searching for commonalities and differences in the meanings each teacher gave to these key theme categories.

Following an inductive analysis approach where the particular could lead to the more general, the initial step explored the key and sub-themes (Guest et al., 2012). Starting with the first key theme, 'Key Theme 1', regarding teachers'

professional path, nothing came up when comparing the sub-themes and codes in teachers' biographies.

The next step was to compare the interview data of teachers in the next theme, 'Key Theme 2: Elements of a Teacher's Identity'. Comparing the interview protocols of teachers in this theme seemed to offer some interesting findings. Some teachers' transcripts referred to only positive influences concerning the sub-themes: 'motivation', 'self-efficacy', 'commitment', 'agency', 'educational values', and 'job satisfaction'. Conversely, there were some transcripts from other teachers in this key theme, who expressed a mixture of positive and negative influences in each code of this theme.

The following step was to explore and compare teachers' transcripts in the next theme, 'Key Theme 3. Perceptions of professionalism'. At that time, the analysis started to show a pattern. Some transcriptions of teachers included the sub-themes of 'teachers' professional knowledge', 'responsibility', 'autonomy', 'values', 'care', 'continuous professional development', 'professional collaboration', 'professional reflection', and 'care'. However, some other teachers' transcripts included the sub-themes: 'teachers' professional knowledge', 'responsibility', 'autonomy', 'values', and 'care'.

The next step was to compare these groups of teachers' themes and sub-themes with those expressed in 'Key Theme 2 Elements of a teacher's identity'. After comparison, it was clear that teachers who in 'Key Theme 3' were assigned broader themes and sub-themes also shared more positive influences in the theme and sub-themes of 'Key Theme 2', concerning 'motivation', 'self-efficacy', 'commitment', 'agency', 'educational values', 'job satisfaction'. Conversely, the group in 'Key Theme 3', assigned to fewer sub-themes in 'Key Theme 2', mainly had negative influences concerning the same themes and sub-themes.

The next step was to compare teachers' transcripts in the following key theme, 'Key Theme 4. Perceptions on classroom regulations'. There, the analysis started to show a clear pattern of two different groups of teachers' transcripts. A group of teachers perceived the sub-themes included in this key theme, particularly

looking at the sub-themes of ‘perception on curriculum’ and ‘perception on textbooks’ as a restriction. In contrast, another group of teachers perceived the sub-themes included in Key Theme 4 as just the framework of their work.

A comparison was made between the group formed in ‘Key Theme 4’ and the previous ‘Key Theme 2’ and ‘Key Theme 3’ groups. After comparing, it was clear that the group assigned to broader sub-themes in ‘Key Theme 3’ and had positive influences in ‘Key Theme 2’ and sub-themes also perceived regulations in ‘Key Theme 4’ as just the framework of their work. Conversely, the group from ‘Key Theme 3’ was assigned with fewer sub-themes and had a mixture of positive and negative influences in ‘Key Theme 2’ and sub-themes in ‘Key Theme 4’ perceived regulations as a restriction.

The next step was to compare teachers’ transcripts in ‘Key Theme 5 Classroom examples’. After comparison, it was clear that the examples of classroom practice teachers could be separated into two groups. One group's examples could be characterised as ‘high agency’, and the other could be characterised as ‘low agency’. At that time, it was indicated that ‘agency’ was an important element across the eight teachers, which could relate to what was discussed in Chapter 2. Since there were already some established groups in the previous key themes, a comparison was made between the groups formed in ‘Key Theme 2’, ‘Key Theme 3’, and ‘Key Theme 4’, with the group formed in ‘Key Theme 5’. Once again here, the group in ‘Key Theme 3’, which was assigned to broader sub-themes, had primarily positive influences in ‘Key Theme 2’, and in ‘Key Theme 4’ perceived regulations as just the framework of their work, was also the group that in ‘Key Theme 5’, their examples were characterised with ‘high agency’. Conversely, the group that was assigned to fewer sub-themes in ‘Key Theme 3’ had a mixture of influences in the sub-themes of ‘Key Theme 2’, and in ‘Key Theme 4’ perceived regulations as restrictions, it was also the same group of teachers that in ‘Key Theme 5’, their examples were characterised as ‘low agency’.

This whole procedure was fruitful for the thematic analysis of the interviews with teachers of progressive focusing. It helped identify the key themes emerging from participants and produced the second chapter of this study's findings.

Considering that all the methodological steps followed in this research study have been detailed, the next section deals with ethical issues before moving to methodological limitations and concludes this chapter.

4.10 Methodological limitations

This study has several methodological limitations that need to be addressed in this separate section, as these might affect the knowledge the current research can produce.

At the outset, the study recognises potential shortcomings related to the design and use of the interview protocols. Each interview protocol alone might not represent the ecological model, able to capture the influence of all layers on the individual teacher simultaneously (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Considering this, the study acknowledges that the knowledge it can produce relates more to specific layers than others, e.g., the teacher-principal interplay and influence on teachers' perceptions of professionalism.

Another methodological limitation of this research project is the total number of participants (n=30). This number suggests that the findings produced in this study cannot be generalised to primary school teachers in Greece (Suri, 2011). However, as elaborated previously in the selection of the interpretative paradigm, it is essential to mention that this study's aim was not to generalise the findings in the professional group of teachers in Greece. Instead, given the limited scope of empirical studies within the Greek context, this research serves the purpose of being analytical concerning the professional experiences and influences on the perceptions of professionalism of the primary teachers in Greece who participated in the study.

Additionally, this study undertook a qualitative research approach, which, by its nature, shares limitations on the data it can produce compared to other

methods, e.g., a mixed-methods approach, where quantitative data could be used along with qualitative data (Creswell & Garrett, 2008). However, based on the nature of this study, its research question and sub-questions, and the conduct of the research by one single researcher, the qualitative research design was considered the most appropriate method.

Furthermore, the current study interviewed only five participants as part of the school's policy, with only two principals and three assistant heads being part of school policy (Check & Schutt, 2011). In addition, especially for Primary School C, the study did not interview the principal or a person serving in school policy from that school. Thus, especially for that school, the current study's scope of understanding might be less prevalent than it is for the other schools.

A limitation is also linked to online and face-to-face interviews during data collection. Specifically, some participants were interviewed online, while others opted for in-person interviews (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). In that way, the quality of data obtained from online or in-person interviews was related to my ability as a researcher to ensure consistent quality. It is important to note that, as discussed in this chapter, at the initiation of the empirical study, face-to-face interviews were impossible due to restrictions in place related to the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece. Even when schools reopened, there were participants who preferred the online format, feeling safer with this option, which I totally respected.

A final constraint pertains to conducting in-person interviews at two schools but not visiting two other school environments (Cohen et al., 2018). However, it was not the primary goal of this project to examine the schools as entities. Additionally, as already described, it was not at my discretion to choose to visit the schools, as this was related to the restrictions imposed by the Greek government and at the principals' discretion.

4.11 Methodological learning

Before concluding this chapter, I find it important to reflect on the methodological learning I gained as a researcher through this study.

One of the most significant lessons learned from this research is the critical importance of ethical practice in the research process. Throughout the study, I encountered various complexities and dilemmas, which I explore in detail in section 4.8, particularly regarding relational ethics. These experiences have profoundly shaped my understanding of how to engage with participants and interpret their realities, fostering greater awareness of my own biases and the influence of my readings and theoretical perspectives.

From a methodological perspective, I found the qualitative empirical design, which utilised interviews to explore Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism, to be both appropriate and productive. This approach effectively aligned with both the research aims and existing literature. Although I recognise that individual interview protocols may not have fully captured the complexity of each participant's perceptions, collectively, they provided rich qualitative insights and meaningful narratives regarding teachers' professional experiences. Additionally, I consider the use of two distinct sampling techniques, tailored to the aims of the study's two stages, a methodological strength that enhanced the exploration of different research objectives.

A further learning experience emerged from modifications I made to the research design. Specifically, I chose to divide the study into two stages to collect data for different purposes. This decision followed insights gained from piloting the initial interview protocol, which revealed that a single, lengthy interview would be insufficient to address all the research questions effectively. By adapting the research design and introducing a second stage, I was able to gather more focused and comprehensive data. This experience highlighted the value of flexibility and adaptability in qualitative research.

Additionally, I learned that empirical studies involving multiple participants present logistical challenges, such as accessing participants, scheduling interviews, and managing unforeseen external factors. In this study, the COVID-19 pandemic posed particular difficulties that I had not anticipated, underscoring the importance of contingency planning and adaptability in the research process.

Finally, I came to understand how my evolving conceptualisation of professionalism influenced every stage of the research, from data collection to analysis and interpretation. Initially, my understanding of professionalism was limited to a set of skills and attributes. However, as my understanding deepened, I became more attuned to the complexities of teachers' perspectives. This shift enabled a more nuanced analysis, moving beyond my initial assumptions and allowing for a richer interpretation of Greek teachers' experiences and professional realities.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the methodological approaches adopted to explore teachers' perceptions of professionalism in Greek primary schools. It has emphasised that the methodological choices aligned with the study's aims, the ecological theoretical framework underpinning it, and limitations related to the chosen methodological design.

The following two chapters present the empirical findings, reflecting this study's two-stage qualitative research design. The first chapter presents how external influences surrounded teachers' experiences and perceptions of professionalism, exemplifying the role of principals, yet without losing the individual teacher's personal stance. This is followed by the second chapter, which presents how teachers manifested their personal influences on professionalism and how the environment, established in the first chapter of findings, directly and indirectly might influenced their views.

Chapter 5: Findings (Part One) – «FACTORS INFLUENCING GREEK TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM»

5.1 Introduction

The current chapter details the key findings from the first stage of this qualitative study (n=[30]). The analysis revealed that Greek teachers experienced either positive or negative influences of professionalism in their school environments. Based on their expressed perceptions, this was primarily related to their school principals, the culture they had established in their schools, and the national policy's regulations their principals chose to mediate and translate to them. The data clearly showed that teachers' perceptions of professionalism were positively influenced by principals who cultivated a collegial culture in their schools and that those who worked within fragmented school cultures established by their principals experienced a negative influence. Moreover, teachers perceived that their areas of influences in their school environments were primarily related to pedagogical rules, social cultures, and administrative structures. The chapter has also some limited evidence to offer regarding the influence of regional policy on teachers' experiences of professionalism.

In this chapter, the presentation first examines the two primary schools in Greece where teachers' perceptions of professionalism were exposed to positive influences in their school environments established by their principals. This is followed by the analysis of the two schools where teachers' perceptions were exposed to negative influences.

5.2 Factors influencing teachers' perceptions of professionalism: Exposure to positive influences

The teachers who worked within Primary School A and Primary School B perceived to be working within school environments where their principals had

cultivated a collegial culture. Aligned with evidence from previous studies for the crucial role of principal's leadership capacities in cultivating a strong school culture (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Day & Sammons, 2020; Schein, 2010), teachers within those schools were found experiencing relationships, shared goals, cooperation, and a family culture which relate to collegiality (Kelchtermans, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Hoyle & Wallace, 2009). This culture, along with structures and rules, was found to nurture teachers' views on professionalism in some areas (n=[14]).

Primary School A	**Primary School B**
Situated in a small city in Northern Greece, Primary School A serves in a semi-urban area. Found in the prefecture's capital, the school serves approximately 160 pupils. The school runs an all-day school programme, and many pupils attend it. The student body reflects a mix of middle-class families, with a few second-generation immigrant children and rare instances of pupils from impoverished backgrounds or Roma communities. Most pupils lived within walking distance of the school. Parents are self-employed, civil servants, farmers, and workers engaged with pupils' learning. The school was built in 1982 and includes twelve classrooms, with some of them including a computer, but with wireless internet at all places. It additionally has an IT room, an integration class, and a library. The teaching staff includes thirty teachers, most of whom are permanent. The principal of this school has served in this role for five years. There are no available public	Primary School B is in a big city in Northern Greece. It is located in a densely populated area in the city where many other schools are located. It is considered a big school serving around 255 pupils. The school runs an all-day school programme with many pupils attending it. The student body reflects middle-class families, with a few second-generation immigrant children. To a great extent, pupils lived within walking distance of the school. Parents are civil servants or self-employed and actively engage in pupils' learning. Parents are engaged with their pupil's learning, offering after-school private lessons to their pupils or other after-school activities. The school was built in 2000, having seventeen classrooms, including a laboratory, a physics room, a laboratory for visual arts, a library room, a music room, staff offices, an integration class, and an event hall. Each class has a computer and wireless internet. The teaching staff includes thirty-three teachers, most

data for the external evaluation of Primary School A.	of whom are permanent. The principal in this school is in her tenth year as a principal. There are no available public data for the external evaluation of Primary School B.

Table 8 Description of Primary School A and Primary School B

At Primary School A, teachers consistently expressed their deep appreciation for the collegial culture they experienced, attributing it to the leadership skills of their principal, who was in her fifth year of service.

Christina (Primary School A), who has been teaching in this school for almost nine years, openly acknowledged the existence of a culture of mutual support among the teaching staff, which she attributed to the principal's efforts — *''If I need something, the other colleague helps me. If I have a problem, the principal will be very supportive. She may hear something from a colleague about an issue I may have with a child and come and reassure me about it... I can say that we have protection, security.''* (Christina).

Alexandros (Primary School A), a long-standing member of this school for nearly seven years, observed a robust culture of collaboration among the teachers, attributing the establishment and sustenance of this strong sense of camaraderie to the influencing role played by the principal's support — *''We have excellent cooperation in our school. All of my colleagues are good. They are cooperative. We try to do as much as we can with what we have... The relationship between teachers and the principal plays a key role in this. Because the relationship between teachers and the principal is perfect. Both In terms of collaboration and in terms of interpersonal relationships. We are a family.''* (Alexandros).

Andreas (Primary School A), a primary school teacher who also served as the assistant head at this school, having been there almost ten years, observed that his principal's leadership approaches aligned with the already existing positive atmosphere among the teaching staff at her arrival at the school five years ago —

‘’*She is very good. From the moment she came five years ago, she has matched both the spirit and the atmosphere of the school very well… She tries to fix things with suggestions and advice. And this is well received.’’* (Andreas).

The presence of a collegial culture in Primary School A was not solely endorsed by teachers who had been in the school for many years. Marilena, Ioanna, and Vagia, who had worked for two and one year in this school, highlighted the same experiences.

Marilena (Primary School A), serving her second year at the school, further supported the argument that a collegial culture was indeed present within her school setting — *‘’They are very cooperative colleagues. Whatever I need, they will help me. And it is not just at a collaborative level. It is also friendly. That is, they care about you… They are very good people. They support you in what you need.’’*. Her decision to continue working at the school for a second year was a conscious and deliberate one, which she attributed to the pivotal roles played by the principal and the assistant head, and the culture they fostered within the school, notably commenting on the leadership skills of her principal — *‘’I chose this school for the culture, for the principal, and the assistant head. Firstly, for them… The principal is like our mother. She is wonderful. She doesn’t want to make you do something extra things… She is cooperative. There is no such thing as ‘I am the head, I will say what will happen’. She is very close to what we need. She is friendly… And above all she is humane. The other person must support you.’’* (Marilena).

Ioanna (Primary School A), being in this school for almost a year, also emphasised the paramount importance of being part of a school environment that nurtures a strong collegial culture, openly acknowledging the profound impact of the principal’s leadership and unwavering support in fostering a strong sense of collegiality within their school — *‘’What would make me prefer this school to another is the culture of colleagues that exists. I am glad to be working in this school. And to cooperate with them… I think the principal plays a key role in this culture… She is a woman symbol. She is both a mother, a manager, and a*

principal. She directs very nicely, with a nice balance. She listens carefully to your problem and tries to help you as much as possible. She is very approachable. And she is very generous. That is, whatever it is, I think she gives her all to deal with it. She is one of the best people in these positions that I have met.'' (Ioanna).

Vagia (Primary School A), who also belonged to this school for less than a year, echoed similar sentiments regarding her principal's leadership skills, acknowledging the principal's pivotal role in establishing and promoting shared goals among the staff, thereby fostering a collective vision focused on benefiting the pupils — *''I like the culture in this school between teachers. There is chemistry. There is a lot of collaboration and mutual aid. That is, we share all the problems. There is cooperation, there is understanding... The principal contributes to this. She is democratic, and she loves children very much. That is, the goal of all of us is children... Whenever possible you should have all of these components in place for launch to maximise profits.''* (Vagia).

In Primary School B, teachers consistently shared positive experiences and perspectives on both the school's culture and their principal's leadership skills, with their principal serving in her tenth year.

Giorgos (Primary School B), who served as an assistant head and had been in this school for nearly fifteen years, emphasised the strong bond and camaraderie among his colleagues — '*''What makes you want to stay after so many years is the relationships with your colleagues. You know so much about these people. You are, now, a family and a family ties you, bonds are created*.''. He emphasised the pivotal role of his principal's leadership skills in cultivating a collegial culture within the school and noted that the principal effectively communicated with and informed colleagues about various school matters — '*''The basic thing is that she is extremely democratic. That is, she wants to get everyone's opinion on everything we do, and she wants to inform all colleagues about the problems of the school. And because we are all so many years in school, she feels bonded with colleagues.''* (Giorgos).

In the same way, Spiros (Primary School B), being in the school for over ten years, expressed a strong sense of comradeship within their school culture, recognising the pivotal role of his principal in shaping and fostering the culture of comradeship within the school, attributing it to the leadership style that she has — *''I want to say that I have solidarity with my colleagues. In recent years I can say much more strongly that I have colleagues who are helpful to each other... Management plays the primary role. When a principal has something in mind to implement both in terms of teaching and also concerning the school, it goes through the relationships of teachers... Well, surely colleagues recognise her good intentions and show her greater willingness.''* (Spiros).

Theodora (Primary School B), being in this school for over four years, highlighted the collective commitment of her and her colleagues to strive to offer the best educational experience to their pupils — *''The culture is great. All teachers are interested in the school and their pupils and in offering the best they can.''.* Like previous teachers, she emphasised the pivotal role of her principal's leadership skills in fostering and nurturing the school's collaboration culture — *''She is friendly and collaborative. She has such leadership skills where needed. Willing to help if we have an issue or something related to pupils.''* (Theodora).

Demetra (Primary School B), who worked within this school for eleven years, went a step further to emphasise the opportunities for collaboration that she found within her school — *''I like the school I am in because I think that there are some people with whom I can work very well, at a very good level... Because here you can find opportunities and possibilities, and we contribute to their creation.''* She highlighted how the principal actively promoted and supported teachers' initiatives, fostering an environment that encouraged professional collaboration and the sharing of ideas — *''Whatever initiatives we want to take, she encourages them. She is positive towards various actions and initiatives we want to do as long as they have a pedagogical character... Many times, she also suggests things. She wants various things to take place at school... So, in fact, she strengthens them [the initiatives].''* (Demetra).

Thalia (Primary School B), being in the school for nine years, further built on the previous argument by describing her school as a professional learning community, attributing this to the leadership and support of her principal — ‘*’Maybe we were lucky enough to be in a school that meets all the requirements of an educational community where everyone works well, having good professional relationships… The principal is, first and foremost, following the culture in which we move. There is a very good leadership from the principal. She has great ability in interpersonal relationships, and she promotes initiatives without insisting.’’* (Thalia).

Foteini (Primary School B), who has worked in this school for nearly six years, shared the same perspective. She believed that within her school, she had the opportunity to offer more to her pupils — ‘’I feel that I am having a good time *at school… A positive mood to offer something more to pupils, to create something more.’’*. She remarked on the leadership skills of her principal, highlighting their ability to foster effective communication with all stakeholders — ‘*’I think she can maintain a calm and good communication culture with everyone… She tries to solve the issues and problems that arise in the most painless way possible. She is pleasant in her communication, bringing balance.’’*. Foteini emphasised that this culture promoted teachers’ initiatives and led to the school’s good reputation of pupils’ academic level — ‘*’There is a culture of taking initiatives from teachers… The school has a smooth operation, and it has formed a good reputation for the academic level of pupils. So, I consider that the school runs as best as possible.’’* (Foteini).

Consistent with the research literature, through the collegial culture principals had cultivated in Primary School A and Primary School B, teachers’ views on professionalism were nurtured in some areas ranging from pedagogical, social, and administrative areas (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Day & Sammons, 2020; Schein, 2010). Particularly, teachers’ views on professionalism were facilitated in the following ways (see Table 11):

- Perceiving encouragement to collaborate with colleagues due to the presence of a school culture that nurtures teacher collaboration. (Primary School A, Primary School B)
- Experiencing structured policies and rules that help them address the diverse learning, social, and special needs of their pupils. (Primary School A, Primary School B)
- Recognising the presence of support in organising extracurricular projects that enhance their pupils' social and academic skills. (Primary School A, Primary School B)
- Perceiving their school as having established communication structures that facilitate interactions with parents. (Primary School A, Primary School B)
- Acknowledging their participation in shared decision-making processes, particularly in administrative areas of their schools. (Primary School A, Primary School B)

Positive influences on Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism

Primary School A (n=7) — Primary School B (n=7) (Total=14)	Perceiving encouragement to collaborate with colleagues due to the presence of a school culture that nurtures teacher collaboration (n=11/14)	Experiencing structured policies and rules that help them address the diverse learning, social, and special needs of their pupils (n=11/14)	Recognising the presence of support in organising extracurricular projects that enhance their pupils' social and academic skills (n=11/14)	Perceiving their school as having established communication structures that facilitate interactions with parents (n=11/14)	Acknowledging their participation in shared decision-making processes, particularly in administrative areas of their schools (n=12/14)

Table 1 Positive influences

5.2.1 Perceiving encouragement to collaborate with colleagues due to the presence of a school culture that nurtures teacher collaboration

Primary School A and B teachers reported that their principals had established cultures promoting teacher collaboration (n=$^{11/14}$). This collaboration referred to the teacher's motivation to collaborate with other colleagues of their choice rather than the presence of established structures for collaboration.

In Primary School A, six out of seven teachers reported this (n=$^{6/7}$). Andreas (Primary School A) openly acknowledged the collaborative efforts he engaged in with various teachers in his school to gather feedback on the progress of his pupils — *''With the colleagues of the extended school, I explain to them what we have done to use them at the extended school to help the children... And with the colleague who is responsible for parallel support teacher in my class.. and with the integration class teacher who has two of my children, we communicate.''* (Andreas).

Vagia (Primary School A) collaborated closely with Andreas in the same classroom as a parallel support teacher to assist two pupils with learning difficulties. In addition to sharing relevant materials and resources with him, she also took the initiative to develop differentiated materials tailored to the specific needs of her pupils. Importantly, Vagia emphasised the positive outcome this had on her two pupils — *''The teacher we have this year has supported me a lot... He has integrated the two pupils very well into the whole class... I usually follow the flow of the class... Of course, as a parallel teacher, I share my material with the class teacher, and I do some more differentiated things.... There is interest from the class teacher, so this gave impetus to these kids.''* (Vagia).

Ioanna (Primary School A), an integration class teacher, highlighted the collaborative culture in their school. This helped her since it was the nature of her role to support specific pupils' learning needs. She acknowledged the willingness of her colleagues to openly share information about their pupils' challenges and work together to develop intervention plans — *''It is one of the*

schools that not only are open, but they welcome you too in their classrooms. They approach you in case they are worried about a child… Teachers suggest children in their classrooms who they think have some learning issues. I evaluate them, and after I make a plan, we agree on how to move on with it.'' (Ioanna).

Alexandros (Primary School A) revealed how he and his colleagues actively engaged in discussions to share their teaching practices, seek feedback, and exchange ideas when they have meetings in their school — *''When we have a meeting at school.. we also exchange ideas regarding the lessons… like 'What exactly are you doing in the Language?', 'Where are you in the curriculum?' How did you do that..;' Or if someone does something or sees something, one informs the other.''* (Alexandros).

Christina (Primary School A) referred to communicating with the teacher of the other classroom of the same grade and the parallel support teacher — *''In general, we keep up in all subjects. We say, for example, 'I am here in the curriculum. Where are you?'. Or with the parallel support teacher, we say 'What are we going to do about this thing to help the pupil?''* (Christina).

Marilena (Primary School A), who worked as a parallel support teacher, underlined her collaboration with Christina, the primary class teacher — *''I collaborate with the class teacher, Mrs Christina. She is very good, and we have an incredible collaboration so we can help the child I support the most.''* (Marilena).

In Primary School B, the picture was similar, with five out of seven ($n=^{5/7}$) teachers confirming this. Thalia (Primary School B) introduced a strong collaborative spirit among the teachers in her school, emphasising the alignment of educational values and practices. She expressed that she shared similar perspectives on education with her colleagues — *''Here, in this school, I can talk about the collaboration of teachers. Some teachers are on the same wavelength as you in their approaches… Specific people that I work with. I found in those teachers a companion in the difficult journey called 'education'.''* (Thalia) .

Spiros (Primary School B) expressed that he did not view himself as his pupils' sole learning provider. Instead, he actively engaged in collaboration with his colleagues to develop lesson plans that fostered an interdisciplinary approach to learning — *''A basic activity we do in recent years with the IT teacher is that when I assign my pupils with a specific topic to search for online, e.g. in History, I share a booklet that I have prepared with the IT teacher and tell her for example 'Today we have to deal with this issue, this is the booklet of questions, these are the websites, please, check on these and work on them'.''* (Spiros).

Foteini (Primary School B) showcased the practice of exchanging ideas and collaborating with her colleagues in the pursuit of shared goals — '*'We exchange teaching ideas on how to apply something in class or if we want to conduct something and we want a second or third opinion. We also speak for the performance of pupils, and generally on how we could improve some things during school life.''* (Foteini).

Theodora (Primary School B), who worked as an integration class teacher, underlined having good communication with teachers whose pupils she supports — '*'Because I have children from different classrooms, I always talk to the main class teachers about the progress of the pupils that I support. They are always willing to talk and collaborate with me to help the pupils.''* (Theodora).

Thus, the data suggest that it was left to the teachers' own volition to determine how, if, and with whom they would collaborate, indicating that the influence of principals varied considerably among teachers. Even though the collegial culture fostered by principals in those two primary schools in Greece nurtured a culture of collaboration among teachers, teachers perceived this to refer primarily to informal collaboration practices occurring among teachers who chose to work together (Kelchtermans, 2006; Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994).

5.2.2 Experiencing structured policies and rules that help them address the diverse learning, social, and special needs of their pupils

Eleven out of fourteen participants (n=$^{11/14}$) from these schools reported that their principals had established structures and rules to address their pupils' diverse

needs. At Primary School A, this was related to structures for establishing an integration class and addressing serious pupil incidents, as well as structures and rules for handling behavioural, learning, or health issues. At Primary School B, this referred to the presence of structures established by the principal to provide school meals, convene meetings for any matters concerning pupils (e.g., exceptional support), and implement rules for collectively sharing responsibility and making decisions, as well as addressing pupils' learning, social, or special needs.

At Primary School A, four out of seven participants referred to this (n=$^{4/7}$). Constantine (Primary School A), the principal, successfully established an integration class in her school so that they could meet the diverse needs of pupils in their school — *''We managed to have an integration class and two parallel support teachers for pupils who needed it with the support of the counsellor. In the Integration class, the children who face learning difficulties go. They go there to balance and catch up with the flow of their main class.''* (Constantine).

Ioanna (Primary School A), who was the teacher at the integration class the principal had established, openly acknowledged that there she had the opportunity to collaborate with her colleagues to address the learning, social, and emotional needs of their pupils — *''We naturally discuss the learning difficulties that a child has in the classroom... And if we can do more things to support them. We also discuss the curriculum... We will discuss some of the behaviours of a child who causes trouble. And, of course, about the emotional development of pupils in general.''* (Ioanna).

Another area was introduced by Andreas (Primary School A), who, as already reported, was a teacher and also served as the assistant head in his school. He referred to the structures from his principal towards how they handled delinquent pupil behaviour — "In cases of delinquent behaviour, a colleague is *responsible for recording the incident. And beyond that, the classroom teacher, in collaboration with the principal and the parents of the children, and in extreme*

cases the counsellor, they discuss and try to find the solution regarding the incident.'' (Andreas).

Finally, Alexandros (Primary School A), a primary teacher, reported another area of concern, emphasising the presence of established structures and rules by the principal to address learning, behavioural, or health issues — *''Everything that arises as an issue, we discuss it with the principal. She calls a meeting. Either it is a learning matter with a child, or it is a matter of health, or it is a matter of behaviour.''* (Alexandros).

In Primary School B, structures and rules for meeting pupils' needs were also present, with five out of seven teachers in those schools referring to them (n=$^{5/7}$). Theodora (Primary School B) introduced the presence of structures in their school established by their principal to provide school meals for pupils in need — *''They are sharing school meals at our school this year... for children who attend the extended school... I think this helps them and their families accept it.''* (Theodora).

In addition, Spiros and Demetra referred to the presence of structures established by their principal in addressing any issues that arise for pupils (e.g. special support), calling official meetings, and rules in how they collectively share responsibility and make decisions together

> — ''In case of any issue related to a pupil, the principal calls a meeting to inform teachers that this issue is not only of one teacher's responsibility but the one whose class the pupil attends. It is a problem of all the teachers at the school.'' (Spiros).

> — ''Our teachers' board is a significant body for us. Together, we make decisions for any issue. We often meet with children of different classes who need special attention, needs, etc... We try to find solutions all together there.'' (Demetra).

Giorgos (Primary School B), a teacher and assistant head, explained more comprehensively this presence of rules in his school, established by their

principal, in providing extra learning, social, or special support to pupils in need — ‘’*The issues that concern us, are the care of the school and the care of the children… So, for example, we discuss the needs of children who need extra care. This is for pupils who are difficult to handle and for pupils who need extra support. There, you take care of yourself. Thus, you share responsibilities among teachers within the school.*’’. He referred to a specific example of how he and his colleagues followed the rules from their principal to deal with a particular pupil in need — ‘’*There is a child who is undertaken by six teachers alternately per week, to take care of him during these hours because the responsible teacher works for 24 hours a week with that kid while the kid stays at school for 30 hours.*’’ (Giorgos).

Similarly, Thalia shared how they make special efforts to support pupils with special needs in their school because of the existence of rules by her principal — ‘’*Our teachers' board makes decisions with the principal. For very important things. And I tell you the most important issues we currently face relate to pupils with special needs.*’’ (Thalia).

To summarise, teachers in those schools perceived that their principals took advantage of their role to call meetings and set the themes of these meetings to help teachers better address the diverse needs of their pupils (Greek Government Gazette 353.1/324/105657/Δ1/2002). Notably, for education consultants at the regional level, this was the first instance where teachers reported their involvement in their professional lives. The data suggest that teachers perceived their support to be rare in cases such as the establishment of an integration class or instances of extreme delinquent behaviour (Law 3699/2008/Α΄ 199).

5.2.3 Recognising the presence of support in organising extracurricular projects that enhance their pupils’ social and academic skills

Eleven out of fourteen participants (n=$^{11/14}$) working in those schools indicated that their principals had established structures and rules to support them in

undertaking extracurricular projects, which encouraged the development of their pupils' social and academic skills. At Primary School A, these included environmental initiatives, participation in national competitions, and a library project. At Primary School B, teachers referred to projects related to recycling, history, a film group, and others focused on developing pupils' collaborative skills and critical thinking. Importantly, teachers at both schools emphasised that no principal could force a teacher to undertake a project and that it was up to the teacher's inclination and interest whether they would choose to engage.

In Primary School A, four out of seven teachers reported this (n=$^{4/7}$). Alexandros (Primary School A) introduced how the principal established structures to facilitate such initiatives in his school. Yet, it was the teacher's choice whether they would engage or not — *''We can consider whether we want a project if it is in the school's interest and the school can do it… We use these projects to offer something more to the development of pupils. Teachers decide if they will do something and what they will do… These projects, I believe, contribute 30% academically and 70% in pupils building interpersonal relationships, learning relationships in school.''* (Alexandros).

Andreas (Primary School A) referred to the engagement of most teachers in his school with a specific environmental project that the principal introduced to them upon her arrival at the school — *''The three last couple of years, the whole school, and I mean every teacher with no exemption, participates in an environmental project. If there was another principal, we probably would not have done it. She introduced it to us… These environmental projects will help the pupils familiarise themselves with ecological issues.''* (Andreas).

Both Christina (Primary School A) and Ioanna (Primary School A) discussed the commonality of engaging in extracurricular projects, particularly those about environmental topics. Additionally, they expressed the existence of other extracurricular initiatives, indicating a diverse range of projects undertaken by the teachers in their school

— *''We have a project for the protection of ecosystems. Other teachers do additional projects, e.g., road traffic projects. We also have participation in pupils'' national competitions such as Physics and Maths, and we also run a library project.''* (Christina).

— *''We are doing an environmental project now. For the oceans, the seas, etc. We work together, we record everything in Word documents. The aim is to cultivate the ecological conscience of pupils*.'' (Ioanna).

In Primary School B, five out of seven teachers confirmed this (n=$^{5/7}$). Spiros (Primary School B) introduced how he and his colleagues were familiar with participating in extracurricular projects, providing the example of recycling, indicating established structures and rules in their school by the principal — *'' E.g. of recycling. After a meeting, a teacher or a couple of teachers become responsible for making the necessary procedures to meet the teaching objectives of the project.''* (Spiros).

Anastasia (Primary School B) confirmed this presence of structures and rules, referring to a project she ran on history with a colleague — *''We can do joint projects with other colleagues, grabbing a common theme and work on it together... This year, I did something with another colleague for the 200 years since the Greek Revolution.''* (Anastasia).

Thalia (Primary School B) highlighted the establishment of a film group within her school, which group continued to flourish long after the pupils had graduated from primary school — *''We started here 7-8 years ago a film group that continued outside of school. And even when the children went to high school, they continued it... These projects went out into society. There were celebrations where we invited the parents and showed the work of the children.''* (Thalia).

Importantly, Thalia underlined something already evident in what teachers had shared so far. That no principal could force teachers to undertake projects. Conversely, it was a teacher's choice if, how, and what they would do, even if the principal had established structures and rules

— ‘’I think that these projects start from the teacher. No principal can force you to say, 'There is a project, do it'. If you don’t want it, you won’t do it. If you don’t think it is something that will offer something more to your pupils.’’ (Thalia).

Demetra (Primary School B) acknowledged that her goal in using these projects was to promote collaboration skills and foster the critical thinking abilities of her pupils — *‘’The way we do them [the projects], collaboratively, reinforces a collaborative climate among them…I believe that the projects we do cultivate the critical thinking of children. It leads them to realise some societal issues in depth.’’* (Demetra).

Foteini (Primary School B) summarised this by revealing that, in her school, such structures and rules generally made teachers more willing to undertake new projects — *‘’There is a willingness to collaborate with colleagues to do extracurricular projects… I think pupils learn some things from that. So, we try to do as many things as we can… Usually, something is running on in our school. There is a small outcome every year which is also visible on our website.’’* (Foteini).

Here, once more, it is evident that teachers in those schools perceived that their principals took advantage of the existing Greek central national policy’s regulations to develop extra-curricular activities in their schools, revealing established structures (Law 3699/2008/Α΄ 199; GG, Presidential Decree No. 79, A’ 109/01.08.2017; FEK A 109/2017). However, it becomes clear from teachers’ perspectives that that even if their principals were mediating central national policy’s regulations to teachers referring to the development of extra-curricular activities in their schools, it did not mean that every teacher in the school would engage with them, or that they would engage in the same way. Many teachers underlined that it was of the teacher’s own volition to engage in those activities, and no principal could force them to enact them.

5.2.4 Perceiving their school as having established communication structures that facilitate interactions with parents

Eleven out of fourteen participants (n=$^{11/14}$) working in these schools recognised the crucial engagement of their principals in cultivating professional communication channels with parents. Participants reported that their principals had established rules for maintaining professional collaboration with parents at Primary Schools A and B. However, participants at both schools noted that it was ultimately up to the individual teacher to convince parents of their professionalism.

At Primary School A, six out of seven participants referred to this (n=$^{6/7}$). Alexandros, Vagia, Ioanna and Christina supported the existence of rules. According to Alexandros, rules were followed by everyone in his school, including parents, which is the only way for the school to work correctly —*'' If the rules are followed properly, the house works well. The same thing happens at school. When the rules exist and work, they are followed by teachers, the principal, pupils and parents, then the school will work well.''* (Alexandros).

Similarly, Vagia (Primary School A) emphasised how, in her school, there were clear rules which cultivated trust between teachers and parents — *''I consider that it is one of the schools that we do a very good job. This can be seen in how parents feel about the school... We have come very close to our parents... We have good communication and trust which I consider the most important things for the development of children.''* (Vagia).

Likewise, Ioanna (Primary School A) commented that her principal had positively influenced the communication channels among parents and teachers — *''There is a good climate between parents and teachers. This comes from the principal. When parents have a problem with teachers, they come and solve it. They think that they can approach the teacher to tell him what concerns them. Similarly, the teacher feels comfortable picking up the phone to ask something.''* (Ioanna).

Especially Christina (Primary School A) revealed how her principal had helped her overcome some issues she encountered with some parents — *''In the past, I had some problems with the behaviour of some children. And I received complaints from some parents... But we don't have such issues in recent years after the arrival of our principal.''* (Christina).

Nevertheless, Constantine (Primary School A), the principal, perceived that beyond the rules in place established by her, she expected teachers to show their professionalism when interacting with parents — *''Apart from my part, I think it is up to the teacher to show and explain to the parents, especially in the first meetings they have, what are our goals, what we should do, how we will achieve it, etc. It is up to everyone to convince the parent how professional he is and how much he knows what he does and what parents should expect.''* (Constantine).

Indeed, Andreas (Primary School A), a primary teacher and assistant head in the school, emphasised that while guidance exists from the principal, it was ultimately up to the individual teacher to take the initiative in building communication with parents and handling any situations involving intrusive parents — *''We have a guidance from the principal, but this also depends on the extent to which a teacher leaves space for parents' intervention.''* (Andreas).

Within Primary School B, five out of seven teachers reported this (n=$^{5/7}$). Foteini and Thalia referred to the existence of rules by their principal. Foteini (Primary School B) commented for her principal that she had established communication channels with parents and that parents were happy to follow any guidance she could give to them emphasising the crucial role of her leadership skills — *''I think she can maintain a climate of calmness and good communication with everyone.... Parents follow, any instructions given by the principal for whatever arises, and they are consistent because they are interested in their pupil's academic and social progress.''* (Foteini).

Similarly, Thalia (Primary School B) also referred to the positive attitude of parents toward their school which results in good school functioning — *''Parents have a positive attitude towards the school... Our school always has had good*

communication with parents since I came to the school… I believe that the parents' board along with the teachers' board can do great things. They can keep a school at a very good level.'' (Thalia).

Nevertheless, Spiros, Demetra, and Anastasia underlined how it was up to the individual teachers to show their professionalism to parents.

Spiros (Primary School B) explained how he, at the beginning of every school year, approaches parents to set his expectations toward parents showing his sense of professionalism — *''In the first meeting in September what I tell to parents is that we learn to listen to the children as we want them to listen to us. So, I explain to them the way we teach Language with this method, with these practices. That we do Maths in this way, all this climate is trusted by the parent so we can respond in the best possible way.''* (Spiros).

Anastasia (Primary School B) also mentioned establishing her communication channels with parents — *''I never had any particular problem with parents e.g. to be intrusive or something. Whenever I need something from them, they are there. Or [when] they want to ask me something about the kids or whatever, I am there.''* (Anastasia).

Moreover, Demetra (Primary School B) mentioned hearing about other colleagues experiencing issues with parents. Still, in her case, she made it clear that intrusion from parents in her work would not be accepted, demonstrating her professionalism — *''I have heard from time to time from some colleagues, that parents may even say, e.g. that 'They don't want this teacher' in their classroom. Or to judge teacher's work… Of course, I wouldn't accept this.''* (Demetra).

In short, teachers perceived that their principals within those two primary schools had established communication channels with parents (Deal & Peterson, 2016). However, again, many participants underlined that although principals in those schools nurtured the communication channels between teachers and parents, it was up to individual teachers to show their professionalism, convincing parents that their work benefits their pupils.

5.2.5 Acknowledging their participation in shared decision-making processes, particularly in administrative areas of their schools

Twelve out of fourteen participants (n=$^{12/14}$) working in these schools emphasised the presence of structures and rules for deciding together on administrative matters. At Primary School A, teachers empathetically expressed that they were making decisions collectively, following a rule established by their principal. These decisions were primarily related to the internal regulations of the school (e.g., excursions, duties, events, etc.). Similarly, at Primary School B, the principal promoted shared decision-making, and teachers' concerns were focused on functional topics (e.g. events, school life, administrative planning, and documentation for the school's participation in projects).

In Primary School A, five out of seven teachers referred to this (n=$^{5/7}$). Christina, Alexandros, Andreas, Vagia and Marilena referred to how their principal introduced discussion topics to teachers, expecting their collective decision-making on issues.

Christina (Primary School A) described the process they followed, where their principal chose the topics, introduced to her by the counsellor, for discussion with them — ‘*’The principal announces what is coming from the ministry, the decisions that have been made…introduced to her by the counsellor. She expresses her opinion and asks us about anything… and colleagues express their views on any issue. So, then it is just what the majority will vote for, so we can move forward. So, we make the decisions all together.’’* (Christina).

Alexandros described the principal’s role as a leader, guiding their decisions — ‘*’She is to pilot the whole school. To give instructions following the instructions decided by the teachers’ board.’’* (Alexandros).

Andreas, Vagia, and Marilena shared similar comments, noting that in their school, decisions were made through a voting process where the majority's stance determined the outcome

— *''All the school issues concern the teachers' board. The teachers' board makes the decisions in our school. If it doesn't become a teachers' board meeting, a decision cannot be made... It is a democratic process.''* (Andreas).

— ''We make the decisions altogether... The principal tells us 'We have this and that to discuss.'' (Vagia).

— *''We all have our say. We express our opinions. The teachers' board is very important to us. And we always make decisions based on what the majority votes for.'' (*Marilena).

However, the issues their principal introduced for discussion ranged from daily duties, excursions, events, and activities, as Christina commented — "*That is, who will go out in the yard to pick up the children? In the daily service, who will be on duty? Who will control the fire extinguisher? About where we will go on excursions, issues with how we are going to organise an event or how we are going to organise any other activity at school.''* (Christina).

Alternatively, they referred to teachers undertaking roles as 'library managers' or 'pharmacy managers', as Andreas mentioned — *''Some teachers are responsible as 'COVID-19 managers', some take on the role of 'library managers', or of 'pharmacy managers', etc. with some teachers being responsible for specific projects that run in the school.''* (Andreas).

Or they referred to whether teachers agree to give some school sites for other events in external clubs, as Alexandros reported — *''We participate in the decision-making on functional issues, on school's operational issues, e.g. whether we agree on giving the event hall for English exams or in some other clubs, etc.''* (Alexandros).

In Primary School B, a similar picture was present, with seven out of seven teachers referring to this ($n=^{7/7}$). Theodora, Giorgos, and Spiros illustrated how their principal introduced topics for discussion during meetings, emphasising her democratic approach to decision-making.

Theodora (Primary School B) commented on how their principal gave space for teachers to share their opinions while also offering suggestions — *''The principal gives space to teachers who want to speak, to express their opinion. She listens to their opinions. She also suggests. In the end, the decision is made based on a collective procedure.''* (Theodora).

Giorgos (Primary School B) highlighted his principal's democratic approach, avoiding making decisions solely with specific teachers or groups of teachers — ''*The basic thing is that she is extremely democratic. That is, she wants to get the opinion of everyone in everything we do. She doesn't want to make decisions alone or with two or three people.''* (Giorgos).

Spiros (Primary School B) also emphasised the pivotal role of the principal, who was open to receiving various opinions — ''*We are in a situation where the principal will give her opinion, and we will say our opinion... Everything is discussed under the prism of different perceptions to decide on an issue each time''.* (Spiros).

Within these established rules, Thalia, Theodora, and Anastasia reported how they collectively make decisions in their school

> — ''Our teachers' school board is a strong board that doesn't cover the problems. It brings them to the surface.''(Thalia).
>
> — ''All together, we make these decisions.'' (Theodora).
>
> — ''It's a teachers' board issue, always. Depending on the issues, suggestions will be made by teachers, and then the board will decide with votes.'' (Anastasia).

Similar to the previous school, the issues ranged from functional concerns, such as whether to organise events or ways to improve school life, as Foteini reported — ''*The issues are functional, e.g. if we want to organise something at school and we want a second or third opinion or how we could improve some things during school life.''* (Foteini).

The issues could also involve functional aspects, such as school planning at the beginning of the school year and monitoring the extent to which these plans are implemented, as Demetra noted — *''The issues are functional… At the beginning of the year, we have a meeting to plan things. From there on and beyond, we regularly meet when a problem arises, but also to discuss how effective what we had planned in the beginning.''* (Demetra).

They could also involve completing the necessary administrative documents required for the school's participation in projects, as Spiros mentioned — ''*Bureaucratic issues, e.g. how do you complete the participation of the school in some projects.''* (Spiros).

Therefore, shared decision-making was considered important by teachers in those schools who felt valued by their principals as professionals to decide together on administrative issues related to their schools (Kelchtermans, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). However, it is essential to note that teachers did not report undertaking any crucial roles in their schools related to pedagogical areas apart from some administrative roles, e.g. pharmacy managers, etc. (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Muijs et al., 2005; Lieberman& Miller, 2011). Additionally, the findings, once more, indicated regional policy's limited participation in teacher's daily lives related to only mediating some administrative regulations from central national policy to principals in those schools (Law 1304/1982; Greek Government Gazette 353.1/324/105657/Δ1/8-10-2002; Law 3848/2010).

To summarise, teachers within Primary School A and Primary School B experienced a collegial culture fostered by their principals that emphasised collaboration, mutual respect and shared decision-making as highly valued aspects (Kelchtermans, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Within those schools, participants were found to share common attitudes towards the socialisation of pupils and maintain open communication within a supportive environment that

encouraged professional relationships (Shah, 2012). In these settings, teachers were actively encouraged to collaborate, share teaching plans and some resources, and engage in classroom feedback. Support was provided to teachers for the development of extracurricular projects aimed at fostering the development of pupils' social and academic skills. These environments had established rules for catering to pupils' diverse learning, social, and special needs. Additionally, communication channels with parents were actively promoted, while shared decision-making in administrative areas ensured teacher involvement in shaping school policies and practices without overburdening them with administrative tasks (Harris & Jones, 2010; Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Day & Sammons, 2013).

However, compared to international studies (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Muijs et al., 2005; Lieberman& Miller, 2011), it is essential to note that teachers in those two primary schools in Greece did not report any involvement in areas such as curriculum planning, and/or being provided with in-school development opportunities, and/or opportunities to take on leadership roles. This may relate to broader contextual influences related to the Greek educational context, and thus, it needs to be explored further in the two other schools participated in this study.

Another interesting finding is that many participants indicated that it was a teacher's interest and decision whether they would enact something introduced by their principal. This should also be explored further in the next section, since it indicates that teachers' perspectives of professionalism could be influenced by their principals, but the extent of this influence varied across teachers.

Equally important to note is the limited evidence of regional policy's engagement in teachers' professional lives, which also needs to be explored with the rest of the participants. This is important since it is inconsistent with their description of their role according to legislation, as outlined in Chapter 2, to provide continuing professional development opportunities to teachers (Law 1304/1982; Greek Government Gazette 353.1/324/105657/Δ1/8-10-2002; Law 3848/2010).

5.3 Factors influencing teachers' perceptions of professionalism: Exposure to negative influences

Teachers at Primary School C and Primary School D perceived to be part of fragmented school cultures (n=[16]), characterised by a lack of cohesion, collaboration, and a shared sense of purpose among teachers (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015; Deal & Peterson, 2016). They acknowledged experiencing limited communication with their colleagues, whose independent functioning and goals prevailed, resulting in a lack of trust among the teaching staff and principals. The fragmented cultures in those schools were found to expose teachers (n=[16]) to negative influences on their views of professionalism in pedagogical, social, and administrative areas.

Primary School C	**Primary School D**
This primary school is located in a remote area of an island in Southeastern Greece. The school serves 200 pupils who are native inhabitants of the island. The school runs an all-day school programme with many pupils attending it. The pupils come from middle-class families with a good standard of living, with most pupils living within walking distance of the school. Parents engaged in tourism activities. They are very engaged with their pupil's learning, offering after-school private lessons to their pupils or other after-school activities. A new building was built in 2015. Every classroom has a screen, computer, and wireless internet. There are twelve	This primary school is located in a small city in Northern Greece. It is considered a semi-urban area. It serves around 160 pupils. The school runs an all-day school programme, and many pupils attend it. The pupil population is homogenous, with only two pupils being immigrants. Most pupils lived within walking distance of the school. Their families are considered middle class, with many being civil servants or self-employed and fewer being workers or farmers. Parents are engaged with their pupil's learning, offering after-school private lessons to their pupils or other after-school activities. The school building is old, built in 1971. It has thirteen classrooms, the principal's and

classrooms: an art room, a computer room, a foreign languages room, an integration class, a classroom for the extended program, and a new library. Twenty-two people are teaching staff. The permanent teaching staff in this school was six teachers, with the rest being substitute teachers. The principal in this school was in her second year of service. There is no available data on pupils' and school performance.	teachers' offices, a computer lab, a multipurpose room, and a lending library. Eighteen people comprise the teaching staff, the most permanent teachers in this school. The principal in this school was in his first year of service. There is no available data on pupils' and school performance.

Table 20 Description of Primary School C and Primary School D

In Primary School C, teachers attributed the presence of a fragmented school culture to their principal's leadership approach. However, evidence suggests that this was related to her recent appointment as a principal, as she was serving her second year in the role, and to the fact that most teachers were in their first year at the school, meaning they had little time to build relationships (Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Deal & Peterson, 2016).

Antigone (Primary School C), who was in her first year in this school, expressed how challenging it was for her to work in an environment lacking comradeship — ‘*’There is no climate of camaraderie… There is no collegiality. Everyone is thinking of himself.’’.* She attributed this fragmented school culture to the principal and her lack of leadership skills — ‘*’All this started with the principal… There was no management to give instructions, to have a common line; everyone showed their most selfish side.’’* Antigone indicated that this culture may have impacted her as a professional — *‘’The culture with colleagues is a factor that affects me. When I do not have a co-working culture, I cannot be the same efficient teacher.’’* (Antigone).

Similarly, Marianna (Primary School C), also in her first year in this school, shared that she had a typical relationship with most of her colleagues — ‘*’We are colleagues in the sense that we work in the same workplace’’*. She attributed this

culture to the principal's lack of leadership skills, indicating the transferring of responsibilities to teachers — ‘*’Our principal is not organised. She is lost… She expects each of us to solve her problems, which then creates friction among us.*’’ (Marianna).

Likewise, Athena (Primary School C), during her initial year at this school, explained how challenging it was for her to be a part of this fragmented school culture with a lack of communication and understanding — ‘’*There are colleagues who look to not to miss 5’ of their break. Or colleagues who will say, ‘This is not my job, I’m not doing it’. Colleagues who do nothing or colleagues who do not care about children. I cannot communicate or cooperate with these colleagues.*’’. Like previous teachers, she ascribed this culture to the poor management skills of her principal — ‘’*This culture started from the very bad management… The principal has no leading character. She cannot make decisions, although she is in a position where it is essential. She returns everything to teachers, making it difficult for us and the school's operation*’’. (Athena).

During her first year at this school, Alexandra (Primary School C) also referred to a lack of cooperation among colleagues, as everyone seemed to prioritise their interests over the collective interest — *‘’We cannot coordinate. No one assumes any responsibility… If someone forgets something, the other will blame him directly.*’’. She attributed this negative culture to the principal and her mismanagement — ‘’*It all starts with the management that cannot share responsibilities. You could ask her something for whatever reason, and she says, ‘I don’t know, look up for it.’ There was no communication… There were incidents in the school without any substantive reason… She confuses us… She creates big issues for us. She gossips about us to others and others to us.*’’ (Alexandra).

Eleftheria (Primary School C), also in her initial year at this school, like all previous teachers, ascribed the fragmented culture to the lack of leadership skills of their principal — *‘’I don’t think she has the necessary leadership skills. She may now make an unreasonable remark, then say something irrelevant to*

you, and speak to you normally as if nothing had happened before. And she is very anxious as a person.'' (Eleftheria).

At Primary School D, most teachers welcomed their new principal, who had been in the role for only nine months at the time of data collection. Notably, the majority of teachers perceived him as having strong leadership qualities. However, he had yet to establish a relationship of trust with them—an unsurprising outcome given his recent appointment (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

Eleni (Primary School D) acknowledged that the new principal came during the pandemic, which made it impossible to get to know him because of the lack of in-person interactions. However, still, she recognised some of his good qualities — *''He came to the school in the middle of a pandemic... And we didn't get to know him very well because the school was closed for a long time during the pandemic. But he is in a very good mood. He is always very kind, and he has a positive attitude. I will not say that everything is excellent. We still have to get to know each other and work on things.''* (Eleni).

Panagiotis (Primary School D), who also served as the assistant head, shared similar thoughts — *''The principal is new. So far, our cooperation is very good. He is very positive and very democratic. But the future will show.''* (Panagiotis).

Aristoteles (Primary School D) referred to knowing the principal as an acquaintance outside the school. He wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the new principal and how he would perform in his role — *''I knew the principal outside of school because he is from a village close to mine. But now I get to know him as a principal. So far, I see him being consistent. He asks for our help, and we help him as much as possible. I hope our cooperation will be good.''* (Aristoteles).

Angellike (Primary School D) shared a similar sentiment with previous teachers, acknowledging his positive qualities but expressing a desire to see how he would perform as a principal in the future — *''Each principal gives their own identity when leading a school. The principal is new. He has an appetite to learn. I think he is very democratic in that this also appears when exercising his power. But we wait to see more of him.''* (Angellike).

Even though teachers at Primary School D had a positive perception of the new principal, past crises related to the leadership approaches of the previous principal had not yet been fully resolved, leaving the school culture fragmented among colleagues.

Katerina (Primary School D) referred to being at a better point with her colleagues compared to the past when they were not interacting with each other. However, their relationship faces disagreements — ‘*’Our relationship is probably friendly… The years of conflicts where ‘We argue, and we don’t talk with each other for the next 70 years’ don’t exist anymore. There are disagreements, but I believe with a good mood, they are being resolved.’’* (Katerina).

Aristoteles (Primary School D) referred to having some friction with some of his colleagues regarding the distribution of some administrative responsibilities, which he tries to solve — ‘*’With one colleague there is an issue with timetables, the breaks, the services, for various practical issues such as that. That is, of everyday life. But we try to overcome them. This happens everywhere.’’* (Aristoteles).

Angellike shared quite the same about the fragmented culture in their school — ‘*’With others more friendly, with others more neutral relationship. It depends on the person. As in any work environment. And if contradictions arise, we take care to ignore them.’’* (Angellike).

Maria (Primary School D) also referred to some frictions existing at their school, but she tried to ignore them and not take part in them — *‘’There are some frictions, but I try to ignore them, which I do for my good. Because we spend many hours at school.’’* (Maria).

Konstantinos (Primary School D) was found to be even more distant from his colleagues, claiming that he had typical relationships with them since he stood against the way they deal with pupils — *‘’The relationships with my colleagues are typical. I have some objections to the approaches of how they deal with issues, e.g. with a child.’’* (Konstantinos).

The above claims showed that there was still a fragmented school culture among many teaching staff members at Primary School D. However, their school culture was more precisely in a transitioning phase compared to Primary School C (Day et al., 2009).

In line with the literature review and consistent with findings from the previous two primary schools in Greece, the school culture in Primary School C and Primary School D influenced teachers' daily lives and their views on professionalism. The fragmented school culture in these schools created an environment that, in turn, hindered teachers' views of professionalism across various areas (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2009; Harris & Jones, 2019). Specifically, teachers' views were hindered concerning:

- Perceiving themselves as isolated within their classrooms and lacking professional support from regional policy. (Primary School C, Primary School D)
- Struggling with a lack of structures to organise extracurricular projects and initiatives aimed at enhancing pupils' social and academic skills. (Primary School C, Primary School D)
- Experiencing a lack of clear rules governing communication between teachers and parents. (Primary School C, Primary School D)
- Feeling that they have limited opportunities to participate in school decisions, with their involvement mostly restricted to administrative matters. (Primary School C, Primary School D)

Negative influences on Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism

Primary School C (n=7) — Primary School D (n=9) (Total=16)	Perceiving themselves as isolated within their classrooms and lacking professional support from regional policy ($n=^{11/16}$)	Struggling with a lack of structures to organise extracurricular projects and initiatives aimed at enhancing pupils' social and academic skills ($n=^{11/16}$)	Experiencing a lack of clear rules governing communication between teachers and parents ($n=^{10/16}$)	Feeling that they have limited opportunities to participate in school decisions, with their involvement mostly restricted to administrative matters ($n=^{12/16}$)

Table 11 Negative influences

5.3.1 Perceiving themselves as isolated within their classrooms and lacking professional support from regional policy

Eleven out of sixteen participants (n=$^{11/16}$) from Primary School C and Primary School D reported experiencing professional isolation within their classrooms. Teachers from Primary School C described this as a lack of interest and willingness among colleagues to engage in cooperation, limited opportunities for curriculum planning, and resistance from long-standing members to accepting the views of newer colleagues. In Primary School D, teachers highlighted a lack of open communication with colleagues, reluctance to seek or offer help, and a disinterest in sharing good practices or discussing teaching methods.

5.3.1a Perceiving themselves isolated in their classrooms

At Primary School C, five out of seven teachers (n=$^{5/7}$) reported experiencing professional isolation in their classrooms.

Eleftheria (Primary School C) introduced this — *''In my school, I don't see that there is what we could call 'collaboration' across the classrooms.''* (Eleftheria). Athena (Primary School C) provided even more evidence to support the prevalence of a culture of isolation in everyone's classroom in her school, highlighting that she missed having professional collaboration with her colleagues in this school compared to the previous years that she was in other schools — *''Many teachers don't want parallel support in their classrooms. They work with closed doors, both literally and figuratively... Everyone is locked in their shell... There aren't people here who will ask you, 'This is something I also want to do. Bring it to me.' You discuss with them and tell them, 'I have been doing this for many years; I have been trained on that. Come, and I will help you; I am pleased to show it to you. And in the end, the other teacher chooses the old-fashioned way.''* (Athena).

Additionally, there was a lack of common curriculum-planning. Antigone (Primary School C) referred to a lack of essential collaboration even with the colleague of the other class with whom they shared the exact grade, emphasising that this was the norm in her school — ‘*’I share the same grade with another colleague who has the other classroom group. But do I collaborate? No. We are just colleagues… We may share a common booklet or something sometimes which I don’t consider to be ‘collaboration’.’’* (Antigone). Marianna (Primary School C) confirmed the same regarding the lack of professional communication in her school — ‘’*There is no common line even between the classrooms that share the same grade in our school!’’* (Marianna).

Moreover, long-standing members were not accepting newer colleagues' views. Alexandra (Primary School C) indicated that teachers who had been in the school for many years were not so receptive to the early appointed colleagues and their teaching approaches, indicating inconsistent teaching practices across classrooms in their school — ‘*’Most of the colleagues who came to the school this year have only some years of teaching experience. The teachers here for many years are old and don’t accept new knowledge and ideas from their early career colleagues… And of course, there is a gap both in terms of the teaching methods and in terms of the established ideas.*’’ (Alexandra).

At Primary School D, a similar picture emerged, with six out of nine teachers ($n=^{6/9}$) reporting a sense of professional isolation in their classrooms.

Katerina, Panagiotis, Maria, and Eleni noted that they perceived a lack of open communication and a reluctance to seek help from teachers or to receive assistance from other teachers.

Katerina (Primary School D) referred to this isolation of his colleagues in their classrooms — ‘*’The other teacher will not open his class. He will say something general that happened with a child but not discuss it. He will talk about a child in his class who is causing problems, but he will not discuss, for example, that he encountered a difficulty in Maths.*’’ (Katerina).

Moreover, Panagiotis (Primary School D), who also served as the assistant head, confirmed that teachers in his school, like himself, preferred to manage issues individually in their classrooms without informing their colleagues — ‘*’Most of the time we manage any issue we face in the classroom alone, without having to inform the others.’’ (*Panagiotis).

Similarly, Maria (Primary School D) also expressed concern about managing any issues in her classroom without informing her colleagues or the principal — ‘*’I often try to solve anything related to the classroom on my own. Not to tell colleagues about it or not share it with the principal. I see it as a self-criticism procedure like ‘Did I make a mistake here?’’* (Maria).

As an integration class teacher, Eleni (Primary School D) initially found it challenging to build relationships and establish trust with her colleagues. Even after five years in the school, she still revealed that her colleagues were reluctant to accept another teacher providing differentiated support for pupils in their classrooms — ‘*’Relationships are slowly forming over time and trust with colleagues. I work in the integration class, so I must take the child out of their class. It is difficult for a teacher to feel that one of his pupils is being taken out of the class to be supported by another teacher. You need to have a relationship of trust with them… After five years, there is still some difficulty. Not so much in the part of trust as in asking for differentiated teaching material for those pupils. Because the pupils cannot follow the flow of the class, but there is not so much flexibility from them in this part.’’* (Eleni).

Konstantinos and Aristoteles further underlined that their colleagues in their school were not interested in sharing good practices or exchanging views on teaching methods in their schools.

Konstantinos (Primary School D) claimed that within his school environment, there are limited opportunities for sharing good practices — ‘*’Because I am in charge of the library, I have often told my colleagues ‘Colleagues, leave the textbook you have in the classroom and send your kids in the library to use other books… I tried this. But I didn’t see any result.’’* (Konstantinos). Finally, Aristoteles

(Primary School D) emphasised that many times he tried to reach out to his colleagues to discuss issues relating to their teaching methods but with no result — *''I have told my colleagues many times that in some lessons we could use theatrical play. Because I have been trained on that and I could teach them how... It has never happened.''* (Aristoteles).

5.3.1b Perceiving a lack of professional support from regional policy

Many teachers in both schools (n=$^{8/16}$) reported feeling further isolated as professionals from their education consultants, which excluded them from discussions about the provision of professional support under regional policy.

At Primary School C, four out of seven teachers reported this (n=$^{4/7}$). Eleftheria and Antigone focused on the lack of education consultants being present in their professional lives. Elefteria (Primary School C) reported that she didn't even meet the education consultant in her school — *''We didn't even meet him [the education consultant] this year. He didn't exist at the school!''* (Eleftheria). Antigone (Primary School C) reported similar things, putting it at a more general level to say that the role of the education consultant in Greek schools is absent from teachers' lives — *''My superior is the counsellor, the education consultant. Never! Never did he provide any support. As the years went by and the consultant became a coordinator, you never saw him again.''* (Antigone).

Athena and Alexandra referred to the general lack of professional opportunities provided to teachers by regional policy, not just in their school. According to them, this situation leaves teachers responsible for deciding whether or not to engage in continuing professional development, which leads some teachers to choose not to pursue training throughout their careers.

Athena (Primary School C) underlined the lack of training opportunities — *''There is no training. They [teachers] are not trained anywhere... There is no proper training for teachers. It is whatever one does on his own.''* (Athena).

Alexandra (Primary School C) revealed that in Greek schools, there are teachers who, although serving for many years, do not receive continuing professional support — *''Teachers who have been in schools for many years are not trained*

correctly! And, of course, I don't charge it to the teachers, but to the competent bodies who don't organise trainings.'' (Alexandra).

At Primary School D, similar arguments were reported by teachers, with four out of nine reporting this (n=$^{4/9}$).

Konstantinos and Sofia noted the lack of education consultants being part of teachers' lives. Konstantinos (Primary School D) referred to the lack of education consultants being part of their professional lives: ''*[The role of the education consultant] It lacks this immediacy to say so. Which for me is something that is needed! It is like being in a business without having a consultant.''* (Konstantinos). Sofia (Primary School D) underlined that she would like her education consultant to come to their school every month to discuss pedagogical issues — ''*I would like him [the education consultant] to come every month to discuss pedagogical issues, learning issues.''* (Sofia).

Panagiotis and Aristoteles emphasised the lack of training provided by regional policy to support teachers professionally despite their requests for it. Panagiotis, who also served as the assistant head, revealed that it was not just the absence of the education consultant in teachers' daily lives but also the lack of training opportunities to provide them — ''*Serious training has years to be done! We ask for training... But we don't have any.''* (Panagiotis). Aristoteles reported that the lack of essential training opportunities being offered to them forced him to pay his own money to develop professionally — ''*There aren't any trainings! And what has happened is that in recent years, we also went, and we paid money to do something on our own.''* (Aristoteles).

To summarise, teachers in Primary School C and Primary School D perceived themselves as working in schools where fragmented school cultures left them feeling isolated in their classrooms (Stoll et al., 2006; Harris & Jones, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Teachers experienced this differently, with some indicating that it conflicted with how they wished to express their professionalism within their classrooms and schools (Sachs, 2005; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Additionally, teachers in both schools reported a lack of

communication with their education consultants, which excluded them from discussions on the provision of continuing professional development support (Law 4547/2018).

5.3.2 Struggling with a lack of structures to organise extracurricular projects and initiatives aimed at enhancing pupils' social and academic skills

Eleven out of sixteen participants (n=$^{11/16}$) from Primary School C and Primary School D supported the argument that they struggled to organise extracurricular projects aimed at enhancing their pupils' learning experiences.

At Primary School C, six out of seven teachers reported this (n=$^{6/7}$). Anna and Antigone referred to the lack of extracurricular activities organised in their school.

Anna (Primary School C) highlighted her lack of engagement in extracurricular projects this year with any of her colleagues, which she believed deprived pupils of learning opportunities — ‘’*Very few teachers tied up with each other and responded to things. Throughout the year, we were depriving the children of extracurricular activities… We only provided teaching to them and nothing else.*’’ (Anna).

Antigone (Primary School C) elaborated on this, leaving out the pandemic context as an excuse for their pupils' lack of extracurricular projects. Instead, she considered the lack of structures from her principal to support such initiatives — ‘’*I wanted to be able to run more extracurricular activities this year. But I didn't have the space to do so. And not because of the pandemic… But because of the school policy environment didn't provide the appropriate support so that pupils could see more things, can do different activities.*’’ (Antigone).

Athena, Eleftheria, Marianna, and Alexandra generalised this issue, perceiving significant obstacles from their principal to any initiative proposed by teachers.

Athena (Primary School C) explained this even further. She revealed that she faced barriers from the principal, even if she wanted to take her pupils to the

library and the yard, not to mention suggesting an educational excursion outside the school's territories — '*'The principal creates many problems for us. We are even thinking about taking the children to the library... to the yard, or to suggest an educational excursion, etc. She creates problems for no reason, which creates problems for you as a teacher. I cannot tremble every time I want to ask for something.*'' (Athena).

Eleftheria (Primary School C) referred to obstacles from the principal for any initiative, which, combined with the lack of proper professional communication with the teaching staff, led to depriving pupils of any extracurricular activities this school year — '*'I think there is an obstacle from the principal in this part... She always fears that something will happen, so she puts prohibitions on us. She doesn't allow us to take the initiative both for the classroom and the school... We have to limit ourselves in the classrooms with nothing in terms of out-of-class creative things.''* (Eleftheria).

Marianna elaborated more on this, referring to her being exclusively responsible for what she does in her classroom — '*'We cannot take on initiatives. She [the principal] doesn't let us organise excursions, sports activities, or anything... I cannot make many decisions. The only decisions I can make are in terms of the lessons in my classroom*.'' (Marianna).

Alexandra (Primary School C) had similar experiences. She emphasised that she felt pupils were being deprived this school year because of the principal, revealing that they only managed to offer a cultural excursion to pupils, and this after pressuring the principal — "*All the time we are depriving the children this year... We don't provide them with anything this year apart from teaching. We only managed to make an excursion. And that's because we [teachers] pushed too hard for it.*'' (Alexandra).

At Primary School D, five out of nine teachers ($n=^{5/9}$) supported this argument, although the situation appeared somewhat better.

Angelike, Panagiotis, and Aristoteles noted the absence of extracurricular projects in their school this year.

Angellike (Primary School D) emphasised how important it was for her, as a professional, to offer more to pupils than just teaching, highlighting the significance of cultures and rules in facilitating such initiatives within a school — *''Schools are not made by walls. Pupils and teachers make them... Therefore, your culture with your colleagues in a school is very important. Primarily because when there is good communication, we can deal with extra things like, e.g. extracurricular activities, and give something more to pupils than just teaching.''* (Angellike).

However, as reported by Panagiotis (Primary School D), a teacher and assistant head, there was a lack of structures and a further lack of interest from teachers in his school to engage in such projects — *''Not many extracurricular activities are done here at this school. Usually, there are two or three people who do such initiatives. They [teachers] are not negative. They don't want to get involved.''* (Panagiotis).

Indeed, Aristoteles (Primary School D) mentioned struggling to find a colleague to collaborate with on a project this year, despite his willingness to do so — *''I am not running any project this year. Last year, I found a colleague with whom we did an environmental project... But this year, I didn't find anyone interested.''* *(*Aristoteles).

Within this environment, Konstantinos and Katerina put this at a more general level, suggesting that their principal has not established structures for initiatives yet.

Konstantinos (Primary School D) revealed that he was unaware of what his colleagues were doing and whether they were working on any extracurricular project this year — *''Coordination is missing in this school. We are a big school, and I don't know, for example, what projects the 5th grade is running or whether it is running any. We don't discuss these things.''* (Konstantinos).

Katerina (Primary School D) complained about the current principal, indicating that there were more projects the school she was involved in in the past — *''I have changed four principals. The changes in personalities are not as significant as in*

their policies. That is, the school was once involved in a European programme which both teachers and pupils enjoyed.'' (Katerina).

Thus, the existence of Greek national policy regulations related to the development of extracurricular activities in Greek primary schools did not guarantee that teachers could initiate them, even if they wished to, unless the principals had established appropriate structures and cultures within their schools (Law 3699/2008/Α' 199; GG, Presidential Decree No. 79, Α' 109/01.08.2017). Teachers in these schools reported perceiving themselves as somewhat limited as professionals due to the lack of established structures, cultures, and attitudes within their schools to support such extracurricular initiatives, which they believed could benefit their pupils.

5.3.3 Experiencing a lack of clear rules governing communication between teachers and parents

Ten out of sixteen participants (n=$^{10/16}$) reported experiencing hindrances in their communication with parents, attributing this to the lack of established rules by their principals. As a result, teachers at both Primary School C and Primary School D felt vulnerable to parental interference.

At Primary School C, five out of seven teachers supported this (n=$^{5/7}$). Anna, Eleftheria, and Nikoleta perceived that their principal had not established yet clear guidelines regarding how parents could approach teachers.

Anna (Primary School C) introduced another example highlighting the lack of structures and rules for proper professional communication between parents and teachers in their school — *''A mom yelled at a teacher because she disagreed with us making an educational trip. But you have no reason, my lady, to ask us if we will make an excursion.''* (Anna).

Eleftheria (Primary School C) referred to another example — *''Once, it happened to me, a parent, to come to the principal to tell her things about one of my children. And I said, 'Whoever wants something can come and find me'. These*

things happen because the principal has encouraged them to do them. But I am the professional, and you are a parent.'' (Eleftheria).

Nikoleta (Primary School C) indicated that the absence of structures made parents a bit obsessed with their pupil scores — *''Parents come and say, 'We have a private teacher at home, we study at home, why the teacher gave us nine instead of 10?'. There, we lose the essence of learning and teaching.''* (Nikoleta).

At the same time, according to Alexandra and Athena, their principal's lack of necessary leadership skills risked the relationships they had established with their pupils' parents.

Alexandra (Primary School C) revealed that her principal tried to hinder the communication she had established with her parents — *''In many situations, I, who have an excellent relationship with my parents, believe that she [principal] puts me in front of something with parents to avoid taking the responsibility.''* (Alexandra).

Athena (Primary School C) explained that she wanted to inform the principal about an issue concerning her pupils' parents. Still, the principal's proposed response risked affecting how she, as the teacher, would be perceived by the parents — *''I brought an issue of one of my children to her [principal's] office, and I told her 'Lady [principal's name] this and that'. She asked, 'Do you want me to be in front of this too?' I said to her, 'No, I don't want you to be in front... I know how to manage it. I'd tell it to you to inform you about what is happening with me and my parents.''* (Athena).

At Primary School D, the situation was similar, with five out of nine participants reporting this (n=$^{5/9}$). Teachers attributed it to the damage caused by the previous principal to the relationships between teachers and parents, as well as the new principal's failure to establish rules due to his recent appointment.

Nikolaos (Primary School D), the new principal, expressed feeling supervised and monitored by parents. He appeared confused, not knowing how to handle parents' intrusion and to provide a clear direction to the teaching staff — *''If*

something happens, which makes sense because it is a school with many children, like kids having minor accidents, etc., in this school, they look like big issues for parents... For example, since we returned to school, I have had the impression that there are parental patrols! Which is something very annoying.'' (Nikolaos).

Sofia and Katerina reported that parents created problems in their daily professional lives.

Sofia (Primary School D) expressed her frustration with the lack of rules in her school by the principal regarding how to manage communication channels with parents — *''There are some problems in this school. Some parents create some issues believing that when they do this thing, they support their children.''* (Sofia).

Katerina (Primary School D) revealed that parents in their school sometimes cause quarrels among pupils, making their job more challenging — *''Parents in this school have a wrong view of how they can support their pupils. Whatever happens, their child is not to blame. This makes children say, 'I'll tell my mom, and this is going to happen,' or 'My dad is a lawyer, and I'll take you to court'. For me, this is a huge mistake for the parents. And ugly for children*.'' (Katerina).

At the same time, this made Konstantinos perceive a sense of prohibition, and Eleni felt like she was being monitored by her parents, with any impact this could have on them as professionals.

Konstantinos (Primary School D) expressed a sense of prohibition from the new principal, confirming both the principal's fear of parents' intrusion and of the lack of rules in his school established by his principal in communicating with parents — *''Today, for example, the principal came to the library and told me, 'The children should come because the heating in the other room was broken. And I won't risk it because the parents will pick up the phone again and tell me the children are feeling cold'. In a school, the principal's management plays a key role. Both how the school will function and how it will stand out, and how parents will be managed, etc.''* (Konstantinos).

Eleni (Primary School D) expressed a sense of being monitored by parents during breaks, which restricted her on how to act as a professional — *''Parents are quite intrusive in this school. During breaks, you feel being monitored. They want to come and observe something so they can call the principal to tell him, "I went through the school and saw that. Please do say something.' Which is not a nice thing for us. You feel being controlled, and this limits you. But also, for children.''* (Eleni).

To sum up, teachers in these schools felt vulnerable to parental interference, which they attributed to their principals' reluctance to establish clear communication rules with parents so far. This is important since some teachers suggested that this influenced their professional lives, and some others indicated that this influenced themselves as professionals (Day & Sammons, 2013; Ärlestig et al., 2016).

5.3.4 Feeling that they have limited opportunities to participate in school decisions, with their involvement mostly restricted to administrative matters

Thirteen out of sixteen participants (n=$^{12/16}$) perceived that their participation in school-related issues referred mainly to administrative-related areas, and still, their participation in this was limited. These areas were similar to those reported by participants in the two previous schools, including excursions, daily duties, and events.

At Primary School C, seven teachers reported this (n=$^{7/7}$). As Anna (Primary School C) noted, the issues ranged from excursions — ''We decided *whether we wanted to go on an excursion, etc. Simple, everyday things. We didn't have involvement in more important issues because they were not even on the table*.'' (Anna).

Or, as Eleftheria (Primary School C) elaborated, the issues could be about internal regulations of a school, daily duties, and events — *''Issues about whether to have an event, about our breaks, decisions about how to cover an*

absence of a colleague who may be absent because of an illness, decisions about who will sit at the door to open to the children. That is, issues of the school functioning… or, i.e. what we will do in a celebration.'' (Eleftheria).

Notably, many teachers expressed that their principal in their meetings tried to transfer some of her responsibilities to them.

Athena (Primary School C) introduced this, bringing her example when the principal tried to transfer responsibility to her — *''In the beginning, we argued with the principal because she wanted to give us a responsibility that is purely hers, and I could not bear to hear other teachers taking responsibilities taken by teachers while it is her responsibility*.'' (Athena).

Marianna (Primary School C) revealed another example of the principal trying to do the same again — *''She will invite us to a meeting to tell us something that she could solve on her own. For example, the principal now has to submit a document about what is in the school. She doesn't make the list alone. She now has a teacher to do it. That is, she will put someone else to do her job.''* (Marianna).

This made Alaxandra (Primary School C) express the view that teachers, rather than the principal, run the issues in their school — *''As a head, I think she avoids taking responsibility. She never knows the issues she introduces to the teachers' board… Last year, I was in another school. The difference is huge between them in terms of the school policy and the principal. There is no organisation here at the school. Teachers run all the issues.''* (Alexandra).

According to Nikoleta (Primary School C), this influenced some teachers in her school to try to transfer their responsibilities to other teachers — *''The other day, a colleague brought an issue in the teachers' board where she wanted us [teachers] to take some kids out of her classroom because they make it difficult for her to work… That is, we have lost a little bit of who makes the decisions and for what in this school.''* (Nikoleta).

Finally, as Antigone (Primary School C) underlined, the issues they discussed were never about pupils' behavioural issues, as their principal would not mediate them in their meetings — *''We never discuss for pupil's behavioural issues. While we have booming behaviours that we could have talked about. For example, a child took off the pants from another child… We have such cases, and they have not been discussed in the board.''* (Antigone).

At Primary School D, six out of nine teachers (n=$^{5/9}$) supported that their principal chose to mediate mainly administrative issues to them. They revealed that the issues they engaged in in their meetings ranged from administrative school planning at the beginning of the year to services, excursions, duties, and school celebrations.

Panagiotis (Primary School D) referred to the school planning at the start of the year regarding the division of classrooms and children — *''At the beginning of the school year, we did the general planning and the whole school's total planning. That is, we saw how we will divide the classrooms, how we will divide the children we have*.'' (Panagiotis).

Maria (Primary School D) mentioned the timetables at the start of the year because they also run the extended school programme — *''We have to deal with practical issues, e.g. with the timetables because of the extended school, that some colleagues have to go one day a week at the extended school for one semester, and some others [have to go] the other [semester].''* (Maria).

Moreover, Sofia (Primary School D) enumerated the issues they deal with during the school year, including services, excursions, duties, and school celebrations — *''For the school's operation. For example, who will be responsible for overseeing the library? Who will be responsible for school trips when we do? Or for the pharmacy and the pharmacy staff. Or the services. How often will teachers come out [in the yard]? Or for the school celebrations. Who will take over one celebration, and who the other?''* (Sofia).

Nevertheless, as Konstantinos and Aristoteles underlined, in their school, they will not discuss pupil behavioural issues or pedagogical or curriculum-related areas in their meetings.

Konstantinos reported the infrequent meetings in their school and their discussions around administrative matters — *''The principal is responsible for calling for a meeting. The regulation exists anyway from the ministry. The issue is to what extent it is implemented... We don't do meetings often. Only if something extraordinary happens, and if something arises, it'll be administrative issues mainly... E.g. asking for 50 books for the library.''* He emphasised that he would like to be able to discuss pupil's behavioural issues or pedagogical issues if the principal mediated these — *''I would like the teachers' board to be more flexible and active. For example, to speak for a child's behaviour and to judge how we will act, etc.... I repeat it, I would like there to be monthly gatherings to discuss pedagogical issues.''* (Konstantinos).

Aristoteles (Primary School D) noted that he would like, for example, if in his school, they could choose national textbooks or had a five-year plan, as he saw happen in other schools in other countries — *''We could have a selection of textbooks as they have in Portugal. I saw it in Portugal because we went there with Comenius... Teachers have had the opportunity to choose their textbooks -I remember that we had entered a large room with textbooks... They also made a five-year plan, of course. The principal was making a five-year plan. And he said, 'In the next five years, I see a school that way,' let's say. There was a stability there.''* (Aristoteles).

To sum up, teachers at Primary School C and Primary School D considered themselves somewhat limited to participate mainly in administrative-related issues. This is important because administrative areas seemed to be primarily the areas in which teachers could engage in those two schools aside from their classroom practice—an area consistently regarded as the teacher's responsibility across all four primary schools examined in this study. This is important since some teachers in those primary schools expressed their need as professionals to discuss broader areas.

To summarise, similar to the findings coming from the two previous schools, teachers in Primary School C and Primary School D identified the crucial role of their principals, being in position to influence their professional lives, moving far beyond just being the mediators of national policies, consistent with previous international studies (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020; Mausethagen & Mølstadt, 2015; Wermke & Salokangas, 2021). In those two primary schools in Greece, teachers' views on professionalism were hindered is some areas ranging from pedagogical, social, and administrative areas, manifesting in line with previous research (Harris & Jones, 2019; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

Teachers at Primary Schools C and D mainly perceived themselves as isolated in their classrooms, with some expressing a professional need for collaboration. Additionally, some felt unsupported by regional policy. They also saw their school environments as lacking structures to organise extracurricular activities, despite some expressing interest in offering such opportunities to pupils. Furthermore, teachers in these schools felt vulnerable to parental interference, which they attributed to their principals' failure to establish clear rules. Lastly, they identified themselves as professionals working in schools where meetings primarily focused on administrative matters, although some expressed a desire to engage in discussions about broader professional issues.

5.4 Summing up the key findings (Part One)

Based on the findings from thirty participants ($n=^{30}$), teachers regarded Greek central educational policy to exert only an indirect influence on their working lives in the four primary schools studied in Greece, primarily through establishing the regulatory frameworks within which they and principals operated (Constitution of Greece, 2019). Consequently, many areas—from administrative, pedagogical, to social—where teachers' perceptions of professionalism were nurtured or hindered in those schools were informed by formal regulations set

forth by Greek central educational policy (Presidential Decree 18/2018). These areas were mainly influenced by specific central rules related to administrative issues that needed to be addressed by the teachers' board in these primary schools. Central regulations also referred to the establishment of support measures for learning, social, and special needs of pupils in primary schools in Greece, as well as specific regulations about the development of extracurricular projects in these schools (Law 3699/2008/Α΄ 199; GG, Presidential Decree No. 79, A' 109/01.08.2017).

According to teachers (n=[30]), these regulations were interpreted in various ways by their principals, rather than merely being conveyed to them (Day, 2020; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020; Paradis et al., 2019). Through their mediation and translation, teachers' perceptions of professionalism were found to be influenced by principals, positively or negatively (Day & Sammons, 2013; Ärlestig et al., 2016). However, the findings from those teachers working in those four primary schools in Greece suggests that the extent of principals' influence on teachers' views of professionalism varied. Specifically, the evidence revealed that it was the teachers' own volition and motivation to decide whether and how they would enact regulations introduced by their principals at Primary Schools A and B, where collegial cultures were present. Meanwhile, at Primary Schools C and D, where fragmented cultures were present, it was not clear whether the exposure to negative influences of principals actually impacted teachers as professionals, apart from their experiences of professionalism. This finding is important as it suggests the need for further exploration in the next chapter of findings to explore whether or the extent to which principals' influence impacted teachers' perceptions of professionalism.

Another important indication is that teachers' classroom practice appeared to be within their own sphere of influence, with no data suggesting principal involvement across any of the four Greek primary schools. Furthermore, no evidence was found in any of the schools to suggest that principals provided in-school professional development opportunities, curriculum planning and

enrichment activities, or promoted teacher leadership approaches (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Muijs et al., 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2011).

This absence of evidence is unsurprising, as it may reflect the broader educational context in Greece and align with findings from numerous Greek scholarly studies on how principals in the country tend to operate (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020; Papazoglou & Koutouzis, 2022; Dimopoulos et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, this gap is significant, as it may shed light on Greek teachers' understandings of professionalism—a theme the next chapter of findings will explore.

This chapter also has limited evidence regarding the role of regional policy and especially the role of education consultants. Notably, teachers at Primary Schools A and B perceived that education consultants engaged in their professional lives only in cases of incidents of pupils' delinquent behaviour and cases where exceptional education support was needed for specific pupils (e.g., through the formation of an integration classroom or the appointment of a special education teacher). Meanwhile, teachers at Primary Schools C and D reported the absence of education consultants in their professional lives and the lack of training opportunities provided by regional educational policy despite this being part of their responsibilities (Law 4547/2018). This is important because the way education consultants functioned at the regional level—what they did and did not—might have also influenced Greek teachers' views on professionalism, as the next chapter intends to explore.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided new evidence on how primary teachers in Greece experience professionalism in their daily lives and their exposure to various influences, ranging from pedagogical and social to administrative aspects of professionalism. Teachers particularly highlighted the crucial role of their principals, who were in a position to influence their lives and professional experiences in various ways. However, the data suggest that principals' influence varied among teachers. Additionally, the chapter offered limited evidence of how

regional policy, particularly the role of education consultants, influenced teachers' lives and their experiences of professionalism—both through their actions and inaction. Finally, the chapter has provided some evidence of the indirect influence of Greek national policy, primarily through the regulations it established, which were found to be mediated to teachers by their principals.

Considering this, the next chapter will examine Greek teachers' understandings of professionalism in greater depth, focusing on specific teachers ($n=^{8}$). It will build on the insights from this chapter, particularly the varied role of principals and regional policy, as well as the indirect influence of central national policy.

Chapter 6: Findings (Part Two) – «TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM»

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter detailed the empirical evidence concerning teachers' exposure to either positive or negative influences on their views of professionalism through the way their principals mediated regulations to them based on their established school culture. It was indicated that this influence might have had varied outcomes across teachers and that it was related to specific areas (administrative, social, pedagogical). The chapter also suggested that regional policy might had not fulfilled its broader responsibilities in providing professional development support to teachers and that national policy indirectly influenced teachers' lives through accountability frameworks.

This chapter presents how teachers' personal and external influences influenced their views of professionalism (n=[8]). Specifically, it explores how teachers' biographies, experiences, and, importantly, their professional identities influenced their perceptions and how these interplayed with external factors, using the evidence of the previous chapter for the role of principals and national policy.

Consistent with the research literature, the findings revealed the importance of a teacher's identity for their professionalism, with those Greek teachers emphasising the element of 'agency'. In addition, it aligns with previous research in Greece (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou, 2013) that identified teachers' professional knowledge, responsibility, individual autonomy, care, professional development, and professional collaboration as elements of Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism. However, not all elements were shared by all teachers, and a new element was found which was not uncovered in these previous studies.

The presentation of this chapter follows the two selected teachers from each school, exploring similarities and differences between them and across the eight teachers to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of perceptions of professionalism among the teachers in this study.

6.2 Primary School A (Alexandros — Andreas)

Alexandros and Andreas were two primary school teachers in Greece, both later in their careers. They had each been at Primary School A for nearly a decade. Both teachers presented a narrow perception of professionalism. This was relevant to their professional identities, particularly the low perceived sense of agency, and the considerably varied influence from their principal and education consultant, as indicated in the previous chapter.

6.2.1 Alexandros (32 years of teaching experience)

Biography
Alexandros was a teacher in his later career phase, with 32 years of teaching experience. He began his career after graduating from a Pedagogical Academy in Greece. Initially, he worked as a substitute teacher serving a range of rural schools in North and South Greece. After a few years in these remote settings, he secured a permanent position at a small rural school in South Greece, where he taught mixed-grade classes with limited staff. Over time, Alexandros sought transfers to schools closer to his hometown in rural North Greece, eventually spending 14 years at a rural school. Finally, when a position opened, he asked for his transfer to Primary School A, an urban school in the city where he lived and served his ninth year. During his career, he upgraded his teaching qualifications by attending a two-year compulsory training for all public teachers in Greece who had graduated from Pedagogical Academies.

Table 12 Biography of Alexandros

A mixture of positive and negative influences affected his professional identity. He entered teaching primarily to secure employment (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — ‘*’I came into teaching for employment reasons, so that I could start working as soon as possible… I wanted to study something else.*”. Despite possessing significant years of teaching experience in various schools, Alexandros expressed doubts regarding his commitment to the teaching profession (Hong,

2012; Day et al., 2007) — *''I believe that at some point when I'll say that I'll retire, it may not seem bad to me... I also engage in other activities -I'm involved in sports clubs- so maybe it won't seem bad to me.''* Additionally, Alexandros expressed ambiguous job satisfaction (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Although he received satisfaction from seeing former of his pupils becoming part of society — *''I have seen children I had in the past who have finished high school, entered universities, etc.... Moreover, let me say that I see this with satisfaction*.''. However, he underlined his dissatisfaction with teachers' salaries — *''I am probably satisfied [as a teacher]. However, okay, we could have been, for example, better financially*.'' Additionally, he expressed his concern over what he can achieve as a teacher, expressing a moderate sense of self-efficacy as a professional (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Canrinus et al., 2012) — *''I would probably give a seven or an eight if I had a scale*.''.

Importantly, Alexandros communicated a particularly low sense of agency, which derived from his misconception that the accountability frameworks existent to secure consistent practices across primary teachers in Greece were, by definition, external limitations to his potential for achieving agency (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ''Only by the existence of the MoE frameworks, everyone complies with them and works within the frameworks the ministry has regulated... The way the IEP has written the textbooks is like orders... We have to comply with the ministry's framework, the regulations... When there is a regulation from the ministry, I have to implement it.'' (Alexandros).

The interplay of positive and negative influences as part of his professional identity reflected his narrow perception of professionalism. His professionalism was related to teachers' professional knowledge (Linninger et al., 2015;), responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014), individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015), care (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002), and educational beliefs (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997).

Alexandros attributed the expertise he acquired through many years of experience as a key element of his perceptions of professionalism — *''I believe that experience plays a key role. I believe that you gain the flexibility you have through experience… Because I have thirty years of previous service. I have a long professional path… I have taught all the grades. I know all the lessons from the outside… So, this helps me to do my work easily in the classroom with the schedule that I want.''*. Additionally, he considered responsibility as another element of his professionalism, feeling responsible for his pupils' learning to parents — *''I have the learning responsibility of what happens in the classroom. The basic thing lies with the teacher… The way I work is visible to parents.''*.

Another element shaping his perceptions of professionalism was individual autonomy. Nevertheless, Alexandros expressed a narrow view of it, reflecting his low sense of agency as part of his professional identity.

> He translated individual autonomy as incorporating supplementary exercises beyond the ones prescribed in the national curriculum and textbooks — ‘*''If I need to do something extra in class, I will. E.g. in grammar, while they have little things in the textbooks, we do much more in class… We always use more than what regulations suggest.''*.
>
> Moreover, he perceived autonomy as choosing to assign repetitive exercises from national textbooks to support his pupils' learning, a decision primarily guided by his expertise gained through experience as well as a solid inclination to adhere to national policies and regulations — ‘*''Many times I kept some things and taught them, although the syllabus was telling 'You need to omit them because they are repetitive'… I kept them and taught them so that pupils could better understand them. I did this from my experience. Not to commit any irregularities.''*.
>
> Alternatively, he viewed autonomy as using a projector in his class — *''I do a different teaching. E.g. at the time of the Greek language… we could open the Literature textbook and show a literature text in front of the whole class using the projector.''*.

Care for pupils in a social sense was also part of his perceptions of professionalism — *''I'll try to give as much as I can to the children, to help them. To help them so that when they finish school, they won't say, 'We had him [as our teacher], and he didn't pay attention to us, and he didn't do that for us.' Have a 'good morning,' a 'good evening' with them. As it should be.''*. This was followed by his need as a professional to develop pupils academically and behaviourally based on their educational beliefs and values — *''A classroom must not only develop pupils academically but also in terms of their behaviour.''*.

Notably, despite what has been written in the literature on the importance of professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013; Avalos, 2011) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021; Johnson, 2003), these aspects were not part of his views on professionalism, which seems to be related to the varied influence of school and regional policy, as reported in the previous chapter.

In particular, he perceived continuing professional development as something he would do only if his superiors offered it and demanded it of him. As something, other teachers do to secure a better working position rather than by the need to become better professionals — *''When it would be necessary to be retrained, and they demand it of me, I will do it. To learn, e.g. some things more... But, mostly, getting more qualifications aims in not being in the classroom. When he becomes a principal, he takes fewer lessons.''*. This is important, as it suggests that the lack of professional development opportunities provided by his principal and his education consultant -something that may be linked to broader influences within the Greek education context- indirectly shaped his perception of professional development as part of his views on professionalism.

Importantly, Alexandros did not include professional collaboration in his perceptions of professionalism, even though (See the previous chapter) he reported collaborating with some of his colleagues. This highlights the varied influence of principals on teachers' views on professionalism. It also suggests a potential lack of proper structures established by his principal for professional collaboration. As teachers revealed in the previous chapter, collaboration was

left to individual teachers' motivation and inclination, including decisions on how and with whom to collaborate.

In conclusion, the varied direct and indirect influences from school and regional policy, through what they did and did not, combined with the mixed influences on his professional identity, with a particularly low sense of agency -through the way he perceived national policy's regulations- contributed to Alexandros's narrow view of professionalism.

6.2.2 Andreas (26 years of teaching experience)

Biography
Andreas, a teacher with 26 years of experience, spent much of his career in rural areas of Greece. After graduating from a Pedagogical Academy, he began as a substitute teacher in small rural schools in North and South Greece, where he observed varying levels of parental involvement and encountered challenging teaching conditions. His most difficult experience occurred at a remote school on a large island in South Greece, where he taught under disadvantaged circumstances. After this, Andreas sought a transfer closer to his hometown in North Greece, working for eleven years in small rural schools. He then moved to another rural region where he faced difficulties with pupils' parents again. After a year, Andreas asked for his transfer to Primary School A, a school in his hometown and a school where his father had previously served as a principal. He served his tenth year as a primary teacher and an assistant head. Regarding his qualifications, Andreas, like Alexandros, undertook the compulsory two-year training programme to equalise his degree to that of a university class degree.

Table 13 Biography of Andreas

Like Alexandros, Andreas expressed a mixture of positive and negative influences that affected his professional identity. Although Andreas had an intrinsic motivation that drove him to pursue a career in teaching (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — ''*I grew up in a family of teachers, and I loved all this daily routine that existed with the children at school, and the preparation at home… So, I became a teacher because I liked this thing''*, and after accumulating numerous years of teaching experience, he remained committed to teaching (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — ''*I remain very happy and completely committed because I chose this*

profession. I couldn't imagine my life differently… So, nothing has changed since the day I came into teaching.''. However, Andreas revealed his dissatisfaction with how people in Greece perceive teachers (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — *''Still, our society considers us as 'nothing'! They do not treat us as professionals. You are just 'a teacher'.''*. Even more, Andreas expressed his concerns over his sense of self-efficacy, questioning whether his teaching methods meet the needs of his pupils (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) — '*'I don't feel that I am offering to children what should have been offered to them in terms of education, knowledge… We teach in a traditional way of teaching.''*.

Notably, and similar to Alexandros, Andreas revealed a particularly low sense of agency, derived from his misconception that the accountability mechanisms coming from Greek national educational policy served as constraints to his potential for achieving agency (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ''I feel that I don't have the agency I would like. Moreover, the one I have, I have it because I demand my way of behaviour and with my work… The textbooks are pre-determined by the MoE… Furthermore, the syllabus must be taught to a certain point within a certain period… This 30% is not enough. He [the teacher] wants a higher percentage and greater flexibility by the central education policy… If the national policy gives me the agency, I'll be able to deal with more things.'' (Andreas).

The combination of positive and negative influences shaping Andreas's professional identity was reflected in his narrow understanding of professionalism, an understanding closely aligned with the views of Alexandros. His opinions on professionalism concerned with the expertise he acquired through professional experience (Linninger et al., 2015; Hopmann, 2003), responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014), individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015), care (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002), and educational beliefs (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997).

He revealed that teachers' professional knowledge acquired through professional experience was a core element of his perceptions on professionalism — *''The potential I have… I have it because I demand it in my way of life and my work… Some new colleagues come and are 'spaced out'. They don't have the 'ease' I have because I've been a teacher for 25 years…. So, it is based on experience.''*. Furthermore, Andreas perceived a sense of responsibility to many stakeholders involved in his pupil's learning — *''[I am responsible] to the school principal, to colleagues who come in, to parents, and finally to children.''*.

Individual autonomy was another aspect of his perceptions of professionalism. Nevertheless, like Alexandros, Andreas perceived it narrowly, partly influenced by his low sense of agency as part of his identity.

> In particular, Andreas translated individual autonomy as managing classroom conditions — *''I would like to have more autonomy to manage my classroom with different conditions. For example, I would like to take my children and go to the park to do a lesson without asking for permission. Or I would like to tell the children, 'Are you tired? Okay, let us go out for a break now in the yard.''*.
>
> He additionally perceived autonomy as the practice of combining units, but only in specific subjects. Thus, his approach unintentionally resulted in the categorisation of subjects and revealed a limited understanding of autonomy as merely the act of combining units — *e.g. In religious studies, a one-hour weekly lesson, I can do two to three units together… It can be done there. However, in the more 'important' subjects, it's very difficult.''*.
>
> He finally viewed individual autonomy as using materials he had prepared, which might have indicated high agency if he had not revealed that not strictly following the school textbook makes it difficult for him as a professional — *''There is a textbook in Maths in the 5th grade, that is hard to understand in some units. I can't understand it myself… So, I don't use it for all units. I use other materials I have made to do my job properly…*

However, it affects me too much when I can't use the textbooks exactly as they are.''.

Importantly, Andreas revealed that teachers in Greece do enjoy individual autonomy in their work. Nevertheless, he suggested that teachers in Greece exercise their individual autonomy in diverse ways, noting that stakeholders surrounding their professional experiences generally show little engagement in what teachers do in their classrooms

— ''In that part, we have an 'anarchy'. That means that everyone decides whatever teaching method he wants. Some use the teacher-centred, others the pupil-centred, etc. But.. it is not that I am choosing whatever I want because I am free to choose whatever I want. I choose two or three things because I don't know whether there are other [teaching approaches]... It is not that I know that someone has taught me five to six teaching methods, and I have to choose one from these. It is that I am going to school, and I am using whatever I see in front of me.'' (Andreas).

In addition to these elements, Andreas, much like Alexandros, cares about pupils in a social sense, which was also part of his perceptions of professionalism — *''To wake up in the morning or sleep at night, feeling excited to come to school the next day... Shortly, it would be an absolute success for me [the children] to be able to put into practice everything I teach them''*, as well as the need to transmit moral and social values arising from his educational beliefs — '*'A teacher is never going to be a 'cold' professional. His very nature does not leave him... The teacher should be more... to play roles. The friend, the father, etc.''.*

It is important to note that, similar to Alexandros, Andreas did not regard professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013; Avalos, 2011) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021; Johnson, 2003) as significant aspects of professionalism. This may again be related to the varied influence of school and regional policy, as reported in the previous chapter.

Particularly, Andreas perceived teachers who undertake development opportunities in Greece as teachers who wanted to move to higher positions rather than as a way to become better as professionals — '*'If a teacher wants by himself to be developed, in most cases, he does that only to collect some appropriate 'certificates' which he will use to progress in a higher level of positions within the educational community... That means continuous training is mainly not used in the teaching process but for progressing to higher positions outside the classroom*.''. Speaking of himself, he underlined that he chose not to spend money to develop professionally, as he would like this to be offered to him, indirectly confirming what was reported in the previous chapter of findings, that teachers are not provided either in-school development opportunities and continuous training from their education consultants at regional level (See the previous chapter) — *''I chose not to pay money to become better for the company I work for! I want the company to tell me, 'Come here; since you work for me and do a good job, I would like to offer you that'. That is, let them offer it to me.''*.

At the same time, Andreas' views on professionalism did not include professional collaboration, even though, similar to Alexandros, he did collaborate with some of his colleagues (See the previous chapter). This indicates a lack of structured support for collaboration in his school, making it reliant on individual willingness to work together, which has influenced his perspective on professional collaboration.

To summarise, the varied influence of school and regional policy, together with the mixed influences on his professional identity and a particularly low sense of agency -through how he viewed regulations- contributed to Andreas's narrow understanding of professionalism.

6.2.3 Summary of Alexandros – Andreas

These teachers experienced a mixture of influences on their professional identities, with a particularly low perceived sense of agency as professionals related to how they viewed national policy frameworks. This, combined with the varied influences of school and regional policy, as presented in the previous

chapter, contributed to their narrow views of professionalism. It is also important to note that both teachers regarded individual autonomy as an element of their perceptions of professionalism but in a similarly narrow manner marked by their low sense of agency as part of their professional identities.

6.3 Primary School B (Demetra — Thalia)

Demetra and Thalia were also in the later phase of their careers, having worked at Primary School B for over ten years. Unlike the previous teachers, they expressed a broader view of professionalism. This was related to the positive influences from their professional identities, a particularly high sense of agency as professionals, and the varied influence of principals and regional policy.

6.3.1 Demetra (24 years of teaching experience)

Biography

With 24 years of diverse teaching experience, Demetra began her career after graduating from a Pedagogical Academy. Her early years included substitute teaching positions in small urban and rural schools across North Greece, where she quickly formed strong bonds with her pupils and discovered a passion for the arts, even organising her first exhibition of children's drawings. After several short-term positions, she was permanently appointed to a school on an island near Athens before being transferred back to North Greece to be closer to home. There, she taught in various rural schools and was seconded for five years to a university, assisting in teacher training programmes. Demetra also spent a year teaching in an Experimental school associated with a university before settling into two urban schools in her city. She has now been at Primary School B for thirteen years. Throughout her career, Demetra continued her professional development, equalising her degree, obtaining a master's degree in education, and recently earning a PhD.

Table 143 Biography of Demetra

Demetra shared only positive influences on her professional identity. When Demetra was accepted into the Pedagogical Academy, she was unsure about her choice. Nevertheless, since she started studying there and engaging with

readings, she understood that she had made the right choice (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — *''Well. At first, I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a teacher when I went to the university. But through the readings, especially personal engagement with pedagogical books, etc.... I started to like the profession.''*. After accumulating those years of teaching experience, her professional identity was firmly committed (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — *''I can say that every year I feel that I give as much as I can. I still like teaching, I like it very much, and I find it very interesting. And I want to do things. That is, I am not tired over time, mentally or physically. I find it very interesting to be a teacher, and I would say that I am even more motivated now.*''. She received job satisfaction from her work in her interaction with pupils (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) — *"I like my profession because of this interaction with the kids. It is something that keeps you alive. There is something fresh in the daily contact with the children.''*. Similarly, she trusted her potential as a teacher, expressing her sense of self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Canrinus et al., 2012) — *''Yes, I trust my potential... I think my teaching works... In other words, you see gradually that there is a change in the attitude of pupils in the way they approach learning.''*.

At the same time, in contrast to previous teachers, she perceived a high sense of agency in her work, perceiving national policy's regulations as just the framework of her work, which she could use in various ways based on her professional judgment (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ''There is this 30% in every subject where you can do some projects. That is, they give you this choice as well. Besides, you can achieve the learning goals in other ways... We don't have any restrictions from the principal or the counsellor. As long as the curriculum is covered, everything is fine.'' (Demetra).

The positive influences from her identity led Demetra to present a broader view of perceptions of professionalism. These included teachers' professional knowledge (Linninger et al., 2015; Hopmann, 2003); responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014); individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015); care

(O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002); educational beliefs (Schutz et. al., 2020; Bandura, 1997). But, unlike previous teachers, they also included a commitment to professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et., 2013) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et. al., 2021; Day et al., 2007; Stoll et al., 2006), together with reflection (Schön, 2017; Zeichner & Liston, 2013), and a passion for teaching (Day, 2009).

Particularly, Demetra valued teachers' professional knowledge acquired through formal training and experience — ‘*''As a teacher, you have the scientific training and the required experience to be able to decide on things that are in the best interest of their kids.''* Moreover, she considered herself responsible for her pupil's learning too many stakeholders — ‘'We are responsible to parents, colleagues, the principal, etc. Through our daily attitude and presence at school, to what extent as a teacher, you are cooperative, willing to discuss various problems that arise, etc.'' (Demetra).

She also valued individual autonomy as part of her perceptions of professionalism. Dissimilar to previous teachers from Primary School A, her perceptions presented a broader view of individual autonomy, reflecting her high sense of agency as part of her identity.

> She perceived autonomy as ensuring the inclusion of all pupils in the learning process and in creating materials to support her pupils' needs — ‘*''We could start with the textbook and read the text with comprehension questions where I always try to involve as many children as possible... Or apart from the grammar exercises that the textbook has, I could have added some of my own.... which I thought were closer to the pupils' needs.''*.
>
> Furthermore, she viewed individual autonomy as developing projects based on the national textbook's themes and her pupil's interests, moving beyond what the national textbooks had to offer — ‘*''Most of the time, I start with the theme of the textbook and along the way with what the*

children have in their minds so that we can carry out a project. Because this needs always to agree with what the children want, and we would combine it with something else that the textbook doesn't have.''.

Finally, she perceived autonomy as using teamwork and projects as her teaching methods, considering that these methods would provide essential skills for her pupils in the future and cultivate their critical thinking — ''*I see that teamwork works better, and the children come in more contact with each other. They learn to cooperate essentially. Especially when I give them distinct roles within the teams... I believe in these methods [projects and teamwork] because they cultivate critical thinking and open the children's horizons. It leads them to realise some issues when they are investigated in depth.''*.

Notably, Demetra, like Andreas, reported that teachers in Greece enjoy individual autonomy. However, she highlighted an important aspect: teachers in Greece utilise this autonomy without engaging other stakeholders in the process. She particularly emphasised the role of the education consultant, noting that, in her 24 years of experience, she had never observed an education consultant monitoring the methods teachers employ to cover the curriculum.

— ''Every teacher, I would say, applies methods as he estimates that he can do the lesson... He [the counsellor] may see if the curriculum has been covered. However, let me tell you that he won't check whether you achieved it with a project at 30%, etc., and 70% using other methods. I have not seen this in my life. I have never heard of a counsellor checking what methods one used to cover the curriculum and how much of the goals have been achieved.'' (Demetra).

Another aspect of her perceptions on professionalism was care for meeting her pupils' needs — ''*To what extent you believe in the positive outcomes of these things that you are doing on pupils.... I build on what the children bring into the classroom. And we try every time for the best possible result. factors also play a big role in this... Like the background and socio-economic status of the children. The conditions in which they grow up and live. This plays a vital role.''*. This was

accompanied by her educational beliefs and values, which informed her actions — ‘’*Basically, what I want, and I try very hard to achieve with the pupils daily is the critical dimension of teaching… in the sense of critical thinking generally, of leading to reflections.*’’.

Beyond that, unlike previous teachers, Demetra expressed her commitment to professional development, driven by her inclination and interests — *’’The teacher needs to be professionally informed, to have some readings. To know what he is doing and why he is doing it. The various readings and various things I engaged with, like theatre, films, etc., have contributed to my teaching.’’* This is important because it suggests that her high sense of agency was potentially related to her need to pursue continuouing professional development independently, even though it was not offered to her at her school by the principal or at the regional level by the education consultant.

In addition, unlike previous teachers, she expressed a strong belief in essential professional collaboration, which was already evident in what she reported in the previous chapter (See the previous chapter) — *’’I am by nature a cooperative person. So when I do something, I want to find allies and share my practice, as with Thalia. We have made a very nice team together. But also other colleagues in the school. So, something that I know and see that the other will accept is something I will share. The same applies to me. I will accept someone else’s idea and follow it within the framework of cooperation.*’’.

Furthermore, she considered reflection, another key element in the research literature, an essential component of her views on professionalism — ‘’For example, I’ll evaluate their cognitive performance and *consistency. But, in general, I don’t evaluate only the cognitive part. It is a series of other parameters that I take into account. Let us say the children who are behind or who experience difficulty, etc. I will try to help them.*’’. This was followed by a strong passion for the areas she engages with through her teaching — *’’And then, it is the love for the subject area that he is interested in engaging with his pupils…For example, I deal with films and the effects they have on children through various themes.*’’.

Thus, the positive influences on her professional identity, particularly her high sense of agency, enabled her to navigate her professional roles and express a broader view of professionalism, confirming the varied influence of school and regional policy and the indirect influence of national policy.

6.3.2 Thalia (26 years of teaching experience)

Biography
Thalia, a later-career teacher with 26 years of experience, began her career after graduating from the Pedagogical Academy. Her early career included a year at an Experimental School in a remote area of North-West Greece, followed by two years of unemployment. She then worked in another remote rural location in North-East Greece before securing a permanent position on an island in Greece. After a year, she transferred to a larger school in an industrial area of North Central Greece and later spent ten years teaching at a large rural school in North Greece, where she worked with disadvantaged pupils. During this time, Thalia was accepted into a university to pursue a four-year degree in education while continuing her teaching role. After graduating, she spent a year at a large rural school closer to her city before finally moving to Primary School B, where she taught for eleven years.

Table 15 Biography of Thalia

This rich biography was reflected in the professional identity Thalia presented, similar to that of Demetra but dissimilar to that of Alexandros and Andreas from Primary School A. Although, at first, she entered the teaching profession by chance rather than through intrinsic motivation (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — *"I came into teaching by chance. Yes, this is a fact. I wanted to become an archaeologist... I didn't choose it. It chose me",* soon after being a teacher she became motivated and deeply committed (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — *''I am so motivated! I often think we are doing the most beautiful profession in the world. We have to deal with souls... they are waiting for someone to help them, to see maybe the world with other eyes, for someone to guide them*.''. The job satisfaction she perceived was derived from observing the small changes in her pupils' personalities (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) — *''I think that seeing your pupils come after years to meet you again, having made a small change in their lives with encouragement, a strengthening of their personality, to*

show them that everyone can do everything as long as they try.'' Additionally, Thalia trusted her abilities, expressing her sense of self-efficacy as a professional (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Canrinus et al., 2012) — *''I think, to a certain extent, that I am achieving my goals.''*.

At the same time, she acknowledged her high sense of agency as a professional, perceiving national policy's regulations as a guiding framework for her work, similar to her colleague, Demetra, but dissimilar to previous teachers from Primary School A (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ''The MoE gives teachers textbooks that provide detailed guidance for every subject. However, from there on, how you deal with the textbooks is another story entirely. I don't read teachers' textbooks. I might refer back to them whenever needed, but I can't say that teachers' textbooks contribute to my teaching… Many times, I also work on other textbooks. In any case, the law gives us a 30% to be able to change textbooks and put in some of our texts as long as the learning objectives of the subject are covered.'' (Thalia).

Thalia's professional identity was reflected in the broader elements of professionalism she expressed, similar to her colleague, Demetra, but dissimilar to teachers at Primary School A, Alexandros and Andreas. These included teachers' professional knowledge (Linninger et al., 2015; Hopmann, 2003); responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014); individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015); care (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002); educational beliefs (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997). In addition, a commitment to professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021; Johnson, 2003; Stoll et al., 2006), together with reflection (Schön, 2017; Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

She recognised the importance of teachers' professional knowledge, yet she challenged the argument that expertise solely from experience can contribute to

professionalism — *''Experience is not everything. It does not mean that just because you have been a teacher for 30 years, you are a good teacher.''* Additionally, she prioritised being responsible for her pupils' learning to them and their parents — ''I want to inform the principal and parents about the progress of the pupils... Especially for parents, it is a good thing always to be informed... I believe that if you do your job properly, everyone will recognise it, both the principal and parents.'' (Thalia).

Moreover, she regarded individual autonomy as another aspect of her perceptions of professionalism. Dissimilar to teachers at Primary School A but similar to her colleague Thalia, Demetra's view of autonomy reflected her high sense of agency as part of her identity.

> She translated her individual autonomy as surpassing the boundaries of the prescribed curriculum and integrating interdisciplinary elements into her teaching — *''The teacher can be interdisciplinary. Well, now, I see everything cross-disciplinary. It is hard. Anyway, what I believe is that knowledge is one. We fragment it into cognitive goals.''*
>
> Additionally, she viewed autonomy as fostering a meaningful and holistic learning environment that catered to her pupils' emotional and academic needs, which she tried to do using films in her teaching — *''I use films a lot in my teaching. Through films, we can get their messages out... For example, the other day, we watched [a] movie where there was a child with learning difficulties, and it showed that a teacher's persistence and interest led the child to a different path. I believe this movie helped one of my pupils change her perspective. As well as it changed the attitude of the rest of the children toward this child. I believe it happened.''*.
>
> Finally, for her, individual autonomy was also perceived as embracing teaching approaches that were more responsive to the needs and interests of her pupils, indicating care for pupil's needs — *''I had children who didn't attach much importance to the typical teacher-centred teaching method, and through teamwork, other possibilities emerged that*

the children had, and I hadn't discovered them... So, we use much teamwork in the classroom.''.

In particular, Thalia, like Andreas and Demetra, commented that in Greece, teachers do enjoy individual autonomy in their work. Nevertheless, she also suggested that different teachers use this space of autonomy differently, leading to variations in their classroom practices. This, once again, signals the lack of proper monitoring or support for teachers' practices within these spaces of autonomy

— ''The teaching methods lie upon the teacher himself... On the one hand, there is 'the visionary teacher' who wants to move forward, e.g. in terms of scientific training, etc. Moreover, there is the teacher, 'the public servant', who is not very interested in becoming better.... Many teachers think that they are the 'leaders' of their classrooms, that no one is above them and that no one knows the best way rather than them.'' (Thalia).

In addition, Thalia's views on professionalism extended beyond simply caring for her pupils' needs, emphasising the importance of addressing those needs — ''*If you listen to the children, taking a systemic approach, there are many things that you discover... You have to be patient to sit down and discuss things. To listen to their needs... Of course, it is necessary to have a plan. To know what you want to do this year. Have something in mind and believe that this will help the children.''.* She also articulated that her work reflects her educational beliefs and values of transmitting social justice values to pupils through her teaching — ''*What I want the children to gain is self-confidence and empathy, to be able to talk about their beliefs, to be able to claim their rights. I am on the side of social justice through education.''.*

Beyond these elements, similar to her colleague Demetra but unlike the teachers at Primary School A, Thalia expressed a commitment to continuing professional development — ''*What I know from my professional career path is that we must always be informed about everything. I am talking about sound knowledge. That is, you need knowledge of psychology, social sciences, etc. Speaking of myself, I*

have never stopped reading. So, it wants interest, and it wants constant development.''. This is important because she independently took steps to stay up to date as a professional, even though such opportunities were not provided at the school or regional level. Once again, this suggests that her strong sense of agency was closely linked to her initiative in pursuing professional development on her own.

Moreover, similar to her colleague Demetra and unlike teachers at Primary School A, she viewed professional collaboration as a means to enhance her skills, a perspective that was also evident in the previous chapter (See the previous chapter) — *''I have such a relationship with a couple of colleagues that we can prepare a lesson and say 'Look what I found. If you want, you can take it,' and the other person takes it with his eyes closed. It is like he was thinking of doing it himself... My collaboration with Demetra started many years ago. I am fortunate to have met her... I learned about films and how to combine them with literature from her. I owe so many things to her for my teaching.''*.

Finally, similar to her colleague but unlike previous teachers, she highlighted the necessity of reflection in her professional practice — ''*Of course, it takes time for all this to happen. It would be best if you thought about the subject. It needs further readings. That is, even if you say, 'Well, I won't teach that target, I will change it.' Okay. What will you do instead of that? In other words, you should be aware of the general context of the subjects.''*.

Thus, Thalia's positive personal influences, stemming from her professional identity and particularly high sense of agency, reinforced her broad view of professionalism. At the same time, her experiences further confirm the varied influence of school and regional policy on teachers' understandings of professionalism.

6.3.3 Summary of Demetra — Thalia

The evidence of this pair identified positive outcomes from the varied school and regional influence in their case, partly because of their professional identities

and a high sense of agency. Nevertheless, comparing the evidence from Demetra and Thalia to that of teachers at Primary School A suggests that because of the varied influence of school and regional policy and that teachers were led to draw on personal influences, this could lead to either positive or negative outcomes. In addition, the findings so far emphasise that teachers across these schools emphasised the importance of the element of agency as part of their identities. Unlike previous teachers, Demetra and Thalia, who perceived high agency, this was reflected in how they viewed individual autonomy. Moreover, it was reflected in their initiative to take measures for their continuing professional development, considering that the school or regional policy did not offer such opportunities. Finally, evidence from Demetra and Thalia, much like Andreas from Primary School A, suggests that these teachers enjoyed individual autonomy. However, they also highlighted the lack of proper monitoring or support within this space of autonomy.

6.4 Primary School C (Antigone — Athena)

Antigone and Athena were primary school teachers, with Antigone in the early phase of her career and Athena in her mid-career phase. They had both been teaching at Primary School C for nearly a year. Their perceptions of professionalism aligned with a broader view, similar to Demetra and Thalia from Primary School B, but differed from those of Alexandros and Andreas, teachers from Primary School A. Their professionalism was closely tied to their professional identities, particularly perceiving a high sense of agency and the varied influence of school and regional policy, as indicated in the previous chapter.

6.4.1 Antigone (5 years of teaching experience)

Biography

Antigone, an early-career teacher with five years of experience, began her career after graduating from a School of Education in Greece. Initially, she worked at a large private school in North Greece while awaiting her appointment as a substitute teacher. At the private school, which served over 600 pupils with eighteen primary teachers, she taught fourth and fifth grades.

Finally, after some years of waiting, she was appointed as a public primary school teacher at Primary School C, located on a remote island in Southeast Greece. Concerning her qualifications, she holds a master's degree in special education and is studying for her second master's degree in educational psychology.

Table 16 Biography of Antigone

Antigone's had only positive influences from her professional identity. From an early stage in her life, Antigone possessed a deep intrinsic motivation to pursue a career in teaching (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — ‘*''It is the profession I dreamed of as a child. I wanted to be a teacher from a young age. So, it was a choice due to intrinsic interests.''.* As the years passed, she grew increasingly committed to her teacher role (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — ‘*''I think that, as time goes by, I get even more excited about my profession. As I get to know more pupils and explore more grades… it helps me to get to know more of my limits every time. And to discover new things in practice. So, I think it excites me even more.''.* She received job satisfaction from the results she viewed in her pupils (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) — *''I think my enthusiasm comes from the results and the impact of my teaching I see in children depending on what we do'',* and perceived a growing sense of self-efficacy as an early-career teacher, feeling more competent with each passing year (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Canrinus, et. al., 2012) — *''I think that every year I see a difference in my pupils. Regardless of where I worked, each year I felt more confident about what I could do.''.*

Notably, she perceived a high agency in her work as a teacher, acknowledging that she could exercise her professional judgment, similar to Demetra and Thalia from Primary School B, yet dissimilar to teachers from Primary School A, Alexandros and Andreas. More than that, she considered that accountability mechanisms were necessary because, without these frameworks, not all teachers would be able to provide quality education to pupils (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ''The school textbooks come from the MoE. However, there is also the potential to take our path, to choose what exactly we want to teach from school

textbooks…In general, I think there should be a potential for teachers to exercise their judgment, but I don't think that all teachers are on the same wavelength to adapt the regulations to their pupils' needs or to do their best for children. That is why I think 70% of the curriculum exists. So, I wouldn't change anything to this 70% – 30%'' (Antigone).

Antigone's professional identity was evident in the broader elements of professionalism she expressed, similar to those of Demetra and Thalia from Primary School B but dissimilar to those of Alexandros and Andreas from Primary School A. Her elements were related to teachers' professional knowledge (Linninger et al., 2015; Hopmann, 2003), responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014), individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015); care (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002); educational beliefs (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997). In addition, a commitment to professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021; Johnson, 2003; Day et al., 2007), together with reflection (Schön, 2017; Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

She valued the knowledge and expertise acquired through professional practice — *''I think every year is different, regardless of where I worked. I felt the most confident about what I could do. And I felt like I needed it. Finally, every year, the experience of previous years is needed… I think you learn every year.''* Moreover, she considered herself responsible for her pupil's learning to parents and the principal — ''I mainly have to inform parents of my pupil's progress. Parents should have a picture of them to have an idea of what the child has, what his possibilities are… And the principal needs to know things about pupils' performance.'' (Antigone).

At the same time, Antigone considered individual autonomy another element of her views on professionalism, expressing a broader view similar to that of Demetra and Thalia but dissimilar to that of teachers from Primary School A. Like previous teachers, the way she viewed autonomy was related to her professional identity, reflecting a high sense of agency.

She translated individual autonomy as adjusting her teaching methods and plan to cater to the specific needs of her pupils, emphasising pupil engagement — *''I use a pupil-centred approach in the sense that when I know that something I have to teach them won't be a pleasure for them, e.g. the fractions… I tried to make things happen at a moment when they wanted it. In other words, I changed the teaching plan and the teaching hours.''*.

Additionally, she perceived autonomy as adjusting the teaching plan to pupil's needs over strict adherence to the prescribed teaching hours in the national curriculum — ''*I may not follow the teaching hours that the curriculum suggests for each lesson. Each time I adjust my teaching plan according to what I feel would work better in my classroom… I wouldn't oppress the pupils and plan to be covered in two hours. Plus, I achieved the learning goals, and I covered the targets. I cover the curriculum anyway.''*.

Finally, she viewed autonomy as using broader teaching methods — ''*Many times lately. It has happened that everyone undertakes, prepares, and presents something. They show me something related to a phenomenon in a lesson, and then we move on to the textbook. We see how the phenomenon, the rule, etc., is presented. Then, we do consolidation exercises.''*.

Interestingly, similar to Andreas, Demetra, and Thalia, Antigone commented that Greek teachers enjoy individual autonomy. However, she also emphasised that no stakeholders are meaningfully involved in overseeing their practices in the classroom

— ''I think that each of us has the potential to shape his teaching approach and manage his classroom… according to what he knows, the [academic] level of his class, and the needs of his pupils… I don't think there is any special monitoring of how teachers work… No one comes to check us if we covered the curriculum or how we did it.'' (Antigone).

Moreover, Antigone expressed that everything she does, she does it to meet the needs of her pupils, reflecting her perceptions of deep care for them — *''I shape my methods according to what is most well-received by pupils, what will make them engage more in the classroom and, of course, what can I support better as a teacher.''*. Additionally, her perceptions included her intrinsic need to integrate her core beliefs and values into her work, maximising each pupil's potential both socially and academically — *''My goal for every kid is to reach an even better point from which they were before. And beyond that, the ideal result for me is to achieve a teamworking classroom. Children who love each other and there is respect for each other.''*.

Beyond these elements, Antigone's perceptions included professional development, professional collaboration, and reflection, much like teachers at Primary School B.

She perceived that various training and continuing professional development were aspects of her perceptions of professionalism — *''I think that as the years go by, we, early teachers, have more degrees, masters, specialisations. And that has helped in our work. It is extra knowledge that we try to apply.''*. This is important since, again, Antigone, similar to teachers at Primary School B, took the initiative to undertake professional development, considering it an important element of her perceptions of professionalism.

In addition, she valued professional collaboration with colleagues, as did Demetra and Thalia — *''I like sharing things. When something is successful, and I think it will help someone, I share it as I want someone to do with me. He shared something with me that he thinks can help me''*, and with parents — *''Parents, those who are behind the children can also help so that there is a better climate at school and in the classroom and everything is functional.''*. This is also important because Antigone was in a school where professional collaboration was not promoted, either formally through structures or informally through culture. Yet, she still considered it an important aspect of professionalism, demonstrating her independent understanding of professionalism.

A final element of her perceptions of professionalism was reflection, expressing a view similar to those described by teachers at Primary School B, Demetra and Thalia, commenting that reflection contributed to how she worked — ''*To get into the process of discovering the children, you need to devote a lot of your time. When you have a break at school, you'll need to observe pupils to see how they move and what they like. When you are at home, you'll need to spend time looking for activities depending on the children you have.*''. Thus, again, Antigone expressed her interest and engagement in discovering her children to understand their needs independently.

Therefore, the positive influences from Antigone's identity, particularly her high sense of agency, shaped her broader view of professionalism. This happened even if she worked within a fragmented school culture that exposed her to negative professional influences.

6.4.2 Athena (10 years of teaching experience)

Biography
Athena, a mid-career teacher with ten years of experience, initially worked outside education as a saleswoman in a bookstore after graduating from a School of Education. She later joined a private school in Athens, awaiting her appointment as a substitute teacher by the Greek central policy. After a five-year wait, she was appointed as a substitute teacher, first working as an integration class teacher in her hometown. She then spent some years working with disadvantaged pupils in different schools and served as a parallel support teacher to pupils with special needs in Athens. She worked at Primary School C this school year, in her first year of working there. During these years, she also acquired two master's degrees, one in special education and one in school counselling.

Table 17 Biography of Athena

Athena had positive influences from her identity. She had an intrinsic motivation to pursue a career in teaching (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — ''*To be completely honest, it is something that has always resided within me. Even during my school days, I couldn't envision myself doing anything else, I had a deep-rooted desire to become a teacher.*''. She regarded the teaching profession as a significant

vocation, showcasing her commitment (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — ‘*’Along the way, I realised that I cannot live without it. Because the children are another world. Every day is beautiful; it is creative. Moreover, it is also a world you can build… It is a vocation. It is not a profession.’’*. She received job satisfaction from her interactions with her pupils, an experience she found incomparable to anything related to her profession (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) — ‘*’There is nothing else in education apart from pupils—neither financial gains nor professional recognition or such things. There is nothing other than the love of children and the love for children.’’.* Moreover, she firmly believed in herself as a professional, fuelled by the motivation she observed in her pupils to learn (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Canrinus et al., 2012) — *‘’I believe in myself to a great extent… I trust myself.’’*.

Importantly, Athena perceived a high sense of agency as a professional, similar to Antigone from her school and Demetra and Thalia from Primary School B, but dissimilar to teachers from Primary School A, Alexandros and Andreas (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ‘’Textbooks sometimes limit me, but sometimes they give me ideas. It limits me when the textbook suggests that a two-page Maths lesson could be covered in 45 minutes… But on the other hand, the teacher's textbook has very nice ideas. So, I can't tell you whether the textbook is good or bad. It is how you use it… I’ll do what I want. I'll say what I want to my children in my class. I’ll find the way and the time to do what I want.’’ (Athena).

Additionally, similar to Antigone, she highlighted the need for accountability mechanisms in their work. She referred to a personal example where her pupils were behind academically because their previous teacher did not cover the national curriculum, a result of the lack of proper monitoring mechanisms of teachers’ practices within the Greek education system

— ‘’It has happened to me that the previous teacher of my children didn’t cover the amount of the curriculum needed and pupils fell behind in some areas. So, you can do whatever you want within this education system. However, next year,

when your children will go to the next grade, some things will be considered given, not only academically, but generally.''(Athena).

Her professional identity was evident in Athena's broader elements of professionalism, similar to those expressed by Antigone, Demetra, and Thalia, yet dissimilar to that of teachers at Primary School A. Athena's elements were related to: teachers' professional knowledge (Linninger et al., 2015; Hopmann, 2003), responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014); individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015); care (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002); educational beliefs (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997). In addition, a commitment to professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021; Johnson, 2003; Day et al., 2007), together with reflection (Schön, 2017; Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

In particular, Athena considered professional experience an essential element of her professionalism — ''*I have been working for ten years and have worked in many positions. I have worked in special support, I have worked in the integration class, and I am now working in a classroom. Many positions. So, every time you learn something.''*. Additionally, she perceived herself as responsible for her pupils' learning to a range of stakeholders, including herself — ''Responsibility to me, as a teacher, the teachers' board, parents, and society itself... For me, my work is evaluated by parents and children... Many times, I get to the point of asking children themselves to evaluate me.'' (Athena).

Moreover, she considered individual autonomy an aspect of her professionalism, and as with all previous teachers, she viewed it through her identity. Her view was closely aligned with that of teachers at Primary School B and her colleague, Antigone, who expressed high agency. However, it was dissimilar to that of teachers at Primary School A, Alexandros, and Andreas.

> She translated autonomy as prioritising her own choices and methods to deliver the national curriculum, moving beyond strict adherence to

prescribed guidelines — ‘’*I have never taught Environmental studies from the school textbook. I take some units and pieces and adapt them to my material. Therefore, I use this percentage of 30% at the maximum rate. And in the Flexible zone, I use this percentage to do things that have to do with values, with friendships, with attitudes, with feelings, with actions.*’’.

She also viewed autonomy as adopting creative teaching approaches and personalising her methods — ‘’*In general, I use experiential learning a lot because I have studied it and seen in practice that it is more effective. When the child ‘does’ something, he will not forget it… For example, every day, I have a specific assistant with whom we make the diary. So, even before we do these things in Maths, we approach them like this. Then, I have some lollipops of every assistant every day. Each lollipop on top has questions such as 'What made you sad today?' or 'What would you like to eat during the break?' etc. So, he produces some verbal speech without even doing Language.*’’.

Furthermore, she perceived autonomy as recognising the need to adapt her communication approach and accommodate different learning styles for her pupils — ‘’*Many times, the children and I choose a teaching method together. They lead me to choose a specific method. Today, I learned I couldn’t help a child from one point to another because my communication means weren’t working. I left the child alone with the classmate sitting next to him, and he explained it to him in a different style and way, and he understood it. So, I leave the teaching method to emerge from the children themselves.*’’.

Significantly, like Andreas, Demetra, Thalia, and Antigone, Athena expressed that teachers in Greece do enjoy individual autonomy. However, she also highlighted a lack of proper monitoring of how teachers in Greece exercise this autonomy in their classrooms

— ‘’I have to tell you that there is no monitoring over this… There is no supervision by the education consultant at the moment… I choose my methods according to the potential of my classroom.’’ (Athena).

For Athena, everything she did reflected her commitment to care for the needs of her pupils — ‘*’All child’s interests are vital to me on how I will shape my teaching to see how each child moves… I see what each child does. When they write a sentence independently in a drawing, I allow the children to be ready to write a sentence. So, I take this opportunity. That is, my guide is the children. The children often lead me to how we will do something.’’.* Moreover, her additional goal is promoting social and emotional skills and helping pupils accept themselves as reflected in her educational beliefs and values — ‘’I would very much like them *to be autonomous. To become independent. I wish they could have increased empathy in the future, which I work on very much… I would like them to love whatever diversity they see around them. Moreover, to embrace all their aspects. Both the bright ones and the dark ones. I would like them to absolve the notion of ‘wrong’. And to stand on their own two feet.’’.*

In addition, much like those previous teachers who presented a broader view of professionalism (Demetra, Thalia, Antigone), she also emphasised that while a genuine love for children is essential, it alone is not sufficient to exercise professionalism, suggesting the need for continuing professional development — ‘’*For me, a good teacher must have continuous scientific development. It is no longer enough to love your job or have your children be good at it. It is necessary to be well-trained too. Academic training is a very important chapter because it opens your horizons.’’.* This is crucial because, like Antigone, Demetra, and Thalia from Primary School B, Athena took the initiative to pursue professional development independently, despite the lack of opportunities provided to her. At the same time, she regarded it as an essential aspect of her understanding of professionalism.

Furthermore, she valued professional collaboration with teachers, as did Demetra, Thalia, and Antigone — ‘’*I always have my classroom open. I like sharing things. Something that I know, I want to show it to the other’’,* and with

parents, acknowledging that good results in pupils' learning can only be achieved through cooperation — *''I believe that to have a good result on children's learning, a very good cooperation between teachers and parents is necessary.''*. This is important because Athena, like her colleague Antigone, was in a school where cultures of collaboration were not promoted by their principal. Yet, due to her needs, she still considered professional collaboration an important aspect of a professional teacher.

A final aspect of her perceptions was reflection, similar to teachers at Primary School B and her colleague, Antigone. Particularly, she considered it crucial for a teacher to reflect on the entirety of the national curriculum to prepare and follow a comprehensive plan — *''It is good in general for the teacher to look at the whole curriculum of his class. I need to know his time frame and see if I will need this after two months. To know what follows. To have a general picture.''*.

Hence, Athena's professional identity, coupled with a strong sense of agency, fuelled her broader perceptions of what it means to be a professional teacher. This occurred despite working within a fragmented school culture that exposed her to negative views on professionalism in various ways, and despite receiving inadequate professional development support from regional policy.

6.4.3 Summary of Antigone — Athena

The evidence from Antigone and Athena has significantly reaffirmed the vital importance that the teachers who participated in this study assigned to agency. This high sense of agency, together with other positive influences from their professional identities, contributed to broader perceptions of professionalism, despite Antigone and Athena being exposed to a fragmented school culture, isolation in their classrooms, and additional lack of regional policy's support on their professionalism, as reported in the previous chapter. However, compared to the teachers discussed, Antigone and Athena from Primary School C, similar to Demetra and Thalia from Primary School B, exhibited broader perceptions of professionalism. In comparison, Alexandros and Andreas from Primary School A exhibited narrower perceptions. The diversion in perceptions of professionalism

is essential, as it seems to relate to whether teachers perceived agency in their work. Another key finding pertains to the variations in how teachers translated individual autonomy based on their professional identities. A final finding concerns teachers confirming that they enjoy individual autonomy, yet the majority noted the lack of proper monitoring or support in their classroom practices.

6.5 Primary School D (Konstantinos – Aristoteles)

Konstantinos, a primary teacher in the later phase of his career, and Aristoteles, a mid-career primary teacher in Greece, had been at Primary School D for ten and five years, respectively. Their professional views diverged significantly: Konstantinos exhibited a narrow view of professionalism, while Aristoteles demonstrated a broader perspective. This divergence once again confirms the role of their professional identities, especially their sense of agency, and the varied role of principals and regional policy, as indicated in the previous chapter.

6.5.1 Konstantinos (34 years of teaching experience)

Biography
Konstantinos, a later-career teacher with 34 years of experience, began his career as a substitute teacher in a small rural school in North Greece, where he taught all 36 pupils across six grades. He then secured a permanent position at another small rural school nearby, where he taught for fifteen years with only one other teacher and implemented a system where older pupils assisted in teaching. During this time, Konstantinos completed a compulsory two-year university programme to upgrade his degree and studied to become a librarian. He later transferred to Primary School D, where he has spent the last eighteen years. He chose this school because of its proximity to his home and because he took pride in organising the library, reflecting his interests.

Table 18 Biography of Konstantinos

Konstantinos had a mixture of influences on his professional identity. He came to teaching coincidentally rather than from intrinsic motivation (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — ‘’*I became a teacher by chance. I wanted to study economics, but I didn’t do well in Maths in the exams, so I went to the school of education*.’’ However, he advocated that since he came into teaching, he became committed

to it (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — ‘’*I think that from the time I started working as a teacher, something changed in me. And I still have the same feeling today. I still have the same momentum, the same interest, like the first time.’’*. However, he expressed a mixture of influences on his job satisfaction (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Although he derived satisfaction from his interactions with pupils — ‘’*I get satisfaction from the contact with the children*’’, he was dissatisfied with not receiving extrinsic rewards for the additional work he does in the library — ‘’*For example, I engage with the library. I have devoted much time to this… No one evaluates this. That is, I have nothing more in my salary.’’*. In addition, Konstantinos expressed his concern over his sense of self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Canrinus et al., 2012) — ‘’*A negative thing in our job is that you can’t see the results immediately. You see the results of your teaching after a while. Moreover, this creates some feelings of ‘I did not succeed’, of inferiority.’’*.

More emphatically, Konstantinos expressed a low sense of professional agency, perceiving a deliberate attempt by Greek national policy to limit the potential of teachers through accountability mechanisms. Thus, Konstantinos, like Alexandros and Andreas from Primary School A, but dissimilar to teachers from Primary School B, Demetra and Thalia, and Primary School C, Antigone and Athena, failed to recognise that the national policy regulations served as flexible guidelines to secure education quality rather than strict prescriptions for his daily teaching practice (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ‘’Teacher’s lack of agency relates to the already structured educational system… The use of a single textbook is recommended to teachers. He is given the leeway to use another textbook, but the way the curriculum is structured with the 70% that needs to be covered… doesn't let him move differently.’’ (Konstantinos).

This mixture of influences on his professional identity was reflected in Konstantinos's narrow perceptions of professionalism, similar to those of Alexandros and Andreas from Primary School A, yet dissimilar to the rest of the teachers presented. Especially, his perceptions were related to teachers’

professional knowledge (Linninger et al., 2015; Hopmann, 2003); responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014); individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015); care (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002); and educational beliefs (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997).

In particular, Konstantinos's perceptions of professionalism strongly emphasised the knowledge and expertise gained through professional experience — *''I do these things from my experience. Generally, I believe that every teacher himself chooses what to do depending on his experience and how he perceives teaching.''*. Additionally, he perceived himself as responsible for his pupil's learning to parents — ''I believe that the factors that coexist in a classroom are the teacher and parents.''.

Moreover, he considered individual autonomy another aspect of his perceptions of professionalism. Like the previous teachers, his professional identity influenced how he perceived autonomy as a component of his professionalism. Konstantinos's perception of autonomy was much more closely aligned with the narrow view expressed by teachers at Primary School A, Alexandros and Andreas, expressing low agency, yet dissimilar to those of teachers at Primary School B and Primary School C.

> He viewed autonomy as managing the classroom under different conditions — *''I don't want to depend my lesson on what the ministry suggests. I am more 'extremist'. I want to do the lesson outside the class, in the yard... For example, I implemented a 'dentist' project for a while. I brought a dentist here. We went to the doctor's office. He saw the children's teeth, etc. Another year, I did a small project about professions, e.g. Firefighters, electricians, etc. Children like this to leave the school and go elsewhere.''*.
>
> Alternatively, he translated autonomy as utilising technology in lessons — *''For example, in some subjects, e.g. Environmental studies, when I want*

to teach pupils about the weather, or the planets, etc., we come to the library, and I show them something using the projector.''.

Finally, he perceived autonomy as remaining in the same unit for an extended period — ‘*'I am not interested in covering the curriculum. I am more interested in my pupils learning some behavioural rules on the one hand, and on the other hand, I want to make sure that what I teach them, they understand it. So... I can stay in the same unit two or three times. Moreover, all these years that I do that, especially in pupils in early grades, I see that it works pupils and myself as a teacher.''*.

Importantly, similar to six out of seven teachers explored so far, he remarked that teachers in Greece exercise individual autonomy. However, he noted that this autonomy has led teachers to perceive themselves as the sole authorities in their classrooms. This viewpoint was also shared by Thalia from Primary School B and may relate to what the majority of teachers in this study have suggested so far regarding the lack of proper monitoring or support for teachers' classroom practices

— ‘'There is a teacher omnipotence approach in the sense that the teacher is the one who decides how to do the lesson. To put it this way, in my opinion, there is a shell. In the sense that the teacher hides in his shell how he teaches, how he works, hardly he will reveal how he works ... Not in the sense that he is afraid, but in the sense that his way is the right way, etc.'' (Konstantinos).

Another aspect of his perceptions of professionalism was care about pupils in a social way — ‘*'To give them the knowledge that I want to give them. To impart to them some rules regarding children's behaviour, some limits. To create their characters on a level. This is the key.''*. This was followed by his educational values to cultivate moral values in pupils — ‘*'I expect the children to take from me some values that I will impart to them, to respect their fellow human beings, to be fair, etc. These are the basics. That is, to me, it is not the rule of a child only if he becomes a good student to determine his behaviour in the future.''*.

Remarkably, Konstantinos, similar to teachers from Primary School A, Alexandros and Andreas, did not consider professional development (Sancar et. al., 2021; Hilton et. al., 2013; Avalos, 2011) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et. al., 2021), elements of his perceptions of professionalism. In his case, this was also found to be related to the varied influence of school and regional policy, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Mainly, he perceived Greek teachers who attend development programmes as doing so for extrinsic reasons rather than to improve as professionals — ‘’*I remember 4-5 years ago it had become so 'fashionable' for everyone to attend a seminar, to get a certificate. To be able to ‘collect’ some more certificates to be able to become a permanently appointed civil servant or to become a principal, etc.*’’. Thus, it seems that the varied influence of school and regional policy, as indicated in the previous chapter, indirectly contributed to how he perceived professional development as part of his overall understanding of professionalism. This could also be linked to his low sense of agency compared to the other teachers, who, despite the lack of professional development opportunities, independently took steps to advance themselves as professionals.

The same applied to how he viewed professional collaboration as an aspect of professionalism. In his view, teachers as a professional group in Greece are disconnected from each other — ‘’*I think there is a lack of intra-professional communication. Contact. That is, the teacher is considered to have his class… considering his classroom carved in stone, an inviolable space.*’’. Similarly, he perceived that parents are disconnected from teachers, again because of how teachers function — ‘’*I will put it on a more general level, to say that in my opinion, the parent in primary school doesn’t have that good contact he should have with the school, with the teacher. And that is the teacher’s fault, not of the parent.*’’. Thus, it could be argued that the school environment in which he worked, characterised by a fragmented school culture that promoted teacher isolation in their classrooms, influenced his perceptions of professional collaboration as an aspect of professionalism.

To summarise, Konstantinos's mixture of influences on his identity, especially his low perceived agency, combined with his exposure to negative influences of professionalism in his school environment and the adequate professional support received from regional policy, as reported in the previous chapter, contributed to his narrow view of professionalism.

6.5.2 Aristoteles (22 years of teaching experience)

Biography
Aristoteles, a mid-career teacher with 22 years of experience, began his career after graduating from a School of Education abroad and recognising his degree in Greece. Due to a lack of public teaching positions, he worked as an accountant for seven years before being appointed as a teacher in South Greece, where he faced challenges teaching a large sixth-grade class but established a drama club using his theatre skills. He then taught in an extended-school programme on a Greek island before being transferred to a small village school closer to his family. He worked there for a year and then moved to another school closer to his hometown, where he spent six years. At that time, he also got engaged with educational clubs and environmental projects, running as the president of the club. Finally, he moved to Primary School D, serving his fifth year. Concerning his qualifications, he has attended several training programmes and has also received a certification in using dramatisation in his teaching.

Table19 Biography of Aristoteles

Aristoteles had only positive influences on his professional identity. He was intrinsically motivated to become a teacher from a young age (Richardson & Watt, 2018) — *''Since I was a young child, I had thought about it. When I went to 3rd grade [of high school], we did a book fair in the village… there, I saw a pedagogical book. It belonged to Jean Piaget's Psychology and Pedagogy'… Since then, my mind has turned, and I have wanted to become a teacher*.''. He articulated a deep sense of commitment (Hong, 2012; Day et al., 2007) — *It is this ignoble 'philotimo', and when we step into the classroom, we forget everything… When you get into the process and are in the excitement of the classroom, you see your little pupils in the eyes and do the best you can.''*. Aristoteles derived job satisfaction from witnessing the achievements and

successes of his pupils in their lives (Ingersoll, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) — ‘’*I see children whom I had as pupils and I am happy because I see how many of these children are doing well in their lives. They could now be university students, or some have already graduated from university, and I feel happy about this.’’*. He perceived a strong sense of self-efficacy (Klassen & Chiu, 2010; Canrinus et al., 2012;) — ‘’*To a great extent, I would say, yes. To a great extent. Above the average… I have this ease to take an object or to be told, ‘Take this, read it for 5’, and teach it, and I can do that with great ease.’’*.

Aristoteles perceived a high sense of agency in his work, much like teachers from Primary School B and Primary School C, yet dissimilar to teachers from Primary School A. He viewed national policy regulations as frameworks for his work rather than rigid constraints, recognising his potential as a professional to exercise agency in interpreting the curriculum and adapting it to meet the needs of his pupils (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998)

— ‘’The curriculum is covered. We also have the advantage that the essential curriculum for each subject is 70%. So, we also have a leeway of 30% to take things out. Since there is this, I think it is up to your flexibility with textbooks to use them as you like…. No one limits you. No one will come from the ministry and tell you, 'Why didn’t you use the textbook, and you used something else?’ At the end of the units, you have to cover your learning goal.’’ (Aristoteles).

Moreover, Aristoteles, like Demetra, Thalia, Antigone, and Athena, shared a broader view of professionalism. This view went beyond the elements of teachers’ professional knowledge (Linninger et al., 2015; Hopmann, 2003); responsibility (Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Fischman et al., 2006; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014); individual autonomy (Frostenson, 2015; Benson, 2016; Parker, 2015); care (O’Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002); educational beliefs (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997). In addition, it included a commitment to professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013) and professional collaboration (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Sancar et al., 2021; Johnson, 2003; Stoll et al., 2006), together with reflection (Schön, 2017; Zeichner & Liston, 2013).

In particular, Aristoteles valued teachers' professional knowledge acquired through experience — ‘*'I don't know I have a convenience in general with the lessons. In other words, it doesn't force me too much to make a lesson plan quickly and to go out and follow it and achieve some goals.''*. Moreover, he considered himself responsible for his pupil's learning to a range of stakeholders — ''We are responsible to children, and the parents of the children... And, of course, to our superiors, to our counsellors... and from the point of view of school administration.'' (Aristoteles).

He also considered individual autonomy an aspect of his perceptions of professionalism. Like all previous teachers, he based this view on his professional identity, reflecting his high sense of agency. His view of individual autonomy was consistent with that of teachers at Primary Schools B and C and dissimilar to that of teachers at Primary School A and his colleague, Konstantinos.

> He translated autonomy as adapting the instructional materials to cater to the specific needs of his pupils — ‘*'In Language when we have a grammatical phenomenon, and we see that there is a text that pupils don't understand it... There, I used another text of my own. Either from my material or from material I have found. Since the purpose is to reach the learning goal we have set, to teach the grammatical phenomenon.''*.
>
> He also viewed autonomy as going beyond the content provided in national textbooks and actively seeking additional resources and alternative teaching methods to enhance his pupils' learning experience — ''In early grades, the textbooks are good enough and *offered as they are for those children. But in later grades, there are texts in the textbooks that you need to find a few more things outside the textbooks to help your pupils. For example, you can teach language or religious education in a completely different way and from a completely different point of view. And in Maths you can use other things... to show pupils new things, e.g. how they do multiplication in other countries etc. This can happen in all subjects.''*.

Alternatively, he perceived autonomy as providing a descriptive evaluation to parents to inform them about his pupil's progress — ‘’*Let us say a mother came yesterday and grabbed me and said ‘How is he? What is he doing? Tomorrow, I will make a small note over there, in which I will give her descriptively what goals we have had so far, so to speak, in language and maths, what the child has achieved, and what he should do more. That is, I do not think there is a better one than this descriptive evaluation.’’*.

Notably, he also confirmed exercising individual autonomy as a teacher in Greece. At the same time, his statement suggests a lack of proper monitoring or support within this space of autonomy -a concern also expressed by six out of seven teachers in this study.

— ‘’The teacher decides. We decide the [teaching] approaches we will follow and what we'll do in class. It is entirely up to us. Of course, this has to do with the classroom and the children and all that.’’ (Aristoteles)

At the same time, Aristoteles's perceptions of professionalism included care for meeting pupil's needs — ‘’*The moment I go into the classroom, I'll try to do the best I can… If you see that things aren't going well, shouldn't you do something? Even for the 2-3 children who can't keep up, you should do something.’’*. This was accompanied by his educational beliefs and values to see pupils constantly progress, academically and socially — ‘’*Ideally, I would like the kids to progress, to continuously achieve something better constantly. I want them to learn how to change their opinions about various phenomena they often form at home. That would be satisfactory to me, and I fight as hard as I can to make it happen.’’*.

Aside from these aspects, Aristoteles, similar to teachers at Primary School B and Primary School C, considered professional development another element of his perceptions of professionalism, considering it essential for him to stay up to date with teaching methodologies — ‘’*I value continuous development. Because I want to see or to see again new things and new methodologies as much as possible. Nothing is entirely new. Nevertheless, I want to say that I want to see*

something else. To see more exemplary teaching in a subject, e.g. in history.''. Therefore, he regarded professional development as an important aspect of professionalism, despite the absence of evidence in the previous chapter indicating that it was provided to him by school policy, and the confirmed lack of adequate professional development support from regional policy. Similar to other teachers in the study, he took the initiative to pursue professional development independently, potentially reflecting his high sense of agency.

Corresponding to those teachers, he also strongly emphasised professional collaboration with parents as part of his perceptions of professionalism — ''*Whatever I do, I inform the parents. I can tell them, e.g. 'This doesn't work out. We will try other things, or parents will call me and say, 'What are these things in Maths? Let us say. What can we do about it?... Ultimately, they are all convinced that we follow a specific way to benefit pupils*.''. Additionally, he was the only one among the eight Greek teachers in this study to indicate that he professionally communicates with his education consultant — ''*Let us say Maths textbooks in fifth grade was unacceptable... We came to this conclusion with our counsellor 'Get everything done, do what you think and try to achieve this*.''. This, again, highlights the inconsistency in how stakeholders surrounding teachers' experiences operated, leaving it up to individuals to decide if, whether, and how they might collaborate, as identified in the previous chapter. It is also notable that Aristoteles did not mention professional collaboration with colleagues, which may be related to the school environment in which he worked, where a fragmented school culture led to marginalisation among teachers, with few of his colleagues indicating professional collaboration within his school (See the previous chapter).

Finally, much like those teachers from Primary School B and Primary School C, another aspect of his perceptions on professionalism was reflection, driven by his perception that as the world changes, so does his teaching — ''*The world is changing. We educate our children for a world that we cannot imagine how it will be. So, we need to supply children with the necessary skills to face a world that*

we do not even know what it will be. Because it'll have no relationship to what we're currently living.''.

Thus, for Aristoteles, the positive influences on his professional identity, especially a high sense of agency, contributed to his broader view of professionalism. This happened even if he worked in a school environment that exposed him to negative professional influences and did not receive professional development support from regional policy, as elaborated in the previous chapter.

6.5.3 Summary of Konstantinos — Aristoteles

The data for this pair showed that similar national, regional, and school influences produced varied outcomes on teachers' perceptions of professionalism. For Konstantinos, how national, regional, and school policy functioned influenced his perceptions of professionalism negatively. Conversely, Aristoteles's high sense of agency led him to see things differently and do things independently to meet his professional needs. This again highlights the importance those Greek teachers gave on agency. However, when comparing the teachers explored in this chapter, Aristoteles, much like teachers from Primary School B and Primary School C, expressed a broader view of professionalism, unlike his colleague, Konstantinos, and teachers from Primary School A, who presented a narrow view. This difference in perceptions of professionalism is essential, as it may relate to this high emphasis on agency expressed by those teachers. In addition, it may relate to the inconsistent and varied influence by school and regional policy, as elaborates in the previous chapter. Another key finding pertains to the variations in how those teachers translated individual autonomy based on their professional identities. A final finding reveals that while these teachers confirmed enjoying individual autonomy in their primary classrooms, many also indicated a lack of proper monitoring or support for their practices.

6.6 Summing up the key findings (Part Two)

Teachers who participated in this study shared diverse perceptions of professionalism (n=[8]). Building on the findings from these eight teachers, it becomes clear that there were two distinct groups (See Table 20). Group 1(n=[3/8]) (Alexandros, Andreas, and Konstantinos) exhibited a narrower view of professionalism, focusing on professional knowledge, responsibility, autonomy, care, and educational beliefs. In contrast, in Group 2 (n=[5/8]) (Demetra, Thalia, Antigone, Athena, Aristoteles), teachers expressed a broader view of professionalism, encompassing aspects such as professional knowledge, responsibility, autonomy, care, educational beliefs and values, professional development, professional collaboration, and reflection. Those teachers' differentiated perceptions of professionalism are essential and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Group 1 - Common elements of professionalism (n= 3/8 teachers)	Group 2 - Common elements of professionalism (n= 5/8 teachers)
Professional knowledge & expertise (3/3)	Professional knowledge & expertise (5/5)
Responsibility (3/3)	Responsibility (5/5)
Autonomy (3/3)	Autonomy (5/5)
Care about pupils (3/3)	Care for pupils (5/5)
Ed. beliefs & values (3/3)	Ed. beliefs & values (5/5)
	Professional development (5/5)
	Professional collaboration (5/5)
	Reflection (5/5)

Table 204 Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism

Moreover, comparing these groups of teachers, it is clear that Group 1 experienced a mixture of positive and negative influences, while Group 2 experienced mostly positive influences from their professional identities (See Table 21). This concerned those teachers' motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and agency. This finding also appears significant, as it aligns with the research literature highlighting the importance of a teacher's identity for their professionalism (Sachs, 2001; Gee, 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). This evidence is equally important, particularly for the Greek academic context, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Notably, the element that differentiated the teachers in each group was their sense of 'agency,' an aspect crucial for all those teachers explored (n=[8]). Notably, teachers who perceived a low sense of agency (Group 1 – Alexandros, Andreas, Konstantinos) also exhibited a narrower view of professionalism. Conversely, those who perceived a high sense of agency (Group 2 – Demetra, Thalia, Antigone, Athena, Aristoteles) expressed a broader view of professionalism (See Table 21). This finding is also important and needs further discussion in the next chapter, as it has significant contributions to make concerning identity, agency, and professionalism.

Group 1 (n=3/8)	Common elements of their identities	Common elements of professionalism	Group 2 (n=5/8)	Common elements of their identities (n=5/8)	Common elements of professionalism
	Motivation (3/3) +-	Professional knowledge & expertise (3/3)		Motivation + (5/5)	Professional knowledge & expertise (5/5)
	Commitment +- (3/3)	Responsibility (3/3)		Commitment + (5/5)	Responsibility (5/5)
	Job satisfaction +- (3/3)	Autonomy (3/3)		Job satisfaction + (5/5)	Autonomy (5/5)
	Self-efficacy +- (3/3)	Care about pupils (3/3)		Self-efficacy + (5/5)	Care for pupils (5/5)
	Agency – (3/3)	Ed. beliefs & values (3/3)		Agency + (5/5)	Ed. beliefs & values (5/5)
					Professional development (5/5)
					Professional collaboration (5/5)
					Reflection (5/5)

Table 21 'Agency'

In addition, the evidence showed that each teacher viewed individual autonomy as an element of their professionalism in varied ways, depending on their professional identities and sense of agency (n=[8]). This finding is also crucial and will be discussed further in the following chapter since it contributes evidence that autonomy, as an element of professionalism, can be perceived differently based on a teacher's professional identity and sense of agency.

A final finding from this chapter pertains to those Greek teachers (n=[7/8]) reporting that they enjoy individual autonomy in their classrooms. However, these teachers also suggested a lack of proper monitoring or support from the

stakeholders surrounding their professional lives, including principals and education consultants, regarding how they exercise this autonomy in their classrooms (see Table 22). This is significant because it provides evidence for the role of external influences in relation to autonomy as part of professionalism. Additionally, it is important because it raises crucial issues for discussion in the next chapter concerning professional development support and the accountability factor for teacher professionalism in the Greek context.

Group 1 (n=3/8)	Common elements of their identities	Common elements of professionalism	Group 2 (n=5/8)	Common elements of their identities (n=5/8)	Common elements of professionalism
	Commitment +- (3/3)	Professional knowledge & expertise (3/3)		Commitment + (5/5)	Professional knowledge & expertise (5/5)
	Motivation +- (3/3)	Responsibility (3/3)		Motivation + (5/5)	Responsibility (5/5)
	Job satisfaction +- (3/3)	Autonomy (3/3) ▪ Enjoying individual autonomy, yet indicating a lack of proper monitoring or support in what they do within this space (2/3)		Job satisfaction + (5/5)	Autonomy (5/5) ▪ Enjoying individual autonomy, yet indicating a lack of proper monitoring or support in what they do within this space (5/5)
	Self-efficacy +- (3/3)	Care about pupils (3/3)		Self-efficacy + (5/5)	Care for pupils (5/5)
	Agency – (3/3)	Ed. beliefs and values (3/3)		Agency + (5/5)	Ed. beliefs and values (5/5)
					Professional development (5/5)
					Professional collaboration (5/5)
					Reflection (5/5)

Table 22 'Autonomy'

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided new evidence regarding the differing perceptions of professionalism expressed by those Greek teachers who participated in this study. These can be partly attributed to their strong emphasis on agency, as found in this chapter, the indirect influence of national policy and the varied influence of school and regional policy, as seen in this and the previous chapter.

The next chapter will combine the findings from this and the previous chapters to provide a comprehensive discussion of this study's core empirical evidence and how they nuance what has already been found in the research literature.

Chapter 7: Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This research has provided new evidence on the experiences, practices, and understandings of professionalism of Greek primary school teachers. Through its adopted framework, it has further contributed new insights into the role of key stakeholders in shaping teachers' experiences of professionalism, particularly principals, regional policy, and national policy. Interestingly, teachers in this study expressed differing understandings of what it means to be a professional teacher. These perspectives were shaped partly by a strong emphasis on agency and partly by detailed national policy texts that schools were trusted to implement, but in which school principals in this study had little or no mediating role –potentially related to the broader educational influences of the Greek context. This led to individual teachers in this research drawing almost entirely on personal influences to understand their professional roles, which contributed to their diverse perceptions of their professionalism.

This chapter discusses the empirical contributions of this study. They range from new evidence in the field of teacher professionalism in Greece to new knowledge concerning the role of identity, agency, and autonomy. Moreover, it presents new empirical contributions related to the role of principals internationally and specifically in Greece. The final contributions concern the role of professional development support and the accountability factor in relation to professionalism within the Greek academic context.

7.2 Teacher professionalism

The current study has offered new evidence to explore and explain why the cultures, conditions, contexts, and personal influences matter for teacher professionalism (Alexander et al., 2019; Sachs, 2016; Day, 2020). By considering these factors, the study has moved beyond previous large-scale snapshot studies in Greece (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou,

2013), which merely enumerated the elements found in Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism.

Culturally, the emphasis Greek teachers in this study assigned to 'agency', as shown in Chapter 6, could be related to the cultural values of independence of thought and action, which have shaped Greek culture throughout its history (Greek War of Independence, National Schism, Greek military junta, Civil War, Economic Crises and Austerity). This particular cultural influence was already evident in how teachers as a professional group in Greece functioned through active unionism, as reported in Chapter 2.

Through establishing teachers' working conditions, as reported in Chapter 2, national policy was found to indirectly influence teachers' experiences and perceptions of professionalism. Specifically, as reflected in teachers' perspectives, the central educational policy indirectly influenced their perceptions and experiences of professionalism, primarily through regulations that shaped the frameworks in which they worked (e.g., national curriculum and textbooks). However, concerning regional policy, and based once again on teachers' perceptions, although legislation designates its role as monitoring teachers' practices and providing continuing professional support (as discussed in Chapter 2), the evidence presented in Chapters 5 and 6 suggests a contrary argument. That is, it primarily influenced teachers' experiences and perceptions of professionalism indirectly through its inaction.

The same applied to school principals, whom teachers identified as the ones who decided which national policy regulations they would mediate and translate to them and which they would not. In addition, teachers in this study recognised principal influence on their professionalism primarily in pedagogical, social, and administrative domains. However, there was no evidence from teachers in this study that their principals exposed them to broader areas such as in-school development opportunities, curriculum planning and enrichment activities, or the promotion of teacher leadership approaches in their schools, as discussed in Chapter 5. These factors directly and indirectly influenced teachers'

perceptions of professionalism, but the extent of their influence varied, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6.

Considering this, individual teachers were found to mainly draw on their previous experiences, biographies, and, most importantly, their professional identities and sense of agency to understand their roles. As shown in Chapter 6, this led to the differing perceptions of professionalism expressed by those teachers.

This evidence justifies the need to move beyond dichotomous, de-contextualised, and contested forms of ideal teacher professionalism — such as democratic vs managerial, enacted vs demanded, and collaborative vs hyperactive, found in scholarly discussions as reported in Chapter 3 (Vanassche et al., 2019; Ball, 2012; Mockler, 2013). These are unlikely to interpret what teachers, East and West, understand as 'professionalism'. Therefore, the study might also be able to offer a theoretical contribution through the adoption of an ecological view of teachers' realities, which provides nuanced and situated evidence for their views on professionalism (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Darling, 2007).

In addition, in line with the research literature, personal influences were important for teachers' understanding of their roles (Sachs, 2005; Gee, 2000; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). This study has empirical contributions to offer regarding the importance of a teacher's identity as part of a teacher's professionalism, particularly in the Greek scholarly context.

7.2.1 Teacher identity

The differing perceptions of professionalism expressed by the Greek teachers in this research were partly related to their professional identities, as teachers were found to draw on them to understand themselves as members of their community of practice, consistent with the literature (Gee, 2000; Day et al., 2006; Day & Kington, 2008). International research literature has extensively demonstrated the importance of teacher identities as part of teacher professionalism and their interaction with a teacher's environment, a finding that

this study confirms (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Flores & Day, 2006; Sachs, 2005).

As reported in Chapter 6, the study has found that Greek teachers (n=3/8) who expressed a mixture of positive and negative influences on their professional identities (motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and agency) presented a narrow view of professionalism (Furlong et al., 2000; Sachs, 2001; Helgøy & Homme, 2007) (See also Table 21 in the previous chapter). Their professionalism perceptions encompassed the practice knowledge they acquired through many years of professional experience, which in the research literature has been identified as a crucial component of professionalism (Shulman, 1987; Hopmann, 2003; Linninger et al., 2015). Those teachers' views on professionalism were related to a sense of responsibility to pupils, parents, and the principal, which, in the research literature, has been regarded as the ethical dimension of professionalism, involving a sense of internal obligation and commitment to pupils, parents, colleagues, principals, the community, and oneself (Lauermann, 2014; Solbrekke & Englund, 2011; Lauermann & Karabenick, 2014). Moreover, their professionalism was also related to individual autonomy in choosing their teaching methods and approaches, another contested element of professionalism and part of the current study's focus (Frostenson, 2015; Ingersoll, 2009; Mausethagen & Mølstad, 2015). It was also followed by care about pupils in a social and moral sense (O'Connor, 2008; Noddings, 2013; Nias, 2002), as well as their need to develop pupils both behaviourally and academically, based on their educational beliefs that shaped their professional conduct (Schutz et al., 2020; Bandura, 1997; Day et al., 2006). Therefore, their view of professionalism could relate to Hoyle's (2012) view of 'restricted professionalism', a more limited view of the role, focusing on practical teaching skills, learned experience, and established routines and norms rather than engaging with broader theories and methodologies.

On the other hand, teachers (n=5/8) who perceived only positive influences from their professional identities (motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, and agency) presented an extended view of professionalism (Sachs,

2005; Svensson, 2006; Helgøy & Homme, 2007) (See also Table 21 in the previous chapter). For them, professional knowledge, responsibility, autonomy, care just about pupils in a social way, and educational beliefs of developing pupils academically and behaviourally were important but not considered enough to meet their views of the needs of their pupils for which they were responsible. They emphasised that teachers need continuing professional development (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013; Avalos, 2011). They emphasised, also the need for professional collaboration with colleagues, principals, parents, etc., through which they perceived that a teacher develops as a professional, once more aligning with research literature (Wenner & Campbell, 2017; Muijs et al., 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2011). In addition, they highlighted a new element not uncovered in previous studies in Greece: reflection (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou, 2013). They referred to this as their need to reflect on their practice and adjust their teaching to better meet the needs of their pupils, consistent with the research literature on the importance of reflection for enhancing practices (Schön, 2017; Zeichner & Liston, 2013). This element is important as it is an element not previously uncovered in empirical studies in Greece (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou, 2013). Therefore, their view of professionalism could relate to Hoyle's (2012) 'extended professionalism', a perspective that encompasses a commitment to learning through continuing professional development and professional collaboration and a reflection on teaching practices.

This is particularly important for the Greek context, as unlike the international research, the importance of teachers' identities in Greece has only recently attracted the focus of academics as discussed in the Introduction chapter (Frydaki, 2015; Androusou & Tsafos, 2018; Fotopoulou, 2023). While their focus has primarily been on specific elements of a teacher's identity and their relation to professionalism (Koutouzis & Spyriadou, 2017; Saiti & Papadopoulos, 2015; Gkolia et al., 2016).

Moreover, scholars in Greece have not yet focused on the importance of teacher agency, which this study found played a key role in shaping how teachers

perceived their roles. Beyond the Greek scholarly context, this study also offers broader empirical contributions to the academic literature on the interplay between agency, identity, and professionalism.

7.2.2 Agency

The academic literature has already established the importance of agency (Etelapelto et al., 2013; Buchanan, 2015; Priestley et al., 2015). In scholarly discussions, agency has been related to teachers' need to influence their own lives and environments (Etelapelto et al., 2013), their capacity to make choices and exert control over their actions (Buchanan, 2015), and make decisions within the constraints and opportunities provided by their professional context (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Teacher agency has also been related to teachers' responses in practice, in the sense of being achieved through action instead of being a capacity teachers hold (Biesta et al., 2015).

Previous research on teacher agency has also highlighted the importance of personal, school, and policy factors influencing teachers' agency (Biesta et al., 2015; Buchanan, 2015; Etelapelto et al., 2013; Nevertheless, this study provides another factor influencing teacher agency that has not been recognised much by previous studies (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Molla & Nolan, 2020; Priestley et al., 2015).

In particular, this research found that teachers viewed agency as an important aspect of their identities, expressing either a 'low' or 'high' sense of agency as professionals. This particular emphasis on the element of agency might relate to what has already been explored in relation to the importance of values in teacher agency (Biesta et al., 2015). It might also relate to policy, especially the conditions in which Greek teachers work, the high percentage of national textbooks that teachers in Greece are required to cover, which stands at 75%, as reported in Chapter 2 (Greek Government Gazette 303B/13-03-2003; Hatzopoulos et al., 2015). Meanwhile, this particular emphasis on the aspect of agency might also relate to teachers in this study perceiving absence of principal authority in what they did in their classrooms.

Nevertheless, the current study suggests that Greek teachers' need for agency might also relate to their cultural need for independence of thought and action, as described in Chapter 2. History in Greece, as described in Chapter 2, from the Greek War of Independence (1821-1830), the National Schism, the Greek Civil War, the military Greek junta of 1967-1974, and even the Economic Crises and Austerity (2008-2018) in the post-dictatorship period, has shown that for Greeks, 'agency' is an important element of their national identity (Kitromilides, 2013; Clogg, 2021; Gourgouris, 2021). As a professional group, this cultural need for agency was already evident in how teachers in Greece function with their active engagement in teacher unions, striving to influence their working conditions (Traianou, 2019; 2023; Stamelos & Bartzakli, 2013). Therefore, this suggests that cultural influences might also be relevant to the emphasis on agency from teachers within a country. Thus, teachers' need for agency might be more prevalent in some countries than in others, considering that, as discussed in Chapter 3, teachers in different European and OECD countries work under different cultural norms, shaping their working realities.

Beyond this, the current study has additional empirical contributions concerning agency. The study has found that teachers ($n=^{5/8}$) who perceived a 'high' sense of agency were also the ones who took the initiative to undertake continuing professional development outside of their schools so that they could become better professionals and better address the needs of their pupils. Unlike that, the group of teachers ($n=^{3/8}$) who perceived a 'low' sense of agency was also the group of teachers who did not take the initiative to attend continuing development opportunities, with any impact this could have on their professional skills and knowledge to meet the needs of their pupils. The academic literature has already discussed the importance of teacher agency for teachers' professional learning and development (Bubb & Ince, 2023; Calvert, 2016; Imants & Van der Wal, 2020; Sang, 2020). However, in the international context, scholars focus more on how teacher agency is the driving force when principals introduce CPD or other initiatives in their schools. This study suggests that teacher agency might be important in relation to professional development

as an area of professionalism when teachers work in school environments that are not offered such initiatives, which is not well-documented either in international discussion or in the Greek scholarly context.

In addition, the current study offers even more empirical contributions, particularly for the interplay of agency as part of a teacher's identity and autonomy as an element of professionalism, which are discussed in the next section.

7.2.3 Autonomy

Based on the findings from teachers participating in this study, Greek teachers perceived individual autonomy as closely aligned to what was described in the literature review as 'classroom autonomy' and 'pedagogical autonomy' (Ingersoll, 2009; Furlong et al., 2000). This was expressed as teachers choosing pedagogical and teaching methods within the boundaries of the national and local policies in which teachers work and as teachers' ownership of how they perceive their ability to make classroom decisions concerning teaching methods and approaches (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Ingersoll, 2009; Furlong et al., 2000).

Beyond this, the current study offers rich qualitative data to show that individual autonomy, as a key element of professionalism, was understood differently by teachers based on their professional identities, reflecting either low or high agency.

Notably, the teachers ($n=^{5/8}$) who expressed a high sense of agency as part of their identities, the way they perceived individual autonomy reflected this 'high agency'. In broad terms, these teachers perceived individual autonomy as adapting teaching methods/national curriculum/textbooks to meet the needs of pupils, aligning their teaching methods to pupils' interests and needs, and creating materials to meet their pupils' needs. Conversely, the teachers ($n=^{3/8}$) who perceived a 'low' sense of agency as part of their identities, the way they perceived individual autonomy also reflected this 'low' agency. In general terms, this group of teachers viewed individual autonomy as teaching in the yard, library, etc., remaining in the same unit for a longer time than the one proposed in the

national curriculum, and using technology in teaching, e.g. a projector and internet.

This is particularly important since it builds on and confirms qualitative evidence from previous scholars who suggested that autonomy can mean different things for different teachers and different teachers have different needs for autonomy (Day et al., 2023; Stone-Johnson, 2014; Keddie et al., 2024). This finding also nuances previous studies that suggested that teachers use their agency to navigate policies in various forms to fit their needs and beliefs and those of their pupils (Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020) and previous research that indicated that autonomy depends on teachers' interests, internal abilities, biographies, and identities and relates to teacher agency (Benson, 2016). It also nuances previous studies that found that teacher agency motivates teachers to adopt autonomous behaviours by reflecting on their teaching practices, making decisions for their classroom practices, and taking responsibility for fostering changes within the constraints (Teng, 2019). Nevertheless, this study moves beyond these studies, as it has shown that a teacher's sense of agency as part of their identities can lead to variations in perceptions and enactments of individual autonomy, raising crucial responsibility issues not discussed thoroughly in previous studies ($n=^{8}$).

In this way, this study addresses the argument posited by ideologically oriented, critical research theory regarding the erosion of teachers' autonomy (Troman, 2008; Ball, 2012; Ball & Olmedo, 2023), as discussed in Chapter 3, proposing that instead of merely debating whether teachers have autonomy, it may be more pertinent and crucial to explore how teachers translate and utilise their individual autonomy within their classrooms.

Hence, it expands beyond the suggestion that future research could focus on how autonomous teachers are and on what specific areas they are autonomous (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021). This approach seems more relevant to understanding 'general' and, to a great extent, 'collegial' professional autonomy (Frostenson, 2015). Considering that 'general' concerns the frameworks of teachers' work (school system's organisation, legislation, entry requirements,

teacher education, curricula, etc.), scholars could explicitly explore the degree to which teachers are autonomous in each of these areas. Similarly, considering that 'collegial' refers to a form of autonomy to decide on the school practice level, and so again, scholars could explore the extent to which their principal allows them to participate in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the current study's findings suggest that for 'individual autonomy', which refers to individual teachers' ideas and ideals that can influence how they perceive and enact autonomy in their everyday practice, discussing the extent to which teachers are autonomous might not be so relevant as is probably the issue of teacher's responsibility. Therefore, it reflects the suggestion made by Hattie (2016) that discussing teachers' autonomy is misleading "unless it specifies autonomy about what, with what responsibilities" (p. v). Moreover, it aligns with the argument of 'autonomy paradox' (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021), where ''a similar quality and quantity of autonomy can be perceived differently by teachers'' (p.8), and ''where a wider scope of action can come with increased risks'' (p.137). An exemplified example comes from England, where teachers' entitlements to individual autonomy risked their pupil's academic progress (Day, 2019).

Finally, the current empirical contribution is additionally important because external factors influenced how Greek teachers perceived individual autonomy as an element of their professionalism. The literature review has thoroughly discussed the significance of national, local, and contextual factors and how these might influence teacher's autonomy (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021; Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Day et al., 2023). Indeed, in Chapter 6, teachers ($n=^{8}$) revealed how national, local, and contextual factors influenced the way they perceived and exercised their individual autonomy in their classrooms. National factors were related to the influence of the national curriculum and textbooks, while local and contextual factors referred to regional and school policies. Specifically, regarding the latter, in Chapter 6, teachers ($n=^{7/8}$) expressed perceiving a lack of proper monitoring or support in the exercise of their individual autonomy, either from their principal or at the regional level. While this allowed them to enjoy individual autonomy in their classrooms, it also led to variations in

their perceptions of how autonomy was enacted. Therefore, the variations in teachers' perceptions of autonomy were not solely driven by their inclination for agency, as discussed previously, but also by the actions and inactions of the stakeholders surrounding their experiences.

Particularly for the role of principals, the current study has new evidence to offer which are discussed in the next section.

7.2.4 Principal's roles

This study contributes to the international body of evidence by positing that principals not only mediate policies to teachers but also actively translate and interpret them in ways that are relevant to the cultures, rules, routines, and structures they have established in their schools, in line with international studies explored in other OECD contexts in Chapter 3 (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021; Day, 2020; Tschannen-Moran, 2009). Nevertheless, the study moves further from previous studies, which showed that teachers resisted or navigated policies introduced by principals (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Wermke et al., 2019; Lennert da Silva & Mølstad, 2020) and others that they adapted, reinterpreted, and reshaped those policies based on their identities, visions, philosophies, beliefs, etc. (Terhart, 2013; Robinson, 2012; Buchanan, 2015). The current study extends beyond these studies because while teachers were exposed to diverse professional influences introduced by principals across varying school environments, the extent of this influence varied considerably, as shown in Chapters 5 and 6. Teachers were not uniformly influenced by their principals, and they also did not respond in similar ways to this influence. It was neither about resistance nor adaptation. It was more about teachers being exposed to either positive or negative influences on professionalism, rather than having their understanding of professionalism dictated to them. This is important as it suggests an interplay between teachers' interpretations of professionalism and principal's influence, an aspect not explored in previous studies.

In addition, research on school leadership highlights how principals influence teachers' perceptions of professionalism—both positively and negatively—

within specific school environments (Harris & Jones, 2019; Day & Sammons, 2013; Ärlestig et al., 2016). However, this influence has not been widely acknowledged in previous Greek studies. Instead, existing research suggests that Greek principals focus primarily on administrative tasks (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020; Papazoglou & Koutouzis, 2022; Dimopoulos et al., 2015) rather than engaging in broader areas such as curriculum planning (Lourmpas & Dakopoulou, 2014; Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2015) or in-school teacher development (Chalikias et al., 2020; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023).

Given this context, the absence of evidence in this study indicating that principals exposed teachers to broader professional areas is unsurprising, as it may be attributed to systemic educational influences in Greece rather than solely to school leadership. Nevertheless, this study moves beyond previous research in Greece by demonstrating that teachers' views of professionalism were shaped not only by what principals did but also by what they did not do. This finding was evident in Chapter 5, where teachers ($n=^{30}$) experienced professionalism in their schools primarily in areas that principals actively mediated—such as pedagogical, social, and administrative aspects—but not in those left unmediated. Similarly, Chapter 6 demonstrated that teachers' ($n=^{8}$) understandings of professionalism were shaped both by what their principals actively mediated and by what they did not.

More specifically, this study has empirical contributions to offer to the Greek scholar context concerning the role of professional development support and accountability, which are discussed in the next sections.

7.2.5 Professional development support

Research internationally focuses on the importance of continuing professional development support for teachers (Sancar et al., 2021; Hilton et al., 2013; Desimone, 2009).

However, in this study, there was a lack of evidence in Chapter 5 indicating that Greek teachers ($n=^{30}$) received continuing professional development support from either their principals or their education consultants at the regional level.

On the contrary, regarding the role of regional policy, evidence from teachers (n=$^{8/16}$) working in Primary Schools C and D, as reported in Chapter 5, highlighted the absence of professional development support provided to them at the regional level (see Section X).

This is unsurprising given previous research in Greece (Saiti, 2012; Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020; Papazoglou & Koutouzis, 2022), which has highlighted the minimal professional development support provided to teachers by principals, particularly through in-school professional development (Anastasiou & Papakonstantinou, 2015; Lourmpas & Dakopoulou, 2014; Moutiaga & Papavassiliou-Alexiou, 2022). Similar findings have been reported regarding the role of regional policy in Greece, with previous studies emphasising the rarity of professional development opportunities available to teachers (Lainas, 2010; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023; Kakana et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, based on evidence, the current study sheds light in an area related to professionalism and professional development support not identified in those previous studies in Greece. In Chapter 6, there were teachers of Group 1 (n=$^{3/8}$) who revealed that they would undertake professional development activities only if this would be offered to them or be demanded by their superiors, principals and education consultants. The same teachers (n=$^{3/8}$) referred to perceiving their colleagues who undertake professional development as teachers who want to move to higher positions within education, rather than from their interest to become better professionals. Thus, they indirectly referred to the infrequent and not mandatory professional development opportunities offered to them which makes them perceive professional development as something unnecessary. On the contrary, there were teachers of Group 2 (n=$^{5/8}$), who independently took steps to support themselves as professionals because they considered it an important aspect of their professionalism. They did this either because it was infrequently offered to them or because they wanted to be professionally develop themselves in areas not provided to them by their superiors in their schools.

Therefore, teachers in this study reported differing perceptions of the need for professional development, a significant finding not previously identified in research on Greece. The variation in their perceptions can be partly attributed to their differing understandings of professionalism, but also potentially to the infrequent availability of professional development support, its misalignment with their interests, and its non-mandatory nature. This left teachers with the responsibility to take independent measures for their own professional growth. Consequently, the current study suggests that teachers' perceptions on professional development can be shaped both by the support provided by principals and regional policy and by the absence of such support. This finding indicates either a lack of awareness among stakeholders regarding the necessity of continuously supporting teachers' professional development or a high level of trust in teachers' abilities.

Thus, rather than just focusing on uncovering whether reforms assigning principals (Law 3848/2010; Law 4024/2011; Law 4142/2013; Law 4690/2020; Law 4823/2021; Law 4547/2018) and education consultants (Laws 3848/2010, 4024/2011, 4142/2013, 4690/2020, 4823/2021, and 4547/2018), with the responsibility to support teachers' continuing professional development, have been introduced in teachers' lives, it might be more accurate to explore how what principals and education consultants do concerning teachers' professional development support influences their experiences and perceptions concerning professional development as an element of professionalism.

In a similar way, previous scholars in the Greek context have centred their focus on whether the educational reforms which focused on strengthening the accountability frameworks in which teachers work (Law 3848/2010; Law 4024/2011; Law 4142/2013; Law 4690/2020; Law 4823/2021; Law 4547/2018), have been introduced in teachers' lives (Traianou, 2023; 2019; Stamelos et al., 2012; Kakana et al., 2017; Dimopoulos et al., 2015; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023). However, this study offers a new perspective on the Greek academic discussion regarding the relationship between accountability and professionalism.

7.2.6 The accountability factor

The findings in Chapter 6 indicate that most teachers (n=$^{7/8}$) perceived themselves as operating within their classroom spaces without proper monitoring or support measures from either their principals or education consultants. Although a policy requiring 75% coverage of national textbooks was in place (Ministerial Decision 303B/13-03-2003) to ensure consistency in implementing the national curriculum, teachers perceived no oversight regarding whether they adhered to this requirement or how they met the targets set by the national curriculum. This is particularly significant, as it suggests that teachers perceived their superiors—principals and education consultants—to have minimal involvement in ensuring compliance with the only formal measure aimed at standardising the teaching received by their pupils.

This finding adds nuance to previous studies in Greece (Stamelos et al., 2012; Dimopoulos et al., 2015; Ifanti & Fotopoulou, 2011) by highlighting the need to explore not only the existence of accountability mechanisms established by Greek education policy but also how teachers perceive these mechanisms as influencing their work, practices, and views on professionalism. Therefore, rather than focusing solely on whether accountability measures have a direct impact on teachers' work and professionalism, as examined in prior research, this study emphasises the importance of understanding teachers' interpretations and responses to these policies (Kakana et al., 2017; Maggopoulos & Svarna, 2023).

Another interesting finding related to this is the varying perceptions of accountability frameworks and the extent to which these frameworks influenced teachers' work, as reported in Chapter 6 (n=^{8}). Specifically, teachers in Group 1 (n=$^{3/8}$) perceived accountability frameworks as shaping both their work practices and their perception of agency as professionals—an element that Greek teachers considered important as reported previously. In contrast, teachers in Group 2 (n=$^{5/8}$) viewed the same accountability measures as merely providing a structural framework within which they could exercise their agency as professionals.

This is particularly important because it highlights accountability as a crucial factor in understanding teachers' views on professionalism within a national education system, as previous research has highlighted (Salokangas & Wermke, 2020; Wermke et al., 2019; Salokangas et al., 2020). It underlines that teachers are not uniformly influenced across different contexts (Stone-Johnson, 2014; Keddie et al., 2014; Day, 2020), even if they may operate under similar or partially shared policies (OECD, 2021). Additionally, it suggests that teachers may perceive and respond in various ways to policies, as well as the stakeholders surrounding their experiences of professionalism may respond differently.

This suggests that rather than assuming that the introduction of similar accountability mechanisms across different countries has uniformly impacted all teachers (Apple, 2012; Ball, 2012; Ball & Olmedo, 2023), a view reported in Chapter 3, it may be more relevant to explore accountability within the inherent, situated, cultural, and contextual conditions in which teachers work (Elo & Nygren-Landgärds, 2021; Day et al., 2023).

7.3 Conclusion

To sum up, this thesis has offered new evidence on teacher professionalism and elements associated with professionalism in Greece and internationally. It has additionally shown the importance of exploring how personal, school, policy, and cultural factors influence the perception and enactment of professionalism within a country-specific setting.

Drawing from this evidence, the forthcoming and final chapter briefly answers the core research question and sub-questions and outlines specific implications for further research. It also raises crucial questions about the standards of Greek pupils' education, which necessitate reflection from national policymakers, school principals, and teachers.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The main aim of this research has been to investigate — ‘’*What is the nature and experience of professionalism expressed by teachers in Greece?’’*. As a primary teacher in Greece myself, this qualitative study focused on primary school teachers to explore, understand, and interpret understandings of the contexts which informed their views of the nature of professionalism. Four interrelated sub-questions were explored in this study concerning the cultural, national, school, and personal influences on Greek teachers’ views on professionalism. A qualitative research design was adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with thirty participants from four primary schools in Greece. The findings and discussion in the previous chapter have contributed to an increased understanding of the professionalism of teachers in Greece.

This final chapter briefly addresses the research questions, outlining the current study’s contributions and drawing implications for further research. Based on this, it raises implications for standards of pupils’ education in Greek primary schools, with recommendations of areas for reflection for policymakers, principals, and teachers. This thesis concludes with the study’s theoretical limitations, a reflective note, and a final thought.

8.2 Answering the central research question & sub-questions

The teachers who participated in this research expressed differing ideas of what it means to be a professional teacher in Greece. This was related to several factors, including their cultural need for independence of thought and action, the indirect influence of national policy, the direct but varied influence of principals, and their varied personal influences.

Thus, culturally, the perspectives of professionalism expressed by the Greek teachers who participated in this study were influenced by cultural values

shaping Greek society concerning the need to act independently, make their own choices, and exert influence over their lives and circumstances.

Regarding national policy's influence, this factor had only an indirect role in teachers' practices and views on professionalism. The central educational policy circumscribed teachers' experiences and perspectives of professionalism through accountability measures. The regional educational policy indirectly influenced teachers' perceptions of professionalism through what it did and what it did not.

Regarding school principals, they were found to actively translate and not just mediate policies to teachers in ways relevant to the cultures, rules, routines, and structures they established in their schools, through which they influenced teachers' views on professionalism in various ways—yet, with the extent of this influence to vary across teachers.

Personal influences, including teachers' biographies and experiences, but most importantly, their professional identities primarily influenced how Greek teachers in this study understood their professional roles.

8.3 Empirical contributions

The originality and contribution to new empirical knowledge in this study concerns the following:

- It expands the limited research on teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools.
- It offers empirical evidence for the importance of exploring teacher's agency concerning teacher professionalism in Greece.
- It provides empirical contributions for the interplay of agency, identity, and teacher professionalism.
- It offers empirical insights into agency as part of a teacher's identity and autonomy as an element of professionalism.
- It adds empirical input for the role of principals in teacher professionalism.

- It contributes some evidence for the role of professional development support provided to teachers by principals and regional policy in Greek primary schools.
- It introduces some evidence to demonstrate the significance of accountability as a factor influencing teacher professionalism in Greece.

8.4 Theoretical contributions

The theoretical contribution of this study relates to the following:

- It adopted an ecological view of various cultural, national, school, and personal influences to explore teacher professionalism in Greece.

Another contribution of the current study relates to the use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theoretical lens (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Darling, 2007), incorporating various layers of cultural, national, school, and personal influences into the analysis of teacher professionalism. This is important as there is still little empirical research in the field of teacher professionalism internationally that considers the importance of cultures, conditions, contexts, and personal factors when exploring what teachers understand by professionalism and how these factors can uniquely influence teachers' understandings within a national education system.

8.4 Implications for further research

The findings of this small-scale study have offered an interpretative view of teacher professionalism in Greece rather than broad generalisations. The limited scope of inquiry necessitates further research into teacher professionalism internationally and in Greece.

Internationally, based on the evidence from this study, the following implications for further research could be made:

- Future research on teacher professionalism could more explicitly focus on culturally inherited meanings of 'professionalism' that consider the interplay of various factors influencing teachers' understandings and practices.

- The research has offered new evidence for the interplay of Greek teachers' identity, sense of agency, and professionalism. Future scholars could more explicitly explore how cultural influences and personal, school, and policy factors might relate to teacher agency in different national educational contexts. In addition, more research is needed on how teachers' agency might be important for teacher's professional development, especially in cases this is not offered to them within their school working environments.
- The study also found that Greek teachers perceived individual autonomy as an element of professionalism differently based on their sense of agency as part of their professional identities. Future research could more explicitly explore how teacher agency might be important for individual autonomy and relate this to the teacher's responsibility.
- The current study has nuanced previous studies that concentrated mainly on how teachers either navigate or resist policies introduced by their principals. It has indicated that Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism were influenced in diverse ways by different principals across varying school environments, with the extent of this influence varying considerably. Therefore, future investigations of teacher professionalism in other OECD contexts might more explicitly explore the potential interplay between teachers' interpretations of professionalism and principals' influence.

The study has some additional implications for further research, specifically for the Greek context:

- In Greece, future scholars could more explicitly explore the role of teacher's agency for Greek teachers and their professionalism.
- Adopting a broader perspective on how teachers' perceptions of professionalism are influenced by their principals is also important. The field needs to expand the sole focus on specific areas in which principals might influence teachers, such as principals' influence on teachers' identity and/or principals' influence through the introduction of an initiative and/or their influence through the adoption of a specific leadership approach. Based on the current study's findings, it is suggested that both the actions and

inactions of principals shaped teachers' perceptions in ways that transcend specific areas or elements of influence.

- There is a need for further investigation into why Greek principals, although in a position to shape teachers' perceptions of professionalism, often avoid involvement in curriculum-related matters, neglect initiating in-school development opportunities, and fail to foster teacher leadership within their schools.
- Similarly, more research is required to understand why regional policymakers do not provide frequent and structured support for teachers' ongoing professional development, nor track the extent to which the mandated 75% coverage of the national textbooks is achieved.

Finally, the current study has some implications for further research about the study's research design:

- Both internationally and in Greece, future research on teacher professionalism might benefit from employing a mixed-methods research design (Cohen et al., 2018). An approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data examining what teachers and stakeholders surrounding their perceptions and experiences within a specific OECD country understand as 'professionalism'.

8.5 Implications for standards of pupils' education in Greek primary schools

In the context of a global effort to enhance the quality of teaching received by pupils, expressed through OECD initiatives using comparative data (OECD, 2023), pupils' education in Greek primary schools was found to depend largely on individual teachers' interpretations of professionalism, the varied influence of principals and regional policy, and the presence of a high percentage of coverage of national textbooks. This raises several concerns for pupils' education in Greek primary schools.

Greek teachers in this study were found to have cultivated differing perceptions of what it means to be a professional teacher. One group seemed to have cultivated what Hoyle (1974) termed ‘restricted professionalism’, and the other group he defined as ‘extended professionalism’. This raises the issue of whether it is appropriate for some pupils in Greece to encounter the first group of teachers while others encounter the second, as well as who is responsible for making that decision.

In addition, especially looking at the evidence of teachers who participated in this study for their individual autonomy, it seems that they were left responsible for establishing their standards of teaching for their pupils, considering the evidence they provided that they are not monitored by their principals and that they are infrequently monitored by regional policy. However, this raises the issue of variability of those standards across different classrooms, similar to the variability of perceptions of enactment of individual autonomy expressed by these teachers. This evidence raises the concern of why Greek pupils’ learning relied on their individual interpretations of their autonomy rather than on a collective sense of responsibility for pupils' learning among all stakeholders, as seen in many OECD contexts discussed in this study.

Compared to most of the OECD countries discussed (except Brazil), pupils' learning outcomes in Greece, as reflected in the latest PISA results, are both lower and in a state of continuous decline (OECD, 2023). Among other factors which are not relevant to this study, this disparity may also be related to the differing understandings of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers in this study, but also to how stakeholders surrounding their professional experiences were reported to function in this study—principals, regional, and central policy.

Together, these raise implications for policymakers, principals and teachers in Greece.

8.6 Implications for policymakers in Greece

The current study has comprehensively discussed how the differing perceptions of professionalism expressed by Greek teachers who participated in this study, beyond cultural and personal factors, were also related to how national policy functioned.

If policymakers in Greece aim to enhance pupils' education and improve learning outcomes—particularly in PISA results (OECD, 2023), which have been a focal point of educational reforms over the past decade—they may need to critically reflect on several key issues:

a. Whether it is appropriate for Greek teachers' practices to remain inadequately monitored, especially given the trends observed in most OECD and European countries examined in this study.

b. Whether regional policy should provide infrequent, irrelevant, or insufficient professional development opportunities for Greek teachers, in contrast to the more structured approaches seen in other OECD contexts discussed in this study.

c. Whether legislative reforms alone can drive meaningful change if the key stakeholders—principals responsible for implementing these reforms and teachers expected to enact them—have not been sufficiently convinced of their potential benefits, both for their professional growth and for improving pupil learning outcomes.

8.7 Implications for principals, teachers

Principals

The principals in the schools examined in this study appeared to adopt primarily administrative and social roles, even if evidence from both current and previous research in Greece highlighting their significant potential to support teachers' views on professionalism. This potentially relates to broader educational influences, resources and challenges for principals in the country which are

outside of the focus of this study. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that principals could benefit from reflecting on these findings and adopting a more active role in teachers' professional lives. They could achieve this by:

a. Promoting a culture of trust within their schools and encouraging value-driven professional collaboration.

b. Providing more in-school professional development opportunities and activities that align with teachers' interests and needs.

c. Introducing various initiatives within their schools and actively engaging in curriculum planning and enrichment activities.

Teachers

Teachers in this study expressed a strong preference to act independently. However, the evidence suggests that this, along with other factors, has contributed to differing perceptions of what it means to be a professional in Greece. Therefore, Greek teachers could reflect on whether prioritising individual autonomy is more important than ensuring that pupils across the country benefit from common teaching standards.

Additionally, if Greek teachers and their unions are committed to support both pupil learning and their own professionalism:

a. They may need to advocate for more proactive professional support from school and regional policymakers, similar to the structured support available to their counterparts in many European and OECD countries.

b. They might need to recognise the importance of implementing standardised quality measures introduced by national policy, rather than each teacher independently defining their own standards. The lack of uniformity in teaching practices may negatively impact pupils' learning experiences and differs from the structured approaches adopted in many European and OECD countries discussed in this study.

8.8 Theoretical limitations

This section discusses the theoretical limitations of the knowledge this study can offer, given that the methodological limitations have already been acknowledged in Chapter 4 (See section 4.10).

Generally, a limitation, or more precisely a difficulty in this study, was understanding the various elements and areas associated with professionalism and the various concepts interplaying with teacher professionalism. This by itself could potentially be part of a whole PhD's focus. Hence, it was a difficult task to understand all these elements, areas, and concepts and how they relate to teacher professionalism without losing focus, a risk inherent to this research project during all stages, from collecting data to writing this thesis.

An additional constraint might be the countries selected to make the case of the international perspective on teacher professionalism. The point was to explore European countries, considering that Greece is a European country and other countries, part of the OECD, to cover a broader range of teachers' experiences of professionalism. The chosen countries or the number of countries chosen to explore teachers' professional experiences might be a limitation. However, notably, this study's purpose was not to compare the professionalism of teachers in Greece with that of other countries. The purpose of including these countries was to make the case for how teacher professionalism in Greece could be studied, considering a range of factors influencing teachers within a national education system.

Close to that, as a limitation, it could be considered the resources used to make the case of the international perspective on teacher professionalism. Although this study attempted to find the resources that incorporated the various factors into their analysis, reflecting an ecology of the various factors that influence teachers' experiences of professionalism, this was not the case for every chosen resource and every country explored. Nevertheless, as noted before, comparing the perceptions and experiences of professionalism of teachers in Greece to those of other countries was not the purpose of this study.

A potential limitation of this study lies in the limited exploration of teacher agency in Chapter 3, despite the study's capacity to offer valuable insights into its interplay with teacher identity and autonomy. It is crucial, however, to acknowledge that the primary aim of the literature review chapter was to establish the foundational concepts and areas related to professionalism. As previously mentioned, the literature review intentionally sought to provide a framework from which the evidence gathered from teachers could guide the identification of elements most salient to their lived experiences. Consequently, the elements discussed in the literature review were not prescriptive but served to open avenues for understanding what might resonate most strongly with teachers. In this context, it was revealed that teacher agency emerged as a more prominent theme in teachers' perceptions than other aspects. Additionally, the study initially drew from prior research in Greece, where agency was not commonly recognised as a key element of professionalism among teachers. This initial focus, grounded in existing studies, likely influenced the study's trajectory. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that this emphasis on pre-existing findings may have limited a more thorough exploration of agency in the current research, thus representing a potential limitation.

Finally, a limitation of this study could also be considered the limited number of empirical studies in Greece exploring teacher professionalism specifically (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou, 2013). Even if this justified the study's importance, it made it difficult for me as the researcher of this study to discuss some of the findings with this previous research, e.g., the importance teachers attributed to agency.

8.9 Reflexivity

This section presents a reflective discussion on the evolution of my perspective as the researcher of this study, building on acknowledgments made in previous sections of this thesis (see Sections 1.3 and 4.3.3).

At the outset of this study, my understanding of professionalism was shaped primarily by my previous readings and personal experiences as a teacher in

Greece. However, throughout my PhD journey, my understanding evolved through continuous engagement with key literature. I soon recognised that professionalism cannot be reduced to a singular, fixed definition; it is a fluid and context-dependent concept. I came to understand that professionalism would not manifest identically for all teachers in this study, even though they shared the Greek educational context. Their perceptions might align with, diverge from, or expand upon elements identified in previous studies conducted in Greece. Additionally, I realised that professionalism is influenced not only by the individual teacher's attributes but also by broader factors, including the roles played by principals, national policies, and other stakeholders. This shift in perspective prompted me to broaden my understanding. Similarly, I came to understand the importance of encompassing a broader range of elements associated with teacher professionalism beyond autonomy. Focusing solely on autonomy as an element of professionalism for Greek teachers would have made this study less reflective of teachers' perspectives of professionalism.

The findings of this study validated the importance of adopting this broader perspective. Nevertheless, interpreting the extensive data collected from thirty participants, including detailed case studies of eight teachers, proved challenging. The large volume of data required deep reflection, multiple adjustments, and iterative analysis to ensure that my interpretations aligned with the study's conceptual framework while maintaining an ecological perspective. Although the findings are clearly presented in Chapters 5 and 6, their development demanded significant effort and careful consideration to articulate how they reflected my evolving understanding of professionalism.

A pivotal moment in my research journey was the identification of a new element—agency—which had not been highlighted as a key component in previous studies on teacher professionalism in Greece. This discovery was significant, as it underscored the importance of remaining open to emergent themes beyond those anticipated from the literature review. Furthermore, while my study reaffirmed that Greek teachers considered autonomy an important aspect of their professionalism, it also revealed that their perceptions of

professionalism encompassed a broader elements. This finding affirmed that my decision to adopt a wider lens, rather than focusing narrowly on autonomy, was appropriate.

This shift in my understanding also uncovered the crucial role of principals in shaping teachers' lived experiences of professionalism—a dimension that may have been overlooked had I not embraced a broader, more holistic perspective. Previous Greek studies (Ifanti et al., 2017; Fotopoulou & Ifanti, 2017; Fotopoulou, 2013) had not explored the principal's role in such depth, which highlights the value of my broader conceptual approach.

Finally, I consider myself to have evolved significantly as a researcher through conducting this study, particularly in my engagement with the field of teacher professionalism. I now recognise the necessity of adopting more nuanced, situated, and context-sensitive approaches when exploring professionalism. My research journey has taught me that professionalism cannot be reduced to a predefined set of elements or skills; rather, it must be understood through the lived experiences of teachers within their specific contexts.

8.9 A concluding thought

At the beginning of researching this project, this study aimed to contribute new knowledge in the field of teacher professionalism in Greece, a field to which I have devoted the last couple of years of my life as a researcher and a teacher. I hope to have achieved this to an extent as this thesis has provided empirical evidence for the nature of the professionalism of Greek teachers, drew some valuable implications for further research, and articulated some crucial implications for national policy, principals, and teachers concerning quality standards of Greek pupils' education.

Notably, when analysing this research data and writing this thesis, evidence emerged that seemed relevant to contributing knowledge to the broader field of teacher professionalism. I hope this thesis has achieved the interpretation of this evidence and has raised some implications for further research that academics

in the field might find helpful for future investigations on teacher professionalism.

After all, the final thought I wish to leave in this thesis regarding Greek teachers' perceptions of professionalism comes from a participant's reflection

''It is this ignoble 'philotimo[1]'', and when we step into the classroom, we forget everything... When you get into the process and are in the excitement of the classroom, you see your little pupils in the eyes and do the best you can.'' (Aristoteles)

[1] Philotimo: is a Greek noun that has the literal translation of "love of honour". In its simplest form, the term means conscientiously honouring one's responsibilities and duties, and not allowing one's honour, dignity, and pride to be sullied (Wikipedia).

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Appendices

Appendix 1. First interview protocol – for purposive sampling

Theme 1 How different stakeholders could influence their professional practice and perceptions (pupils, parents, colleagues, the principal)

1. Could you please tell me more about your pupils, their lives, living conditions, etc.? How is your relationship with them? How might they influence your work?
2. Would you like to share some about your pupils' parents with me? What relationship have you established with them? Can they influence your work in any way?
3. Could you please tell me more about your colleagues? What relationships have you established with them? How would you characterise them, etc.? How might you work with them?
4. Could you please share some things about your principal with me? In what way does your principal support or influence your work?

Theme 2 - School contextual factors
(topics/areas/regulations of discussion in meetings, quality of management, management of emergency issues, ways of making decisions, ways of working with colleagues, monitoring pupil's progress, role of education consultant)

5. What is it like working in the school you are now? If you have taught in other schools, in what ways this school is different?
6. If you had the opportunity, would you prefer to work in this or another school? Why?
7. What kind of issues do you discuss in your meetings in your school? Who introduces these?
8. Do you want to discuss any other issues in your meetings? If yes, what are they about, and why do you think you don't discuss these now?
9. Does the education consultant have any role to play in what you discuss/do at your school?

10. How does your school handle emerging issues that concern children? (Either it has to do with learning, social, or behavioural issues)
11. Is your school monitoring pupils' progress in some way? If yes, what are these? If no, why?

Appendix 2. Second interview protocol – for progressive focusing

Theme 1 – Biography

(professional experiences since starting of teaching career, key moments in teaching career, qualifications

1. How many years are you working as a teacher?
2. What are your professional qualifications?
3. I would like to hear more about your past as a teacher since the day you started teaching (e.g., the schools you have worked in, the places you may have changed, etc.)
4. Do you want to share any key moments in your teaching career? Were all these years the same? In what ways? In what ways they were different?

Theme 2 – Teacher's identity

(educational values, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, agency)

5. What were the reasons for choosing to become a teacher?
6. How satisfied are you with your work? Have there been any changes in how you feel about your work since you began teaching?
7. What would ideally be the impact or influence of your teaching in the short and longer term?
8. At what level do you achieve your goals? At what level do you trust your abilities?
9. To what extent do you perceive agency in your work?

Theme 3 – Perceptions of professionalism

(teachers' professional knowledge, responsibility, autonomy, etc.)

10. What skills, qualities, and values do you believe are essential for a teacher to be considered a professional?
11. Has your perception of what it means to be a professional teacher changed over the course of your career? If so, how?
12. Can you provide examples of how your experiences have shaped your professional approach?

Appendix 3. Follow-up interview protocol – for progressive focusing

Theme 1: Perceptions of national policy's regulations

(national curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, pupil evaluation criteria)

1. How do you see the curriculum? Is there anything you would like to keep and/or anything you would like to change in that? And for what reasons?
2. How do you see this 75% of national textbooks that needs to be covered?
3. Is there anything or anyone influencing you in choosing your teaching methods?
4. What about your pupils' evaluation? Who is choosing the criteria based on which they are evaluated?

Theme 2: Use of regulations in their classrooms

(examples of classroom practice using the national curriculum, textbooks, teaching methods, pupil evaluation criteria, general examples, etc.)

5. What are you doing in your daily lesson? Can you describe a daily lesson, e.g. from today, yesterday?
6. If you had the space and time to organise your teaching on your own, would something be different? In what ways?
7. What are your teaching methods? What influences you in choosing these methods?
8. What are your criteria for evaluating your pupils?

Appendix 4. Information sheet for teachers

INFORMATION SHEET

(for teachers)

Project title ……«Teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools' ……

Researcher's name ……Despoina Athanasiadou……..……

Supervisors' name ……..Christopher Day...and…Jane Medwell…….

I would be happy to invite you to participate in my research study. To decide whether you would like to participate, it is crucial to explain who I am, why I am undertaking this study, and how I would like to involve you as my participant. I can answer all your research questions if you need more information than the following. Please take all the necessary time to decide whether you would like to participate in my research.

Who am I?

My name is Despoina Athanasiadou. I am a PhD researcher at the University of Nottingham (UoN), School of Education Research. I am interested in studying the professional realities of primary school teachers in Greece.

I am interested in learning more about your working lives and professional experiences because I am a primary school teacher. This is not the first time I have engaged with this topic; during my master's at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Education, I also researched the working lives of primary teachers in Greece. I aim to provide Greek primary school teachers with an open space to speak regarding how they experience and perceive their professionalism and professional lives.

What is the purpose of the study?

The present research focuses on teachers' working lives and professional perceptions of primary school teachers in Greece. It aims to explore and interpret what you, as a primary school teacher in Greece, are experiencing in these areas.

When will the study be completed?

According to the research timetable, the study will have been completed by March 2021.

Why have I been chosen?

To be more precise, I would like you as my research participant for these reasons:

1. You are a primary school teacher in Greece
2. The Greek government has appointed you a public primary school teacher with all the necessary credentials (higher education, etc.).
3. You have worked within that school for at least three months.

Do I have to take part?

I would be very pleased if you would like to participate in my study. Participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any stage without explaining the reasons for your decision. You have the option to participate in my research study, and whether you decide to participate, I can assure you that it will not impact your working lives and conditions.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you would like to take part in my study, I would like to interview you to discuss your professional life as a primary school teacher in Greece.

The purpose of the interview is to understand how you perceive your everyday working life rather than to describe what you do, invade your working environment, criticise how you work, and/or ask your colleagues how you are working. My priority is to provide you with a safe place to speak.

The topics I would like to discuss broadly refer to how the many stakeholders surrounding your lives, pupils, parents, colleagues, and principal, influence your everyday lives and professional experiences. There will also be more school-contextual factors included as topics, e.g. in terms of school leadership, culture, etc.

Will my anonymity be respected?

As the person in charge of that research, I can assure you that your personal information, such as name, age, sex, etc., will be anonymised. This means that no one could identify your potential participation in that research.

What do I have to do?

If you decide to participate in my study, I should explain how the procedure will work. Firstly, I need to clarify that I will not interrupt your working schedule. Although you could choose to undertake the interview inside your school when you are having your break, you can choose a different place and time. My intention is to adjust to your everyday schedule since I understand that you may have a busy working and social life.

The expected duration of the interview is approximately twenty minutes. I would also like to ask your permission to record our discussion using my phone as a recording device, which is only a method I will use to ensure that I do not miss any of your thoughts.

How will my interview data be processed?

In terms of what I am going to do with your interview data, I will transcribe and translate them from Greek to English before analysing them. To ensure you agree with the procedure I am transcribing, I will send you back the transcriptions to check whether you confirm your statements.

Finally, the IT Helpdesk service will permanently electronically wipe the recording of your interview from the UoN network and destroy it after the scheduled retention plan of 7 years minimum.

Are there possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?

The potential risks of participating in my research study are minimal. You will only have to refer to how you perceive your working lives and professional experiences in the most convenient way since you will be responsible for deciding the interview's date, time, and place.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

In terms of benefits, my research will give teachers an open space to speak regarding their working lives and professional experiences based on their national tradition, which is not much represented in the literature. Additionally, my research will be an opportunity for teachers to share their perspectives and experiences, which may also help some teachers reflect on some aspects of their views.

Will the interview data be kept confidential?

As the researcher, I assure you that all the data you share with me will be confidential. Only me, the researcher, and my supervisors will have access to it, and only for the purposes of my research.

The data you provide in the interview will be transcribed and translated into English for analysis electronically. Furthermore, data referring directly to you or other people in your workplace will be pseudonymised. The data will be stored and accessed only at the secure network of the UoN, which applies passwords and authorised access. If, for any reason, the data needs to be transferred outside of the secure UoN network, the device with which they will be transferred will be encrypted by the UoN IT Services.

Following the UoN regulations, your data will be kept for a minimum of 7 years after closure. Additionally, your interview data will be archived on the UoN network (OneDrive), allowing future researchers to validate them while their confidentiality remains. If there is hard-copy data of your interview data, they will all be destroyed at the secure disposal service provided by the UoN. Finally, your interview data will be destroyed after the scheduled retention plan and permanently electronically wiped from the UoN network by the UoN IT Helpdesk service.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The research study's results will be included in my PhD thesis, which I will submit to UoN to be awarded the PhD title. Additionally, I will make the results of my research publicly available on UoN’s online platform, NUsearch. Finally, I also intend to use the results of my research in conferences and academic journals while maintaining the confidential treatment of the data teachers will provide.

Has an Ethical Committee reviewed the research?

As a PhD researcher at UoN, I have taken all the necessary measures to ensure the ethical conduct of my research. This means that the School of Education Research Ethics Committee has accessed and approved my research.

Who should you contact for further information?

Researcher: Despoina.Athanasiadou@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisors: christopher.day@nottingham.ac.uk

Jane.Medwell@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

[Thank you!]

Appendix 5. Consent form for teachers

CONSENT FORM

(for teachers)

Project title ……«Teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools' ……

Researcher's name ……Despoina Athanasiadou……..……

Supervisors' name ……..Christopher Day...and…Jane Medwell…….

- I have read the Information Sheet for the intended participants and understand the research's nature and purpose.
- I understand why I will participate in this research project and agree to participate.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw at any point of the research without explaining the reasons.
- I understand that the personal data I will provide during the study will be kept confidential even if the study may be published.
- I understand that my personal information, such as name, age, sex, etc., will be anonymised.
- I understand that I will be recorded during the interview, and I agree with that.
- I understand that I will have the right to check the data I will provide in the interviews and that I have the right to approve and/or withdraw statements and/or provide additional information.
- I understand that the data I will provide in the interview will be transcribed, pseudonymised and translated in English to be analysed electronically. I understand that the data I will provide will be stored and accessed only at the secure network of the UoN, which applies passwords and authorised access. I also understand that if, for any reason, the data needs to be transferred outside of the secure UoN network, the device with which they will be transferred will be encrypted by the IT Services of UoN. I understand that the data I will provide will be accessed only by the researcher and the respective supervisors.
- I understand that, following the regulations of UoN, the data I provide will be kept for a minimum of 7 years after closure. I also understand that the data I will provide will be archived on the UoN network, which will allow future researchers to validate them. In contrast, the confidentiality of the data I provide will continue to be maintained. I understand that if there is hard-copy data of the data I will provide, they will all be destroyed at the secure disposal service provided by the UoN. I understand that the audiotapes of the interviews will be destroyed after the scheduled retention plan, and all data will be permanently electronically wiped from the UoN network by the UoN IT Helpdesk service.
- I understand that I have the right to contact the researcher or the supervisors to ask for further details about the research. I understand that I also have the right to contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham if I wish to complain regarding my participation in the research.

Signed …… (research participant) **Date**……

Contact details

Researcher: Despoina.Athanasiadou@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisors: christopher.day@nottingham.ac.uk

Jane.Medwell@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 6. Information sheet and consent form for principals

INFORMATION SHEET

(for principals)

Project title ……«Teacher professionalism in Greek primary schools' ……

Researcher's name ……Despoina Athanasiadou……..……

Supervisors' name ……..Christopher Day...and…Jane Medwell…….

I would be very pleased to invite you to help me with my research study. To decide whether you would like to assist me in this study, it is crucial to explain who I am, why I am undertaking this study, and how I would like to involve teachers working in your school as my participants. In case you need more information than the following, I am at your disposal to answer all your questions regarding my research. Take all the necessary time you need to decide whether you would like to assist me in my research.

Who am I?

I am Despoina Athanasiadou, a PhD researcher at the University of Nottingham (UoN), School of Education Research, who is interested in undertaking a study regarding the working lives of primary school teachers in Greece. I am interested in learning more about the professional experiences of primary school teachers in Greece because I am a primary school teacher. It is not the first time I have engaged with this topic, since during my masters at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, School of Education, I also realised a research regarding teachers' working lives in Greece. For me, giving Greek teachers an open space to speak themselves in terms of their working lives and professional perspectives and enrich the literature with their voices is crucial.

What is this research about?

The present research focuses on the working lives and professional experiences of primary school teachers in Greece. It aims to gain a clearer understanding of what these teachers experience in their working lives.

How am I going to undertake my research?

To gain insight into teachers' professional experiences and lives, I will use interviews as the method of collecting data. I intend to discuss with teachers to understand how they perceive their working lives rather than describe what they do, invading their working environment, criticising how they work, and/or asking other people in their workplace how they teach. Therefore, my priority is to provide teachers with a safe place to speak regarding their everyday working lives. Finally, I intend to use a recording device in the interviews to avoid missing a point from the teachers' sayings and focus on our discussion.

What do I need your assistance with?

I would like to operate ethically and respect any individuals who are affected by my research, so I designed research that considers your role crucial. This is why, first of all, I want to ask your permission to realise my research in your school and, secondly, your assistance so that my research will not interrupt any of the school's schedule or your existing relationships with teachers.

What I really need from you is for you to assist me in distributing information regarding my research to teachers, including the information sheets and the consent forms, and to provide me with access to your school when the scheduled interviews will take place. Also, I would be pleased if you could inform the interested teachers who ask you for more information about my research to contact me directly.

When will the study be completed?

According to the timetable of the research, the study will have been completed by March 2021.

What are the inclusion criteria for selecting teachers?

To be clearer, I would like primary school teachers of your school to participate in my research study. The criteria on which they will be selected will be:

1. Primary school teachers in Greece
2. The Greek government has appointed you a public primary school teacher with all the necessary credentials (higher education, etc.).
3. They have worked within your school for at least three months.

How many primary school teachers do I want?

For this research, it would be best to have at least seven teachers from your school. However, less or more than this number would be fine.

What will involve taking part in the research?
The topics I would like to discuss with teachers broadly refer to how the many stakeholders surrounding their lives, pupils, parents, colleagues, and you, as the principal, may influence their everyday lives and professional experiences. There will also be more school-contextual factors included as topics, e.g. in terms of school leadership, culture, etc. There will also be a second part of interviews with some teachers in your school, where the topics will be more about their personal influences and experiences of teachers as professionals.

What is the duration of the interviews?

The expected duration of the interviews is approximately twenty minutes. The participation of interested teachers is voluntary, and they are free to withdraw at any stage of the research.

Are there any potential risks for teachers?

The potential risks of those who will take part in the research are minimal. Teachers will only have to refer to how they perceive their working lives and conditions in the most convenient way for them since they will be the ones who decide the date, time, and place where the interview will take place. Furthermore, after conducting the interviews, I will send back the transcripts to teachers to check and confirm their statements and whether they agree with the way I am transcribing.

Are there any benefits for teachers?

In terms of the benefits, my research will give teachers an open space to speak regarding their working lives and professional experiences based on their national tradition, which is not much represented in the literature. Additionally, my research will be an opportunity for teachers to share their perspectives

and experiences, which may also help some teachers reflect on some aspects of their views.

Who will have access to data from research?

The data teachers will provide in the interviews will be transcribed and translated into English to be analysed electronically. Furthermore, the data referring directly to you or other people in your workplace will be pseudonymised. The data will be stored and accessed only at the secure network of the UoN, which applies passwords and authorised access. If, for any reason, the data needs to be transferred outside of the UoN network, the device with which they will be transferred will be encrypted by the UoN IT Services. Besides, the data teachers will provide in the interviews will be accessed only by me, the researcher, and my supervisors and only to fulfil the purposes of the present project.

Furthermore, following the regulations of UoN, the data teachers will provide will be kept for a minimum of 7 years after closure. Additionally, the data will be archived on the UoN network (OneDrive), which will allow future researchers to validate them while the confidentiality of the data I provide will continue to be maintained. If there is hard-copy data of the data teachers will provide, they will all be destroyed at the secure disposal service provided by the UoN. Also, the audiotapes of the interviews will be destroyed after the scheduled retention plan, and all data will be permanently electronically wiped from the UoN network by the UoN IT Helpdesk service.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of my study will be part of my thesis, which I will submit to UoN to be awarded the PhD title. Additionally, I will make the results of my research publicly available on UoN's online platform, NUsearch. Finally, I also intend to use the results of my research in conferences and academic journals while continuing to maintain the confidential treatment of the data teachers will provide.

Has the research been reviewed by an Ethical Committee?

As a PhD researcher at UoN, I have also taken all the necessary measures to ensure that my research is ethical. This means that my research has been accessed and approved by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee.

[Thank you!]

Consent to facilitate research

- I agree to facilitate the present research study voluntarily.

- I understand that I am free to withdraw from assisting the research at any stage, even if I agree to assist now.

- I confirm that the research project's purposes and nature have been explained to me, and I also had the opportunity to ask further questions regarding the study.

- I understand that I will help the researcher distribute the information sheets and consent forms to the intended participants and provide her with access to the school when scheduled interviews are in place.

- I understand that all data teachers will provide in this research project will be kept confidential and pseudonymised when necessary.

- I understand that I am free to seek further information from any person involved in this research, such as the researcher, the supervisors, and/or the ethics committee of UoN.

Signed from the principal ……
Date……

Who should you contact for further information?

Researcher: Despoina.Athanasiadou@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisors: christopher.day@nottingham.ac.uk

Jane.Medwell@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator: educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 7. General information for participants

	Pseudonym	Gender	Specialisation	Working experience	School
1.	Alexandros	Male	Main class teacher	32	Primary School A
2.	Andreas	Male	Main class teacher/Assistant head	26	Primary School A
3.	Constantine	Female	Principal	24	Primary School A
4.	Christina	Female	Main class teacher	26	Primary School A
5.	Ioanna	Female	Integration class teacher	4	Primary School A
6.	Marilena	Female	Parallel support teacher	2	Primary School A
7.	Vagia	Female	Parallel support teacher	2	Primary School A
8.	Demetra	Female	Main class teacher	24	Primary School B
9.	Thalia	Female	Main class teacher	26	Primary School B
10.	Giorgos	Male	Extended school teacher/Assistant head	31	Primary School B
11.	Theodora	Female	Integration class teacher	18	Primary School B
12.	Spiros	Male	Main class teacher	27	Primary School B
13.	Foteini	Female	Main class teacher	18	Primary School B
14.	Anastasia	Female	Main class teacher	16	Primary School B
15.	Antigone	Female	Main class teacher	5	Primary School C
16.	Athena	Female	Main class teacher	10	Primary School C
17.	Eleftheria	Female	Main class teacher	1	Primary School C
18.	Alexandra	Female	Main class teacher	3	Primary School C
19.	Anna	Female	Main class teacher	2	Primary School C
20.	Marianna	Female	Main class teacher	4	Primary School C
21.	Nikoleta	Female	Main class teacher	3	Primary School C
22.	Aristoteles	Male	Main class teacher	22	Primary School D
23.	Konstantinos	Male	Main class teacher	34	Primary School D
24.	Nikolaos	Male	Principal	29	Primary School D
25.	Panagiotis	Male	Main class teacher/Assistant head	26	Primary School D
26.	Eleni	Female	Integration class teacher	15	Primary School D
27.	Katerina	Female	Main class teacher	28	Primary School D
28.	Sofia	Female	Main class teacher	31	Primary School D
29.	Maria	Female	Main class teacher	27	Primary School D
30.	Angelike	Female	Main class teacher	26	Primary School D

Appendix 8. Ethical approval

University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

School of Education
University of Nottingham
The Dearing Building
Jubilee Campus
Wollaton Road
Nottingham
NG8 1BB

educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

20/10/2020

Our Ref: 2020/28

Dear Despoina Athanasiadou

Thank you for your research ethics application for your project:

Primary school teachers' in Greece working lives and conditions with regard to the concept of autonomy

Thank you for confirming you will make the minor changes we requested in a letter on 14/10/20. We have added your amendments notes to your application file.

Based on the above assessment, it is deemed your research is:

- **Approved**

We wish you well with your research.

Dr Kay Fuller
Chair of the Ethics Committee