

# PERCEIVED COMPETENCE OF THE PRIMARY EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF IN THESSALONIKI, GREECE BASED ON THEIR EXPERIENCE AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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**Abstract**— Competences have been the focus of international attention in recent decades, as they can contribute to the accomplishment of a more efficient operation concerning organizations. In school units, the issue of competence is one of the crucial factors leading to achievement. In the present study, it is examined whether there is a difference in the perceptions on the level of competence of the administrative staff (both principals and vice principals) as far as their experience (experienced or inexperienced) and a common characteristic of the general environment, such as the school district (urban or non-urban), are concerned. Based on the findings concerning the correlation between experience and district, it is revealed that the greatest need for training seems to concern the novice school administrative staff, both of urban and non-urban districts, while on the contrary the least need for training refers to the experienced ones of urban districts.

**Keywords**— Competence(S), Administrative Staff, Novice, Experienced, District, Training

## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, organizations of both private and public sector focused their interest on the concepts of ‘competence’ and ‘competency’, aiming at developing their people - employees [5]. Some organizations already use ‘competences’ and ‘competencies’ as components of administrative performance [20]. As far as the field of education is concerned, the ideas of competence and competencies have become central in the last four decades, as experts have emphasized on the importance of setting learning objectives to guide curriculum designers and courses creators, in order to help students understand the learning process [16].

Unfortunately, the terms ‘competence’ and ‘competency’ are often confused [30]. According to Nolan and McConnell, these terms require definition, as they are often used interchangeably and may, in fact, be unique but related entities. "Competence is often defined as the ability to perform, which is based on knowledge, while competency is the actual performance" [32]. "Competences describe what people need to do to perform well in their work, while competencies identify the dimensions of behavior behind adequate performance" [9],[10].

The most important benefit of approaching competences for management development is the fact that the particular approach focuses on what managers actually do and not on

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assumptions about what they do [17]. More generally, it is believed that competences are the key factor for creating a competitive advantage [29].

Various surveys have been conducted concerning the perceived level of competence, but none of them examines whether they are related or differentiated according to the experience of administrative staff and some of their common personal characteristics (such as gender, position and titles in business management) or characteristics concerning the general environment - situation (such as the amount of school classes and the population of the area or the district where the school is located), to determine whether these factors affect their effectiveness. Therefore, it is highly interesting and essential to consider whether there is a difference in the perceptions on the level of competence of the administrative staff as far as their experience (experienced or inexperienced) and a common characteristic of the general environment, such as the school district (urban or non-urban), are concerned.

## 2. COMPETENCE AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN GENERAL

It is essential to clarify that competence means a skill and the standard of performance that is achieved, while competency refers to the behavior on the basis of which this is achieved. Put simply, the first describes what people can do, while the second focuses on how they will do it. Therefore, there is an interface between the two, that is the adequate application of a skill is likely to make an act adequate and vice versa. The plural of each word gives two different meanings. ‘Competences’ refer to a skill scale that is completed satisfactorily, while ‘competencies’ refer to the behavior adopted for an adequate performance [19], as shown in the table below:

Table I. The Interface between ‘competency’ and ‘competence’

<b>Competence</b>	<=====>	<b>Competency</b>
Skill-based	<=====>	Behavior-based
Attributes of the job	<=====>	Attributes of the person
Process-centric	<=====>	Result-centric
Standard attained	<=====>	Manner of behavior
What is measured	<=====>	How the standard is achieved

Taking into consideration all the above, it is reasonable, from this point onwards, to illustrate that the term competence and its plural competences will be used when referring to ‘competences’, ‘competencies’, ‘competence’ and or ‘competency’. However, it must be pointed out that the terms ‘competences’ and ‘skills’ are very often used interchangeably. Despite the fact that there are some similarities between them, they are nevertheless remarkably different [22]. Skill is the executive part of competence, which is the result of learning and training that has preceded and involves specific actions to achieve the desired result. In contrast, competence includes broader knowledge, skills, abilities, personal attitudes, beliefs, non-cognitive elements and personality qualities, that is data which contribute to performance. It is understood that the concept of ‘competency’ is not equivalent to the concept of ‘skill’, since the former is broader than the latter, including skills and expressing what the subject can do in real situations [24].

It is of great importance to point out that competences are the source of the manager's three key roles [8]:

- The interpersonal role is the official duty of representing the organization. It is about building interpersonal relationships at the institute and inspiring employees to take on challenges. The manager is a kind of liaison between specific organizational units within the institution.

- The information role concerns the flow of information within the institution and the manager is perceived as the source and carrier of important information, since he/she himself/herself manages the flow of information from external institutions.

- Decision-making roles are very complex and absolutely essential in any action, as they require decisions. Surely, some decisions are more important than others, some are less important and some others are strategic.

The choice of competences is the most important process in the development of training activities for managers [26], whereas Roberts links competence to the early stages of the recruitment and selection process [29]. More generally, however, we can argue that the important benefit of the competence approach to management development is that it focuses on what managers actually do and not on assumptions about what managers do [17], resulting in this way to the previously mentioned belief that competences are the key for creating a competitive advantage.

### **3. COMPETENCE AND SCHOOL LEADERS**

Human beings seek competence, since everyone desires to do the right thing. The challenge and the opportunity for school leaders is to cultivate the know-how of staff and students in their work, their way of thinking and their daily actions. Achievement comes through competence, experience and knowledge [6]. In particular, as far as teachers are concerned, competences are directly connected to their professional ability which presupposes and requires their knowledge both of the teaching subject and ability on their part, diagnostic and counseling abilities, classroom management ability, assessor - evaluator ability, research disposition and interest in innovations, communication skills and finally readiness for continuous education and training [31].

It is considered that school leaders should have professional competency especially in instructional leadership, organizational development and creating a positive school culture. By having all these competencies, they can administer a school in a more effective way [3].

There are specific differences between a competency-based school leaders and those who are not. Firstly, the competency-based leaders possesses a thorough knowledge of the tasks, competencies and indicators of competences required in the various administrative roles that he or she supervises. Secondly, the competence-based leader understands that the requirements of any school position face ongoing change justifying the fact that tasks and related competences demand continuous personal growth. Thirdly, competency-based leaders know what their personal strengths and weaknesses are and work from the perspective of their strengths [15]. that is, the leader must identify where the strengths of the school exist and whether the whole staff understand the direction of the school [11].

In theory, there are a lot of views on the competences of school leaders and more often there is an identification between them. School leader competences can be divided into two groups [8]:

- the internal concerning the planning, the control, the management, the organization, the duties of the employer and

- the external ones concerning the representation of the school, the cooperation with other organisations, the creation - building of the image of the school or the institution.

The effectiveness of school leaders' leadership depends on whether they can facilitate members' participation and involvement in the decision-making and planning process, the communication between the school's multiple groups, the collaboration between different school units, the social interactions and relationships among members, the development of school climate, as well as the basic teaching and learning activities [4]. School leadership competences require, not only to inspire teachers in their commitment towards students, but also to challenge and support those who fail in their task of improving their teaching practice [7].

Essentially, the issue of competences requires school leaders to see each individual as capable of approaching maximum performance with minimum supervision [13]. However, competences are more difficult to detect in terms of qualifications, skills or knowledge, although they clearly influence the above, as shown in the figure below [23]:

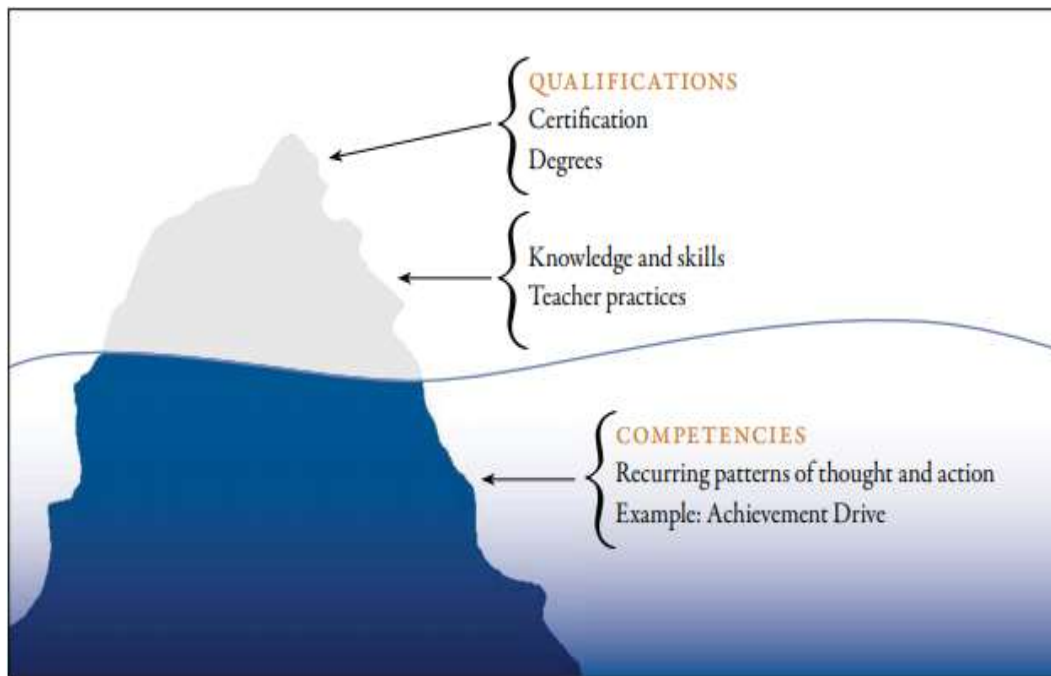


Fig. 1 Observable Characteristics versus Underlying Competencies

Consequently, school leaders should be selected according to proven competences. They must have clear roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability to all school government and education agencies [25]. Among other functions, principals should demonstrate competence in areas such as planning, staffing, budgeting, and communicating with a wide range of audiences in order to be effective in the role of a special school leader. They have to make decisions about curriculum and guidance, schedules, support services, school curriculum evaluation, students' transfer, parent-teacher meetings, and communication systems required for facilitating the operation of all programmes [12].

A lot of research has been done on competences stressing the importance of their implementation as far as school leadership is concerned. An important study, which explored the need for principal competences for effective school administration in secondary schools, was conducted in Nigeria by Adegbeile in 2011. The results revealed that the instructive leadership skills that principals needed to exercise effective

school administration included among others: the principal's cooperation with teachers in setting objectives, the provision of activities by the principal and the supervision of lesson plans, the teaching and learning activities, the evaluation of the curriculum design and its implementation [1].

In Malaysia, another study, that of Rosnarizah, Amin Razak & Abdul in 2010, attempted to determine the high-impact competences of the country's school leaders. The results of the research revealed that the general level of competence of principals was moderate, the following competences as highly influential for school principals: change management, quality focus, computer use, decision making, problem solving, performance management, school improvement, as well as building capacity [18].

Another research is that of Williams in 2007 on school principals in the USA. Twelve of the twenty competences that were studied significantly differentiated prominent from typical principals. The research revealed differences in the way prominent and typical principals perceive and adapt to their external organizational environment. Prominent principals interact with a wider range of external groups and use a wider limit for measuring strategy [28].

Shirley's research in 2010, conducted in Malaysia, examined the competences of secondary school principals and the importance they play in their continuing professional development. The results showed that, in addition to the interpersonal relationships that principals considered to have a high level of competency, the level of the majority of them in other four areas of competences studied was moderate. The results emphasize both the importance and the need for continuous professional development of principals [21].

We infer that although much research has been done based on competences, there is a void concerning the perceptions on the level of competence of the administrative staff as far as their experience and the school district (urban or non-urban) are concerned. A probable incompetence on their part may unfold an urgent need for training so that they can perform their task on the best effective level.

## **4. RESEARCH PROCESS**

The research process that was followed includes the sample of the administrative staff (principals and vice principals) that participated, as well as the tool and the methodology that were used to gather data.

### **4.1. RESEARCH SAMPLE**

The target population of the research was the 496 administrative staff, that is the 305 principals and the 191 vice principals, of a total of 312 six-grade or more primary schools in the prefecture of Thessaloniki in Greece. At the end of the survey, a total of 412 administrative staff (a percentage of about 83% in the whole prefecture), that is 261 principals (who constitute 52.6% of the total number of the administrative staff and 85.6% of the total number of principals of this prefecture) and 85.6% of the 151 vice principals (who constitute 30.4% of the total number of the administrative staff and 79.1% of the total number of vice principals of this prefecture), responded completing it sufficiently and in such a way that data can be used to analyze and draw conclusions about the correlation between experience and district.

### **4.2. RESEARCH TOOL**

To measure the competences of administrative staff (principals and vice principals), the questionnaire "Principals' Perception of Competence Survey" of the American researcher Kelly Glodt was used, translated into Greek and adapted to the Greek reality following the process of backward translation. The questionnaire is divided into two

sections. The first part includes general items - questions about the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the second one includes 41 five-point Likert-scale items with the following values: 1 = fully competent, 2 = somehow competent, 3 = marginally competent, 4 = not competent and 5 = have never experienced, which investigate certain competences of principals and vice principals concerning common administrative responsibilities of their work. Administrative staff with up to three years of experience were considered inexperienced for this study, while those with more years were considered experienced. This decision was made because a three-year experience was considered sufficient time for a principal or a vice principal to deal with certain situations, specific duties and responsibilities. Furthermore, it is of crucial importance to be mentioned that the lower the value chosen by the respondent was, the higher the perceived level of his/her competence was. This decision was made in order to be safeguarded that the respondents would not complete the questionnaire taking for granted in advance that the higher the number of their response is, the more competent they think they are.

### **4.3. STATISTICAL METHODOLOGY**

The participants' responses in this research were presented by the corresponding means and standard deviations per each item-question and per each group of administrative staff. The groups of administrative staff were formed taking into account the factors "EXPERIENCE" and "DISTRICT" (novice of urban school, novice of non-urban school, experienced of urban school and experienced of non-urban school). The statistical comparisons of perceived competence scores among the four groups of administrative staff were performed by applying the Kruskal-Wallis test and Dunn's post-hoc test with Bonferroni correction. The significance level was set equal to 5% ( $p = 0.05$ ).

## **5. FINDINGS**

The findings of this research are divided into the general ones and these of them that seem to stress the need for further training for the administrative staff, due to their quite low means scores.

### **5.1. GENERAL FINDINGS**

This particular research aimed at determining whether there is a significant difference in the perceived level of competence of novice - beginner - inexperienced administrative staff (principals and vice principals) compared to that of the experienced ones, but also separately between novice and experienced administrative staff of non-urban district schools, as well as between novice and experienced administrative staff of urban district schools of the prefecture of Thessaloniki in Greece in terms of 41 items - questions - competences included in the "Principals' Perception of Competence Survey" questionnaire.

Table II below includes all the data of the administrative staff deriving from the "Principals' Perception of Competence Survey" questionnaire ranking from the best to the worst, based on the means scores of the perceived competence for the novice administrative staff (principals and vice principals) of non-urban schools ( $N = 48$ ). The number of respondents to this survey varies per question - item - competence. The averages were based on the values: 1 = fully competent, 2 = somehow competent, 3 = marginally competent, 4 = not competent, as the answer 5 = have never experienced was excluded from the analysis.

Table II. Perceived Competence Means Scores for Novice Administrative Staff (principals and vice principals) of Non-Urban Schools (up to 3 years of administrative experience)

Number	Question - Item - Competence	Statistics		
		N	Mean Scores	Standard Deviations
34.	Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees	48	1.54	0.544
27.	Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues	47	1.55	0.583
36.	Dealing with Concerned/Angry Parents	48	1.58	0.613
12.	Preparing for and Conducting Effective Faculty Meetings	48	1.67	0.663
35.	Organizing and Supervising School Activities/Athletics	47	1.68	0.556
7.	Improving Overall School Climate	48	1.69	0.776
39.	Possessing Mediation Skills (staff vs. staff and/or student vs. student)	48	1.69	0.776
38.	Developing Time Management Skills	47	1.70	0.657
32.	Possessing Public Speaking Skills	48	1.73	0.765
8.	Improving Staff Morale	47	1.74	0.736
37.	Developing Decision Making Skills	48	1.75	0.729
10.	Supervising Staff	47	1.77	0.698
40.	Possessing Necessary Technology Skills	47	1.79	0.750
13.	Teacher Union Issues	44	1.82	0.756
11.	Learning Routine office tasks/procedures	48	1.83	0.930
28.	Interpreting and Enforcing School Law Issues	48	1.83	0.781
31.	Developing Public Relations Skills	48	1.83	0.834
15.	Addressing Custodial Staff Issues	48	1.88	0.733
33.	Creating an Effective Site Council	46	1.89	0.674
6.	Creating an Atmosphere of High Expectations	48	1.90	0.805
14.	Addressing Building Maintenance Issues	44	1.91	0.910
20.	Leading Curriculum Development	46	1.91	0.725
19.	Analyzing Student Data	48	1.92	0.794
1.	Possessing Instructional Leadership Skills	44	1.93	0.587
41.	Developing and Preparing for Board Meeting Presentations	44	1.93	0.818

4.	Assisting Teachers in Creating More Effective Lesson Plans	47	1.98	0.872
18.	Guiding the School Improvement Process	48	2.00	0.744
22.	Completing Education Reports	47	2.00	0.956
25.	Dealing with the Building Budget	47	2.04	0.932
16.	Addressing Fire Marshal Issues	45	2.07	0.837
17.	Addressing Secretarial Staff Issues	38	2.08	0.941
3.	Instructing Teachers in Effective Instructional Techniques	45	2.11	0.832
5.	Leading Effective Staff Development	47	2.11	0.787
30.	Addressing ELL/Bilingual Issues	48	2.21	0.922
23.	Handling Site-Based Management	47	2.23	1.005
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	39	2.23	1.038
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	47	2.23	0.840
2.	Possessing Knowledge of Effective Instructional Methods (Best Practices)	44	2.25	0.781
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	40	2.32	0.997
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	41	2.44	1.074
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	38	2.45	0.978

It is noticed that the best means scores in terms of the perceived competence for novice non-urban school administrative staff appear in *Question 34: Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees* with an average of 1.54. Then follow *Question 27: Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues* with an average of 1.55, *Question 36: Dealing with Concerned/Angry Parents* with an average of 1.58, *Question 12: Preparing for and Conducting Effective Faculty Teachers' Meetings* with an average of 1.67 and *Question 35: Organizing and Supervising School Activities/Athletics* with an average of 1.68.

On the contrary, the worst means scores in terms of the perceived competence for novice non-urban school principals are noticed in *Question 21: Supervision of the assessment-certification process* with an average of 2.45, followed by *Question 9: Conducting Formal Evaluations* and *Question 24: Staffing/Interviewing Skills* with averages of 2.44 and 2.32 respectively.

Table III below includes all the data of the administrative staff deriving from the "Principals' Perception of Competence Survey" questionnaire with a classification from the best to the worst, based on the means scores of the perceived competence for the novice administrative staff (principals and vice principals) of urban schools (N = 134). The number of respondents to this survey varies per question - item - competence. The averages were based on the values: 1 = fully competent, 2 = somehow competent, 3 = marginally competent, 4 = not competent, as the answer 5 = have never experienced was excluded from the analysis.



Table III. Perceived Competence Means Scores for Novice Administrative Staff (principals and vice principals) of urban schools (up to 3 years of administrative experience)

Number	Question - Item - Competence	Statistics		
		N	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation
27.	Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues	132	1.59	0.592
34.	Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees	130	1.63	0.649
36.	Dealing with Concerned/Angry Parents	133	1.65	0.578
7.	Improving Overall School Climate	133	1.68	0.632
8.	Improving Staff Morale	129	1.72	0.684
12.	Preparing for and Conducting Effective Faculty Meetings	131	1.73	0.713
39.	Possessing Mediation Skills (staff vs. staff and/or student vs. student)	130	1.73	0.594
37.	Developing Decision Making Skills	129	1.74	0.641
35.	Organizing and Supervising School Activities/Athletics	126	1.79	0.719
11.	Learning Routine office tasks/procedures	130	1.79	0.733
40.	Possessing Necessary Technology Skills	133	1.80	0.645
28.	Interpreting and Enforcing School Law Issues	131	1.82	0.728
31.	Developing Public Relations Skills	129	1.83	0.762
38.	Developing Time Management Skills	130	1.85	0.664
18.	Guiding the School Improvement Process	132	1.86	0.729
19.	Analyzing Student Data	131	1.89	0.781
20.	Leading Curriculum Development	127	1.90	0.765
4.	Assisting Teachers in Creating More Effective Lesson Plans	129	1.90	0.738
17.	Addressing Secretarial Staff Issues	122	1.90	0.776
15.	Addressing Custodial Staff Issues	131	1.91	0.769
32.	Possessing Public Speaking Skills	131	1.95	0.797
10.	Supervising Staff	131	1.95	0.700
25.	Dealing with the Building Budget	119	1.97	0.786
33.	Creating an Effective Site Council	125	1.98	0.740
3.	Instructing Teachers in Effective Instructional Techniques	127	1.98	0.713

14.	Addressing Building Maintenance Issues	128	1.99	0.808
30.	Addressing ELL/Bilingual Issues	124	2.03	0.743
41.	Developing and Preparing for Board Meeting Presentations	118	2.04	0.800
22.	Completing Education Reports	123	2.04	0.918
16.	Addressing Fire Marshal Issues	125	2.04	0.817
13.	Teacher Union Issues	128	2.05	0.762
6.	Creating an Atmosphere of High Expectations	129	2.05	0.672
1.	Possessing Instructional Leadership Skills	129	2.06	0.609
5.	Leading Effective Staff Development	129	2.09	0.765
23.	Handling Site-Based Management	121	2.10	0.821
2.	Possessing Knowledge of Effective Instructional Methods (Best Practices)	129	2.16	0.667
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	124	2.22	0.870
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	110	2.30	0.894
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	103	2.30	0.884
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	110	2.33	0.900
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	108	2.51	0.826

It is noticed that the best means scores of the perceived competence for novice urban school principals are shown in *Question 27: Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues* with an average of 1.59. Then follow *Question 34: Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees* with an average of 1.63, *Question 36: Dealing with Concerned/Angry Parents* with an average of 1.65, *Question 7: Improving Overall School Climate* with an average of 1.68 and *Question 8: Improving Staff Morale* with an average of 1.72.

On the contrary, the worst means scores in terms of perceived competence for novice urban school principals reappear in *Question 9: Conducting Formal Evaluations* with an average of 2.51, followed by *Question 21: Overseeing the Accreditation Process* with an average of 2.33. Then with the same average, that is 2.30, two questions follow which are *Question 24: Staffing/Interviewing Skills* and *Question 26: Implementing District/Building Policy*.

Table IV then includes all the data of the administrative staff deriving from the 'Principals' Perception of Competence Survey' questionnaire ranking from the best to the worst, based on the means scores of the perceived competence for the experienced administrative staff (principals and vice principals) of non-urban schools (N = 52). The number of respondents to this survey varies per question - item - competence. The averages were based on the values: 1 = fully competent, 2 = somehow competent, 3 = marginally competent, 4 = not competent, as the answer 5 = have never experienced was excluded from the analysis.

Table IV. Perceived Competence Means Scores for Experienced Administrative Staff (principals and vice principals) of non-urban schools (more than 3 years of administrative experience)

Number	Question - Item - Competence	Statistics		
		N	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation
7.	Improving Overall School Climate	51	1.39	0.532
34.	Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees	51	1.39	0.532
25.	Dealing with the Building Budget	50	1.40	0.670
27.	Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues	51	1.41	0.536
11.	Learning Routine office tasks/procedures	51	1.45	0.541
37.	Developing Decision Making Skills	51	1.45	0.541
8.	Improving Staff Morale	50	1.46	0.613
36.	Dealing with Concerned/Angry Parents	51	1.47	0.504
12.	Preparing for and Conducting Effective Faculty Meetings	51	1.49	0.703
39.	Possessing Mediation Skills (staff vs. staff and/or student vs. student)	50	1.50	0.544
35.	Organizing and Supervising School Activities/Athletics	51	1.55	0.610
18.	Guiding the School Improvement Process	51	1.57	0.539
28.	Interpreting and Enforcing School Law Issues	51	1.57	0.608
14.	Addressing Building Maintenance Issues	50	1.58	0.609
15.	Addressing Custodial Staff Issues	50	1.58	0.609
22.	Completing Education Reports	49	1.65	0.663
6.	Creating an Atmosphere of High Expectations	51	1.69	0.583
10.	Supervising Staff	50	1.70	0.707
19.	Analyzing Student Data	50	1.72	0.671
13.	Teacher Union Issues	52	1.73	0.819
38.	Developing Time Management Skills	51	1.73	0.666
40.	Possessing Necessary Technology Skills	51	1.73	0.603
17.	Addressing Secretarial Staff Issues	46	1.74	0.648
31.	Developing Public Relations Skills	51	1.76	0.764
1.	Possessing Instructional Leadership Skills	51	1.78	0.503
23.	Handling Site-Based Management	47	1.85	0.780

33.	Creating an Effective Site Council	50	1.85	0.650
4.	Assisting Teachers in Creating More Effective Lesson Plans	51	1.86	0.749
32.	Possessing Public Speaking Skills	51	1.86	0.895
5.	Leading Effective Staff Development	52	1.88	0.784
20.	Leading Curriculum Development	51	1.88	0.621
2.	Possessing Knowledge of Effective Instructional Methods (Best Practices)	51	1.90	0.539
16.	Addressing Fire Marshal Issues	50	1.92	0.829
30.	Addressing ELL/Bilingual Issues	51	1.92	0.688
41.	Developing and Preparing for Board Meeting Presentations	50	1.92	0.829
3.	Instructing Teachers in Effective Instructional Techniques	49	1.94	0.659
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	51	2.08	0.821
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	47	2.15	0.884
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	46	2.22	0.728
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	44	2.30	0.851
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	45	2.33	0.826

It is noticed that the best means scores of the perceived competence for experienced non-urban school principals at 1.39 appear in two questions. These are *Question 7: Improving Overall School Climate* and *Question 34: Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees*. *Question 25: Dealing with the Building Budget* and *Question 27: Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues* follow with averages of 1.40 and 1.41 respectively. Then with the same average, that is 1.45, follow two other questions which are *Question 11: Learning Routine office tasks/procedures* and *Question 37: Developing Decision Making Skills*.

On the contrary, the worst means scores in terms of the perceived competence for experienced non-urban school principals appear once again in *Question 9: Conducting Formal Evaluations* with an average of 2.33, followed by questions with the immediately worst percentages, which are *Question 24: Staffing/Interviewing Skills* and *Question 21: Overseeing the Accreditation Process* with averages of 2.30 and 2.22 respectively.

Table V below includes all the data of the administrative staff deriving from the 'Principals' Perception of Competence Survey' questionnaire ranking from the best to the worst, based on the means scores of the perceived competence for the experienced administrative staff (principals and vice principals) of urban schools (N = 178). The number of respondents to this survey varies per question - item - competence. The averages were based on the values: 1 = fully competent, 2 = somehow competent, 3 = marginally competent, 4 = not competent, as the answer 5 = have never experienced was excluded from the analysis.

Table V. Perceived Competence Means Scores for Experienced Administrative Staff (principals and vice principals) of Urban Schools (more than 3 years of administrative experience)

Number	Question - Item - Competence	Statistics		
		N	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation
34.	Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees	177	1.37	0.560
7.	Improving Overall School Climate	177	1.38	0.520
12.	Preparing for and Conducting Effective Faculty Meetings	175	1.44	0.630
37.	Developing Decision Making Skills	178	1.44	0.600
39.	Possessing Mediation Skills (staff vs. staff and/or student vs. student)	174	1.44	0.584
8.	Improving Staff Morale	178	1.45	0.602
11.	Learning Routine office tasks/procedures	174	1.45	0.574
28.	Interpreting and Enforcing School Law Issues	178	1.45	0.647
36.	Dealing with Concerned/Angry Parents	178	1.49	0.585
15.	Addressing Custodial Staff Issues	176	1.50	0.650
25.	Dealing with the Building Budget	171	1.50	0.754
27.	Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues	177	1.50	0.585
14.	Addressing Building Maintenance Issues	176	1.53	0.684
35.	Organizing and Supervising School Activities/Athletics	176	1.55	0.683
18.	Guiding the School Improvement Process	177	1.56	0.629
10.	Supervising Staff	174	1.57	0.723
38.	Developing Time Management Skills	178	1.58	0.677
33.	Creating an Effective Site Council	171	1.60	0.628
31.	Developing Public Relations Skills	176	1.62	0.731
17.	Addressing Secretarial Staff Issues	163	1.64	0.682
13.	Teacher Union Issues	178	1.65	0.761
32.	Possessing Public Speaking Skills	177	1.65	0.708
19.	Analyzing Student Data	173	1.68	0.731
22.	Completing Education Reports	171	1.68	0.822
20.	Leading Curriculum Development	173	1.70	0.764
40.	Possessing Necessary Technology Skills	178	1.70	0.636

6.	Creating an Atmosphere of High Expectations	173	1.72	0.668
16.	Addressing Fire Marshal Issues	173	1.73	0.786
1.	Possessing Instructional Leadership Skills	178	1.74	0.583
41.	Developing and Preparing for Board Meeting Presentations	165	1.78	0.827
30.	Addressing ELL/Bilingual Issues	169	1.84	0.812
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	171	1.85	0.805
2.	Possessing Knowledge of Effective Instructional Methods (Best Practices)	176	1.86	0.662
23.	Handling Site-Based Management	167	1.86	0.850
5.	Leading Effective Staff Development	174	1.89	0.786
4.	Assisting Teachers in Creating More Effective Lesson Plans	176	1.90	0.771
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	153	1.92	0.850
3.	Instructing Teachers in Effective Instructional Techniques	172	1.94	0.735
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	149	2.11	0.839
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	142	2.11	0.884
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	146	2.36	0.837

It is noticed that the best means scores for the perceived competence for experienced urban school principals are shown in *Question 34: Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees* with an average of 1.37. *Question 7: Improving Overall School Climate* follows with an average of 1.38 is next and then three questions with the same average follow, that is 1.44. These are *Question 12: Preparing for and Conducting Effective Faculty Meetings*, *Question 37: Developing Decision Making Skills* and *Question 39: Possessing Mediation Skills (staff vs. staff and/or student vs. student)*.

On the contrary, the worst means scores in terms of the perceived competence for experienced urban school principals appear again in *Question 9: Conducting Formal Evaluations* with an average of 2.36. Then two questions with the same average follow, that is 2.11. These are *Question 24: Staffing/Interviewing Skills* and *Question 21: Overseeing the Accreditation Process*.

In general, the average perceived competence of urban school principals is better than that of non-urban school ones in 31 of the 41 questions. On the contrary, the averages of non-urban school principals are better than those of urban ones in only 10 questions. Therefore, reasonably the overall average perceived competence of urban school principals is slightly better than that of non-urban school principals (average = 1.79 vs. average = 1.84). This specific difference concerning the average perceived competence is also proportional to the individual comparisons between both experienced and inexperienced non-urban school principals (average = 1.77 vs. average = 1.91), as well as between experienced and inexperienced urban school principals (average = 1.67 vs. average = 1.95).

In particular, the average perceived competence for experienced non-urban school administrative staff is better than that of beginner - inexperienced ones in 39 of the 41 questions, with a difference ranging from 0.01 (*Question 41: Developing and Preparing*

for *Board Meeting Presentations* with average = 1.92 vs. average = 1.93) to 0.64 (*Question 25: Dealing with the Building Budget* with average = 1.40 vs. average = 2.04). In the remaining two questions, that is questions 32 and 38, the average competence of novice non-urban school principals is better than that of the experienced ones with a difference of 0.03 for *Question 38: Developing Time Management Skills* (average = 1.70 vs. average = 1.73) and 0.13 for *Question 32: Teacher Union Issues* (average = 1.73 vs. average = 1.86).

As far as urban schools are concerned, the average perceived competence for experienced administrative staff is better than that of inexperienced in 40 of the 41 questions with a difference ranging from 0.04 (*Question 3: Instructing Teachers in Effective Instructional Techniques* with average = 1.94 vs. average = 1.98) to 0.47 (*Question 25: Dealing with the Building Budget* with average = 1.50 vs. average = 1.97). On the contrary, *Question 4: Assisting Teachers in Creating More Effective Lesson Plans* is the only one in which the same average appears for both experienced administrative staff and beginners (average = 1.90).

As regards comparisons of perceived competence scores among the four groups of administrative staff (novice of urban school, novice of non-urban school, experienced of urban school, experienced of non-urban school), Kruskal-Wallis tests indicated that there are statistical differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) in 30 out of 41 questions (Table VI).

Table VI. Comparisons of Perceived Competence Scores among the Four Groups of Administrative Staff (novice of urban school, novice of non-urban school, experienced of urban school, experienced of non-urban school) based on Experience and District

QUESTION	Chi-square**	d.f.	p-value
1	22,782	3	<0.001
2	20,882	3	<0.001
3	1,570	3	0,666
4	0,288	3	0,962
5	7,822	3	0,050
6	19,559	3	<0.001
7	23,117	3	<0.001
8	17,787	3	<0.001
9	2,574	3	0,462
10	25,294	3	<0.001
11	21,195	3	<0.001
12	17,395	3	0,001
13	22,749	3	<0.001
14	30,019	3	<0.001
15	28,275	3	<0.001
16	14,460	3	0,002
17	11,880	3	0,008
18	23,682	3	<0.001

19	7,353	3	0,061
20	8,446	3	0,038
21	6,114	3	0,106
22	15,511	3	0,001
23	10,176	3	0,017
24	4,869	3	0,182
25	44,220	3	<0.001
26	13,496	3	0,004
27	4,049	3	0,256
28	27,488	3	<0.001
29	18,270	3	<0.001
30	9,891	3	0,020
31	7,739	3	0,052
32	11,591	3	0,009
33	22,607	3	<0.001
34	16,602	3	0,001
35	11,938	3	0,008
36	7,757	3	0,051
37	23,587	3	<0.001
38	13,308	3	0,004
39	19,921	3	<0.001
40	2,249	3	0,522
41	9,026	3	0,029

According to the Dunn's post-hoc test with Bonferroni correction concerning the four groups of the administrative staff with statistical differences ( $p < 0.05$ ), six comparisons were performed: experienced urban versus experienced non-urban, experienced urban versus novice non-urban, experienced urban versus novice urban, experienced non-urban versus novice non-urban, experienced non-urban versus novice urban and novice non-urban versus novice urban. The results reveal that there were found statistical differences concerning four of the six aforementioned comparisons.

More specifically, the comparison between experienced urban and novice urban administrative staff indicated statistical difference in 29 out of 30 questions. The comparison between experienced urban and novice non-urban administrative staff revealed statistical difference in 9 out of 30 questions, while the comparison between experienced non-urban and novice urban administrative staff showed statistical difference in 8 out of 30 questions. The comparison between experienced non-urban and novice non-urban administrative staff indicated statistical difference in only 2 out of 30 questions. Finally, there were no statistical differences between experienced urban and



experienced non-urban administrative staff, as well as between novice non-urban and novice urban administrative staff (Table VII).

Table VII. Post-hoc Comparisons of Perceived Competence Scores among the four groups of administrative staff (novice of urban school, novice of non-urban school, experienced of urban school, experienced of non-urban school) based on Experience and District

Question	1		2		3		4		5		6	
	Experienced Urban vs. Experienced Non-urban		Experienced Urban vs. Novice Non-urban		Experienced Urban vs. Novice Urban		Experienced Non-urban vs. Novice Non-urban		Experienced Non-urban vs. Novice Urban		Novice Non-urban vs. Novice Urban	
1					4,644	<0.001			2,661	0,047		
2			3,223	0,008	3,885	0,001						
6					4,123	<0.001			3,125	0,001		
7					4,384	<0.001			2,915	0,021		
8			2,641	0,050	3,667	0,001						
10					5,005	<0.001						
11					4,155	<0.001			2,788	0,032		
12					3,833	0,001						
13					4,669	<0.001			2,781	0,032		
14					5,237	<0.001			2,981	0,017		
15			3,303	0,006	4,881	<0.001						
16					3,450	0,003						
17			2,699	0,042	2,816	0,029						
18			3,794	0,001	3,77	0,001	2,834	0,028				
20					2,372	0,018						
22					3,581	0,002						
23					2,586	0,010						
25			3,991	<0.001	5,419	<0.001	3,852	0,001	4,583	<0.001		
26					3,557	0,002						
28			3,343	0,005	4,839	<0.001						
29			2,956	0,019	3,815	0,001						
30			2,682	0,044								
32					3,350	0,005						
33					4,507	<0.001						
34					3,825	0,001						
35					3,247	0,007						
37			2,881	0,024	4,382	<0.001			2,738	0,037		
38					3,625	0,002						
39					4,351	<0.001						
41					2,982	0,017						

## 5.2. FINDINGS AND TRAINING

As far as the perceived averages of competence for novice non-urban school principals are concerned, the data revealed that 13 of the 41 averages for administrative competences fell below 2.0. This means that the specific administrative staff of the prefecture of Thessaloniki do not feel particularly competent in terms of their specific administrative responsibilities. These thirteen items - questions are listed in Table VIII below. There are issues for which this category of administrative staff has never undergone any university education in the past.

Table VIII. Competence Means Scores Falling below 2.0 for Novice Non-Urban School Administrative Staff

Question - Item - Competence		Means Scores
25.	Dealing with the Building Budget	2.04
16.	Addressing Fire Marshal Issues	2.07
17.	Addressing Secretarial Staff Issues	2.08
3.	Instructing Teachers in Effective Instructional Techniques	2.11
5.	Leading Effective Staff Development	2.11
30.	Addressing ELL/Bilingual Issues	2.21
23.	Handling Site-Based Management	2.23
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	2.23
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	2.23
2.	Possessing Knowledge of Effective Instructional Methods (Best Practices)	2.25
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	2.32
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	2.44
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	2.45

As far as the perceived averages of competence for novice urban school principals are concerned, the data revealed that 15 of the 41 means scores for administrative competences fell below 2.0. This means that the specific administrative staff of the prefecture of Thessaloniki do not feel particularly competent in terms of their specific administrative responsibilities. These fifteen items - questions are listed in Table IX below. Once again, there are still issues for which this category of administrative staff has never undergone any university education in the past.

Table IX. Competence Means Scores Falling below 2.0 for Novice Urban School Administrative Staff

Question - Item - Competence		Means Scores
30.	Addressing ELL/Bilingual Issues	2.03
41.	Developing and Preparing for Board Meeting Presentations	2.04
22.	Completing Education Reports	2.04
16.	Addressing Fire Marshal Issues	2.04

13.	Teacher Union Issues	2.05
6.	Creating an Atmosphere of High Expectations	2.05
1.	Possessing Instructional Leadership Skills	2.06
5.	Leading Effective Staff Development	2.09
23.	Handling Site-Based Management	2.10
2.	Possessing Knowledge of Effective Instructional Methods (Best Practices)	2.16
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	2.22
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	2.30
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	2.30
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	2.33
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	2.51

As far as the perceived averages of competence for experienced non-urban school principals are concerned, the data revealed that only 5 of the 41 means scores for administrative competences fell below 2.0. This means that these administrative staff of the prefecture of Thessaloniki do not feel particularly competent in terms of their specific administrative responsibilities. These five items - questions are listed in Table X below. There are issues again for which this category of administrative staff has never undergone any university education in the past.

Table X. Competence Means Scores Falling below 2.0 for Experienced Non-Urban School Administrative Staff

Question - Item - Competence		Means Scores
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	2.08
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	2.15
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	2.22
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	2.30
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	2.33

As far as the perceived averages of competence for experienced urban school principals are concerned, the data revealed that only 3 of the 41 means scores for administrative competences fell below 2.0. This means that the specific administrative staff of the prefecture of Thessaloniki do not feel particularly competent in terms of their specific administrative responsibilities. These three items - questions are listed in Table XI below. There are also issues for which this category of administrative staff has never undergone any university education in the past.

Table XI. Competence Means Scores Rising above 2.0 for Experienced Non-Urban School Administrative Staff

Question - Item - Competence		Means Scores
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	2.11
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	2.11
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	2.36

To sum up, taking into consideration the individual tables concerning the correlation between experience with district, it is useful to present a brief comparative chart (Table XII) in which the best and worst means scores are listed per question - item - competence, in order to make the findings of the research more understandable and tangible.

Table XII. The Best and the Worst Competence Means Scores Concerning the Correlation between Experience and District

Question - Item - Competence		Best Group	Worst Group
1.	Possessing Instructional Leadership Skills	Experienced urban	Novice urban
2.	Possessing Knowledge of Effective Instructional Methods (Best Practices)	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
3.	Instructing Teachers in Effective Instructional Techniques	Experienced urban Experienced non-urban	Novice non-urban
4.	Assisting Teachers in Creating More Effective Lesson Plans	Experienced non-urban	Novice non-urban
5.	Leading Effective Staff Development	Experienced non-urban	Novice non-urban
6.	Creating an Atmosphere of High Expectations	Experienced non-urban	Novice urban
7.	Improving Overall School Climate	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
8.	Improving Staff Morale	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
9.	Conducting Formal Evaluations	Experienced non-urban	Novice urban
10.	Supervising Staff	Experienced urban	Novice urban
11.	Learning Routine office tasks/procedures	Experienced urban Experienced non-urban	Novice non-urban
12.	Preparing for and Conducting Effective Faculty Meetings	Experienced urban	Novice urban
13.	Teacher Union Issues	Experienced urban	Novice urban
14.	Addressing Building Maintenance Issues	Experienced urban	Novice urban
15.	Addressing Custodial Staff Issues	Experienced urban	Novice urban
16.	Addressing Fire Marshal Issues	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
17.	Addressing Secretarial Staff Issues	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
18.	Guiding the School Improvement Process	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban

19.	Analyzing Student Data	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
20.	Leading Curriculum Development	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
21.	Overseeing the Accreditation Process	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
22.	Completing Education Reports	Experienced non-urban	Novice urban
23.	Handling Site-Based Management	Experienced non-urban	Novice non-urban
24.	Staffing/Interviewing Skills	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
25.	Dealing with the Building Budget	Experienced non-urban	Novice non-urban
26.	Implementing District/Building Policy	Experienced urban	Novice urban
27.	Effectively Handling Individual Student Discipline Issues	Experienced non-urban	Novice urban
28.	Interpreting and Enforcing School Law Issues	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
29.	Managing Special Education Laws/Issues	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
30.	Addressing ELL/Bilingual Issues	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
31.	Developing Public Relations Skills	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban Novice urban
32.	Possessing Public Speaking Skills	Experienced urban	Novice urban
33.	Creating an Effective Site Council	Experienced urban	Novice urban
34.	Working with Parent Organizations and/or Committees	Experienced urban	Novice urban
35.	Organizing and Supervising School Activities/Athletics	Experienced urban Experienced non-urban	Novice urban
36.	Dealing with Concerned/Angry Parents	Experienced non-urban	Novice urban
37.	Developing Decision Making Skills	Experienced urban	Novice non-urban
38.	Developing Time Management Skills	Experienced urban	Novice urban
39.	Possessing Mediation Skills (staff vs. staff and/or student vs. student)	Experienced urban	Novice urban
40.	Possessing Necessary Technology Skills	Experienced urban	Novice urban
41.	Developing and Preparing for Board Meeting Presentations	Experienced urban	Novice urban

It is perceived that as far as the experience-district relation is concerned, in several items - questions - competences, that is in 14 of the 41, the experienced urban school principals show the best percentages and the novice urban school principals the worst, while in other 14 out of 41 items experienced urban school principals appear to have the best rates and novice non-urban school principals the worst. All other items indicate completely different results, with either partial or absolute differentiation. More specifically, there are 5 questions in which experienced non-urban school principals show the best results and novice urban school principals the worst, as well as 4 questions in which novice non-urban school principals show the best percentages and non-urban school principals the worst. In addition, there are 3 questions in which the experienced

urban school principals are equal to the best percentages with the experienced non-urban school ones, as well as 1 question in which the percentages of the novice urban school principals are equal to the novice non-urban school ones. Finally, there is no question in which any beginner - inexperienced category expresses better perceived competence than the experienced ones.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In general, it is clearly understood that managers should become experts in studying their environment, determining which clues are the most important, as well as what the most appropriate management role to use in response to each clue is. Additionally, there will be a need that they own a wide range of competence on which to lean, so that they meet their constantly changing requirements environment [27]. Important starting points for the development of competence are the principal's own experience of various types of work in school [2]. It is imperative that the school leader possesses the competences necessary to help plan and implement the improvement activities [14]. It is also worth mentioning that in the majority of cases school principals and mostly vice principals remain teachers. To meet the responsibilities they take on, they must possess a lot of organizational competences, be highly motivated, creative and ready to cooperate [8].

As regards comparisons of the four groups of administrative staff, the one between experienced urban and novice urban administrative staff indicated statistical difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) in almost all questions. The comparison between experienced urban and novice non-urban administrative staff, as well as between experienced non-urban and novice urban administrative staff revealed statistical difference in nearly one third of the questions. Moreover, the comparison between experienced non-urban and novice non-urban administrative staff showed statistical difference in very few questions. Finally, there were no statistical differences between experienced urban and experienced non-urban administrative staff, as well as between novice non-urban and novice urban administrative staff.

Based on the findings of this particular research concerning experience and district correlation, it is understood that the greatest need for training seems to concern the novice school principals, both of urban and non-urban districts, while on the contrary the least need for training concerns the experienced ones of urban districts. Training programme designers should take this fact very seriously when creating training or mentoring courses.

More specifically, the above findings are reasonable due to the fact that both the given inadequacy of university education and the absence of training provision accompany the entire working career of school teachers in Greece. The issue of the specific incompetence of the administrative staff might not be of crucial importance, if the evaluation of the teachers as a real situation - issue was not in progress. Given that from the school year 2012-2013 in Schools of Excellence -and already put into force to initiate its implementation for the rest of the schools- in Greece the evaluation of the teachers who work in such schools has already begun by the principals of these specific schools and also the school counselors, inevitably some form of immediate training which will concern the effective evaluation of teachers' work should have been established. Their existing deficiencies concerning the particular 41 discussed competences, as expressed by themselves in this research, could direct education policy makers in Greece to turn their point of interest into the training of the administrative staff in general and especially that of the novice ones, focusing on specific areas of competences concerning school administration. In this way, all the appropriate conditions will be prepared and cultivated, so that people who already lead schools as well as the aspiring ones can be capable of performing their administrative duties efficiently and effectively, based eagerly and solely on a variety of certain paramount competences.

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