

## Recording of Primary Education Teachers' Views on the Use of Mentoring in Learning Difficulties Assessment of a School Unit

Iosif Fragkoulis<sup>1</sup> , Argyro Palaiothodorou 

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, ASPAITE

**Abstract:** Teachers are daily required to manage various and complex school problems. Sometimes are not able to manage them efficiently. This is a good reason for the existence of a more experienced, educated and well-practiced person who is able to support them, give expert advices, information, or specific practices for managing education problems. This person, called Mentor, acting as an adult trainer may be useful to a school unit by advising, giving instructions, information, directions or expert knowledge that teachers need in their daily school work. Based on this point of view, the present survey tries to record teachers' views about the role of a specific Mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment in a school community, as many educators are not well trained to cope with issues related to learning difficulties and thus, their scientific and well-organized management in school class. Students' learning problems are issues that make teachers feel anxious or not quite sure about their choices on the implementation of appropriate and well-adjusted learning methods during school class. 80 permanent teachers from the urban area of Patras took part in the present study where they were asked to make a questionnaire about the role of a specific mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment and his contribution to a school unit. Data analysis demonstrated the necessity of such a person where his role is to communicate with all teachers in a school community giving them specific advices or practices for certain, effective and well established management for learning difficulties problems. It is also pointed out that teachers need a counselor who can provide support, assistance and guidance for certain issues and school problems. Engaging in mentoring process improves interpersonal skills, cooperation and communication among mentor and mentees. Teachers can function in a less stress environment, get support and specific advices on learning difficulties issues and foster a sense of cooperation and communication for effective and productive school work.

**Keywords:** Mentor, Mentee, Advisory and Supportive Role, Expert Mentor Focused on Learning Difficulties Assessment

### 1. Introduction

It is commonly acknowledged that teachers even new or older, have to face many and various difficulties during the course of their work where they should be able to address them as effectively as they can. Problems like students' behavior, school violence, learning difficulties and their assessment as also, their treatment during classroom or problems related to parents' communication and cooperation are some of the issues a school teacher has to cope with in his every day work.

Kriwas (2012) and Fragoulis (2013) have pointed out that effective addressing of the most school issues need support from a Mentor. A Mentor, according to them, is an educator with professional experience, knowledge as well, with specific communicative and relational skills and competences.

An educator, according to Fragoulis & Michalou (2018: 83) helps less experienced teacher and contributes to his professional development and growth, as the relationship between the Mentor and the mentee gradually develops based on the mutual interest and trust. Rajuan and Verloop (2007) mention that the mentoring process functions to the teachers' professional development in five fields of their personality. It contributes to academic field development through the provision of knowledge, teaching part through the development and cultivation of teaching skills as well as the emergence of good practices, counseling sector through the development of problem solving procedures, personality development through cognitive, social and emotional skills and metacognitive sector through the development of critical thinking.

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Iosif Fragkoulis (Correspondence)



sfaka @ otenet.gr



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## 2. Definition of Mentor

The term "Mentor" is used in Homer's "Odyssey" where "Mentor was the faithful, paternal friend of Odysseus. His role was to advise or counsel the Odysseus' low experienced son, Telemacho" (Kalogirou, Spyropoulou & Pantelis, 2010). Today, according to Andrews (1987) (as mentioned in Kalogirou, et al., 2010: 200), Mentor is an experienced educator who takes a supervisory, advisory and sometimes evaluative role both for older and new entrants in the educational process Coleman (1997), in the definition of the concept of Mentor, focuses more on the assistance given to the new entrant. Mentor, for her, may be a consultant for specific issues and his role is to advise less experienced teachers for addressing teaching problems.

The Mentee now, is a person willing to participate in a mentoring relationship" (Mullen, 2005: 1) while the mentoring relationship according to the same researcher, is a personal or professional relationship between two people, one that is experienced and experienced and the other novice or guided.

Mentorship is a two-person cooperative relationship that allows exchanges, opinions, experiences, judgments, information, or even specific expert advice on a particular topic or practice. According to Hansford & Ehrich (2006) (as reported by Voyiatzaki 2015: 20) the perception of the Mentor relationship involves the concepts of supporting both the teacher and the professional development. Guidance, therefore, is not static, unilateral or fragmentary, but it is a dynamic process that supports and improves the learning and educational action of a newcomer, an educator. The exchange of experiences, the discussion on educational process issues, the animation, the support, the understanding of the difficulties, but also the overcoming of these by means of specific, auxiliary, actions, are specific areas of this guiding relationship. The basic principle of this relationship is that both commit themselves to a consultative and non-valuation relationship that often includes long-term goals (Mullen, 2005: 1).

## 3. Aim and Objectives of school mentoring

Mentoring, according to Fragoulis (2014) is considered an effective method of staff development and training. In education, according to him, educators seek a Mentor when they want to evolve, to improve their educational and teaching practices, to feel secure about their choices and to acquire knowledge and skills around a subject (Fragoulis 2014:51). The Mentor as a more experienced and well trained in particular field, person, is able to guide the trainees by transferring their knowledge, experience and good practices to them. He functions as a trusted friend and supporter for them (Fragoulis,

2014: 51).

The purpose of mentoring according to Mihiotis, Bradoudakis, Adamopoulos, Gouklas, Nikiforaki, & Oikonomou (2006) is to provide assistance and support to the teachers in order to manage their education course with an effective way. It also helps to gradually develop their skills, to improve performance and become more effective in their work.

The objectives of mentoring according to Fragoulis and Michalou (2018: 84) can be stated as following:

- provide support, assistance and guidance from an experienced to another with less experience, in the context of an interpersonal relationship between the two of them.
- give the trainee the broadest picture of the socio-economic and educational context within which the learning process is implemented.
- provide the mentee/protégé with learning opportunities at a non – threatening environment.

Collin (1988: 24) mentions that Mentors can systematically support and effectively guide teachers in practicing their teaching task, as through their experience and education, they have developed to a considerable extent the following skills:

- recognizing the strengths and weaknesses of the less experienced teachers.
- recognize the difficulties faced by teachers in effective planning, implementation and evaluation of the educational – teaching task.
- support teachers in difficulties and problems arising from the performance of their work.
- analyzing and dealing with difficulties.
- counseling and guidance for teachers.

## 4. The role and characteristics of Mentor

The Mentor's role seems to depends on various factors. Fragoulis and Michalou (2018: 84) mention that the most important are identified in

- the Mentor's available time,
- the environment and the origination of working patterns,
- his skills, commences and experience,
- the needs and interests of his trainees
- the culture of the educational unit that applies mentoring procedures.

Mentor needs to have developed specific characteristics for constructive and effective mentoring process. Emotional empathy is considered as an important factor. A cultivated personality with developed soft skills like communication, cooperation, mutual assistance seems to gain ground among the qualifications a Mentor should have. Furthermore, he must have educational teaching

experience, specific scientific background on education issues and information of new techniques and school practices. He must be a good listener or interlocutor in a school team. He has to be pleasant and willing to advise, support and to offer effective guidance, reflections and visions (Papastamatis, 2010:210).

According to Tickle (1994) (as reported by Kalogirou et al., 2003: 203) the essential qualities or characteristics among the others, a Mentor should have, are: his credibility as an educator, the experience, the compassion, the sense of humor, the ability of a good listener, the calmness, the accessibility to material and resources, the availability, the positive constructive nature, the encouragement and the honesty.

### **5. The role of a specific Mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment**

Given that each teacher encounters different types of learning disabilities where he has to prepare and then, implement a school program adapted to each student needs and capabilities, a specific Mentor on learning difficulties should be able to:

- recognize different types of learning difficulties
- evaluate the level of students' cognitive problem
- prepare a detailed program (as a consequence of the above) in terms of student's special needs, class level and school demands
- advise on issues related to parents' communication, support and guidance
- support teachers in making a precise recording learning problems form that may be given to Public Institutions related to educational problems and support (e.g. ΚΕΔΔΥ in Greece)
- aware all members staff about learning problems as also, the appropriate teaching methods and directions for effective teaching procedure
- encourage and support teachers in every day school practice talking with them, advising or helping them whatever they need him.

### **6. The contribution of mentoring in a school unit**

Mentor taking role in the school environment seems to contribute to a number of benefits. It is clear that the relationship with a Mentor tends to provide opportunities for general or specific learning. Teachers are informed, supported and then, are able to prepare and implement a school program according to each student's difficulty. They function in a non-threatening environment so, they feel secure, confident and more effective in managing a variety of school problems and especially learning difficulties.

Benefits also arise from effective communication

between staff members. All school members have the opportunity to communicate, to express their opinions with difficult situation they cope with or to exchange ideas or good practices they prefer to adopt and implement in class. As a consequence, they acquire cooperative skills and competences making them working as a well prepared and organized team preventing, reducing or well managing school problems. In addition, through its counseling competence a Mentor is able to organize innovative educational actions like seminars, working groups or workshops where teachers have the chance to enhance their experiences improving school unit function.

During mentoring process, a Mentor also, seems to acquire many and varied experiences that allow him to be more flexible, supportive and effective in his role. He enhances his professional satisfaction and self-confidence for a more pleasant and effective work.

So, it is not only educational staff or the Mentor himself but also the whole school community is benefited from such a process. Mentor process supports the personal and professional development of all the teaching staff, the development of the school unit and the improvement of the educational work provided to the students.

Mentor is available more often than a school boss and each teacher can accept his support or guidance the time he needs him. School chief is less available for supporting or counselling due to his official duties. Voyiatzaki (2015: 30-31) mentions that where Mentor works as a Learning Leader, he has full knowledge of the educational material, facilitates the exchange of experience, enhances autonomy, allows learners to experiment and helps them handle the problems (as reported in Giannakopoulos, 2008). An expert Mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment, it is certain that offers all the above but also a more specific knowledge and available practices suitably adopted for intensive work in school class.

### **7. Difficulties and concerns about the role of Mentor in a school community**

Mentoring process, in principle, should be based on honest, confidential and respectful relationships between Mentor and Mentee. If these conditions are lacked, then there is no space for cultivating a real and untroubled relationship.

A friendly environment where Mentor and Mentee feel secure, accept each other, feel like confident friends may be necessary priorities for mentoring process. Conditions like collaboration, need for counseling, acceptance may be taken for granted for mentoring development.

According to Theodorou & Petridou (2014: 145), the main problems that impede the implementation and acceptance of the Mentor role in a school unit may be:

- the perception that the Mentor is a supervisor,
- his work is superior to that of the Mentor,
- the difficulty of school problem perception and thus the appropriate guidance,
- the lack of communication and conversation for teaching problems,
- the difficulty in meetings due to workload and the lack of pedagogical knowledge and experience on the part of the counselor.

Brock & Grady (1998: 182) (on Kalogirou, 2010: 202) point out that even though a Mentor's role is essential in a school unit, not all teachers are able or have acquired the skills to become effective Mentors. It is certain that Mentors do not automatically possess the skills they need to effectively support newly appointed teachers and advocate for a mentoring culture in a school unit. They need for themselves more knowledge, experiences and work on fostering interpersonal skills for effective cooperation and communication. Cooperation with other Mentors or engagement in supporting training programs for improvement mentoring skills will actually be essential for undertaking this responsible and productive role.

A crucial issue that has been emerged from educators who work in remote areas or diverse conditions is how to get help or assistance on school problems as the conditions not permit a Mentor's access. Fragoulis, Papadakis & Velissarios (2016) have suggested that the use of new technologies and e-mentoring in particular, as software, easily accessible to the educator, can reduce the distance and give valid, timely and an effective solution to the problems of the school life of any teacher.

## 8. Research methodology

### 8.1 Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore teachers' views in relation to the advisory dimension of the expert mentor focused on learning problems assessment in the framework of the school unit.

### 8.2 Research questions

1. Teachers' views on mentor's characteristics both in general and especially on a specific mentor focused on learning problems assessment depend on their demographic characteristics.

2. Teachers' views on their benefit being involved in mentoring process depend on their demographic characteristics.

3. Teachers' views on mentor's benefit being involved in mentoring process depend on their demographic characteristics.

4. Teachers' views on school unit benefit during implementation mentoring process depend on their demographic characteristics.

### 8.3 Population – research sample – restrictions

The sample consisted of 80 primary school teachers of the Achaia prefecture who readily accepted to take part at the present research making a questionnaire during February – March 2018. All respondents were permanent school teachers.

### Research constraints

Only 80 Primary Education teachers, who selected from Patras urban area, took part in the survey. The criterion for their choice was the variety of learning problems they have to manage during their working time. For the present survey it was chosen only the questionnaire research tool as it could be possible to be used the methodological tool of the interview. As it was not preferred for the time being the results had not the chance to be triangulated (as defined by Dimitropoulos, 2001: 188).

### 8.4 Data collection Tools

Data collection was conducted using a questionnaire, created by the authors for the purpose of the research.

### 8.5 Statistical process

The statistical program SPSS v.20 (widely accepted in social sciences), was used so as questionnaires be further elaborated. Non-parametric criterion  $\chi^2$  (Chi square) was selected for comparing variables.

## 9. Results

### 9.1 Demographic characteristics

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the individuals that participated in the research 27 of the 80 participants were men (33.8%) and 53 were women (66.3%). In relation to age, 9 teachers (11.3%) were in the 25-35 age group, 27 teachers (33.8%) were aged in the 36-45 age group, 40 teachers (50%) were in the 46-55 age group and 4 teachers (5%) were in the 56-65 age group. As far as their degree is concerned all subjects were teachers in primary school. In relation to their studies distribution 2 teachers (2.5%) had Ph.D. degree, 18 teachers (22.5%) postgraduate diploma, 10 teachers (12.5%) had other degrees moreover the basic degree of schoolteacher, while 50 teachers (62.5%) had not any other than the basic degree (Table 1.).



Table 1 Studies distribution

Ph. D. teachers	2	2.5%
Postgraduate Diploma teachers	18	22.5%
Other degrees	10	12.5%
Not any other degree	50	62.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100%</b>

*In relation to the position in education* 6 of the participants (7.5%) were School Chiefs Units, 6 (7.5%) were School Unit Deputy and sub-managers and 68 (85%) were educators. Regarding their teaching experience, 9 participants had 1-10 years of

service (11.3%), 37 educators (the majority) 11 - 20 years of service (46.3%), 24 of them had 21- 30 years of service (30%) while 10 teachers had more than 30 years of teaching experience (12.5%) (Table 2.).

Table 2 Teaching experience

1-10 years of service	9	11.3%
11-20 years	37	46.3%
21-30 years	24	30%
30 years plus	10	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100%</b>

**9.2 Teachers' views on Mentor's characteristics both in general and especially on a specific Mentor focused on learning problems assessment depend on their demographic characteristics**

Five questions were chosen to explore teachers' opinions about how they realize the role a Mentor in a school unit and what are the basic characteristics he should have for this role. To the question "Do you know the content of the terms" Mentor "and" mentoring "within the educational system?" the results of the one- variable analysis showed that 61 out of 80 teachers reported positively (76.3%), 18 teachers (22.5%) reported that they were informed but they kept some questions about the Mentor's role and only 1 teacher (1.3%) was not at all aware of this role.

To the question "The terms" Mentor "and" mentoring "are used in the context of education with a variety of definitions. Which of the following characteristics should, in your opinion, be included in the role of Mentor in school unit"? the results of the one-variable analysis occurred that 74 teachers (92.5%) reported that they preferred an experienced and well trained teacher, 64 teachers (80%) a teacher with high typical qualifications, 30 teachers (37.5%) declared he should have an official administrative role, 8 teachers (10%) a supporting role on a voluntary basis extremely, 17 teachers (21.3%) a supervisory role, 77 teachers (96.3%) preferred a Mentor as advisor, 14 educators (17.5%) reported an assessment role, 66 teachers (82.5%) emphasized on his encouraging role, 65 teachers (81.3%) stressed his leadership role while 39 teachers (48.8%) perceived , Mentors' role as a critical friend. From the two – variable analysis and the check  $\chi^2$  criterion significant statistical significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) was observed in relation to

gender and Mentor's administrative role ( $p= .017$ ), age and Mentor's role on a voluntary basis ( $p= .040$ ), age and Mentor's supervisory role ( $p= .013$ ), years in service and a well experienced teacher as a criterion for Mentor's choice ( $p=.018$ ) as well, years in service and official Mentor's administrative role ( $p= .023$ ).

To the question "Which of the following qualifications do you think a Mentor should have to successfully fulfill his role?", 75 out of 80 participants (93.8%) reported cognitive competence, 77 of them (96.3%) reported interpersonal communication skills, while 75 participants (93.8%) focused on his mature and responsible personality and appropriate attitude.

To the question "What criteria should have been taken for Mentor's assessment?", the results of the one-variable analysis demonstrated that the majority of teachers (53 out of 80 teachers) would like a Mentor with enough years of school services and class experience (66.3%), 72 teachers (90%) took priorities on his scientific knowledge, 53 participants reported his engagement in mentoring programs (66.3%), 45 teachers stressed on his experience in innovative actions and programs (56.3%), 41 educators declared their negative position on having both mentoring and administrative role (as e.g. school chief) (51,3%), 48 teachers expressed their opinion that they would prefer a Mentor who is permanent and belongs to the same school unit with them (60%), 50 participants preferred a Mentor with sufficient knowledge on the functional use and utilization of computers as educational tool (62.5%), 51 educators would like a Mentor from the same educational area with them (63.8%) while 47 subjects reported the mature and responsible personality of a Mentor that

gains acceptance from all member staff (58.8%). From the two – variable analysis and the check  $\chi^2$  criterion significant statistical significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) was observed in relation to gender and years in service ( $p = .033$ ), gender and the case a Mentor should be from the same educational area with teachers ( $p = .025$ ), years in service and the case a Mentor from the same educational area with teachers also ( $p = .047$ ).

Regarding the answers of the subjects to the question "Which are, in your opinion, the characteristics of an expert Mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment?", the results of the one- variable analysis resulted in the following: 76 teachers deemed that he should be able to recognize the different situations of learning difficulties within a school community (95%), 65 teachers that he should be able to organize an educational intervention program that any teacher can apply to the school class (81.3%), 76 educators that he should advise teachers on how to cope with students with learning difficulties (95%), 67 participants that he should help teachers to organize suitable practice activities for student with learning difficulties (83.8%), 72 teachers that he should increase communication skills for effective cooperation with students' parents (90%), 64 of them that he should enhance cooperative skills with all member staff for multiple effective addressing learning difficulties problems (80%), 70 teachers that he should assist teachers to make valid and scientist reports for Pedagogic Public Structures (like ΚΕΔΔΥ in Greek) (87.5%) and finally, 44 teachers that he should function as a mediator between school boss and member staff for informing him about learning problems, difficulties and discuss with him on ways to improve teachers work with learning difficulties students (55%). From the two – variable analysis and the check  $\chi^2$  criterion significant statistical significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) was observed in relation to years in service and Mentor's expert role as such to facilitate teachers work by organizing suitable practice activities for student with learning difficulties ( $p = .013$ ) and years in service and Mentor's role as mediator for effective communication and cooperation between school chief and member staff for cases of students with learning difficulties ( $p = .034$ ).

### 9.3 Teachers' views on their benefit being involved in mentoring process depend on their demographic characteristics

To explore the perceptions of the subjects in this field seven questions were asked. Their responses were as follows: Regarding the answers of the subjects to the question: "If teachers' participation in mentoring processes contributes to provide opportunities for their learning in a non-threatening environment" results of the one- variable analysis resulted in the

following: 20 subjects responded too much (25%), 38 subjects responded much" (47.5%), 20 subjects responded enough (25%), 1 subject responded very little (1.3%) and 1 subject responded not at all (1.3%).

To the question "Do participation in mentoring procedures help teachers to improve their self-esteem?" results of the one- variable analysis resulted in the following: 17 teachers responded too much (21.3%), 39 teachers responded much (48.8%), 20 teachers responded enough (25%) and 4 teachers responded very little (5%).

Subjects answer to the question "If participation in mentoring processes contributes to the acquisition of experience and specialized knowledge (recognition of the case of learning difficulty and assessment)", formed as subsequently. 31 teachers stated very much" (38.8%), 34 teachers stated much (42.5%), 13 teachers stated enough (16.3%) and 2 teachers stated very little (2.5%).

Regarding the answers of the subjects to the question "If participation in mentoring processes contributes to effective school management and problem solving (in cases of specific practices for learning difficulties)", 35 participants responded too much (43.8%), 36 responded much (45%) and 9 participants responded enough (11.3%).

To the question "If teachers' participation in mentoring processes contributes to the acquisition of professional networking and cooperation opportunities" 10 educators stated too much (12.5%), 43 educators stated much (53.8%), 18 educators stated enough (22.5%) and 9 educators stated very little (11.3%). From the two – variable analysis and the check  $\chi^2$  criterion significant statistical significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) was observed in relation to years in service and teachers' professional networking ( $p = .020$ ).

Regarding the answers of the subjects to the question "If participation in mentoring processes contributes to the development or improvement of teaching skills and methods for successful management and addressing learning difficulties in the classroom" 34 teachers reported too much (42.5%), 35 teachers reported much (43.8%) and 11 teachers reported enough (13.8%).

To the question "If participation in mentoring processes contributes to the development or improvement of skills for effective management and communication with parents of students with learning difficulties" 35 subjects reported too much (43.8%), 29 subjects reported much (36.3%), 13 subjects reported enough (16.3%) and 3 subjects reported very little (3.8%).

#### **9.4 Teachers' views on Mentor's benefit being involved in mentoring process depend on their demographic characteristics**

To explore the views of the subjects in this field six questions were asked. Their responses were as follows:

To the question "*If a Mentor develops and improves his communication skills in the field of education*", 28 teachers stated too much (35%), 35 teachers stated much (43%) and 17 teachers stated enough (21.3%).

To the question "*If a Mentor in the context of his mentoring process gains recognition from his colleagues in the field of education*", 6 subjects reported too much (7.5%), 33 subjects reported much (41.3%), 29 subjects reported enough (36.3%) and 12 subjects reported very little.

Regarding the answers of the subjects to the question, "*If a Mentor during mentoring process increases his self-esteem*", 14 participants stated too much (17.5%), 31 participants stated much (38.8%), 31 participants stated enough (38.8%), 2 participants stated very little (2.5%) while 2 participants stated not at all (2.5%).

To the question "*If a Mentor during mentoring process becomes better himself on the subject of learning difficulties assessment?*", 39 educators reported too much (48, 8%), 28 educators reported much (35%) and 13 educators reported enough (16.3%).

Subjects' answer to the question "*If a Mentor is more capable of managing and tackling problems as far as it concerned students' learning difficulties in the classroom*", 35 teachers reported too much (43.8%), 28 teachers reported much (35%), 14 teachers reported enough (17.5%), 1 teacher reported very little (1.3%) and 2 teachers reported too much not at all (2.5%).

To the question "*Can a Mentor during mentoring process provide not only school teachers a variety of information, experience and advices but all school community by organizing seminars or workshops focused on learning difficulties assessment?*" 27 teachers reported too much (33.8%), 38 teachers reported much (47.5%) and 15 teachers reported enough (18.8%).

#### **9.5 Teachers' views on school unit benefit during implementation mentoring process depend on their demographic characteristics**

To investigate this area six questions were asked, the answers of which are described below. Regarding the answers of the subjects to the question, 35 "*Is it possible in the context of utilizing the mentoring process in the school unit, equal relations of*

*communication and cooperation between member staff involved in teaching students with learning difficulties to take part?*" 28 subjects stated too much (35%), 35 subjects stated much (43.8%), 12 subjects stated enough (15%) and 5 teachers stated very little (6.3%). From the two – variable analysis and the check  $\chi^2$  criterion significant statistical significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) was observed in relation to position degree ( $p = 0.050$ ).

To the question "*Can, in the context of use of mentoring process in a school unit, equal relations of communication and cooperation between teachers and school chief be enhanced on the issue of effective treatment of students with learning difficulties?*" 24 participants reported too much (30%), 29 participants reported much (36.3%), 20 participants reported enough (25%) and 7 participants reported very little (8.8%). From the two – variable analysis and the check  $\chi^2$  criterion significant statistical significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) was observed in relation to studies ( $p = 0.030$ ).

To the question "*Can be developed effective communication and cooperation relations between teachers and Public Structures related to diagnostic evaluation and treatment of students with learning difficulties (eg. ΚΕΔΔΥ in Greek) in the framework of utilization of mentoring process in the school unit?*", 30 subjects stated too much (37.5%), 32 subjects stated much (40%), 17 subjects stated enough (21.3%) and 1 subject stated very little.

Teachers' answer to the question "*Do you believe effective communication and cooperation relations between teachers and parents of students with learning disabilities can be developed in the context of mentoring process in the school unit?*" were formulated as follows: 29 teachers reported too much (36.3%), 30 teachers reported much (37.5%), 20 teachers reported enough (25%) and 1 teacher reported very little (1.3%).

To the question "*Do you believe that in the context of use of mentoring process in a school unit, the quality of the school's work can be improved by effective management of students with learning disabilities?*" 30 participants stated too much (37.5%), 36 participants stated much (45%), 10 participants stated enough (12.5%) and 4 participants stated very little (5%). From the two – variable analysis and the check  $\chi^2$  criterion significant statistical significance ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ) was observed in relation to gender ( $p = 0.012$ ).

Finally, to the question "*Do you believe that in the context of use of mentoring process in a school unit, innovations such as expert workshops or seminars focused on learning disabilities assessment can be reinforced?*" 23 teachers reported too much (28.8%), 34 teachers reported much (42.5%), 18 teachers

reported enough (22.5%) and 5 teachers reported very little (6.3%).

## 10. Discussion and Conclusions

### 10.1. Characteristics of Mentor's role

Teachers, as it is pointed out from the data analysis, seem to need a Mentor who will advise or support them to their work. It seems to prefer a Mentor with enough experience and educational qualifications helping them on addressing difficult situations when they need to do so. However, the same teachers and especially women teachers do not prefer the Mentor with a formal or official role (for example to be chosen by an administrative type evaluation process), to have a supervisory or evaluative role in their work or to act as an external critic friend and his role, according to 1-10 years in service educators should not be under an occasional voluntary basis. Older teachers in 56-65 group age seek out a volunteer mentoring role as opposed to new teachers who seem to prefer a permanent role based on educational qualifications.

These findings advocate for a friendly advisor and assistant that every school unit should have for managing problems related with teaching and students' behavior. This view is in line with Fragoulis' opinion (Fragoulis, 2014: 51), where Mentor, a person with more experience of the trainees in a specific field, can transfer knowledge, experiences and good practices to them and functions as a trusted friend, supporter and guider.

The qualifications a Mentor should have for a successful mentoring process, according to teachers' opinions should be:

- scientific background in pedagogical and teaching issues. Any candidate Mentor should have enough knowledges, experiences and skills that help him to support its role.
- school class experience and knowledge on applying specific methods and practices through school class.
- mandatory participation in any introductory Mentor training program. His participation permits him to gradually enhance his abilities and competencies for better and effective cooperation and communication.
- years in educational service only for men's view as women expressed an opposite opinion.

It is worth mentioned also, that if it is possible, a Mentor, according to the majority of the participants should be a teacher working in the same with the mentees, school unit. If it happens, it is more certain to know the variety of school life problems. His directly supporting and guiding is anticipated to solve any emerging school problem. A Mentor, according to teachers' views, should have a perspective and responsible personality. He should be a cultivated friendly person with cooperative, communicative

interactive skills. He must have good enough experience in innovative programs which may offer him new information, practices or techniques for active teacher problems management.

These opinions are in agreement with findings of other investigations (Tickle, 1994) (on Kalogirou et.al., 2010: 203) where, according to them, the Mentor is an experienced, cooperative, friendly, supportive, and a qualified educator who can support and guide a practitioner effectively, validly and effectively, on matters relating to his or her daily, professional life. It is worth mentioned that the view of "critical" friend seems to be not acceptable for the time being. Possibly, the concept of a critical friend may not be fully understood in order to be accepted by the educational community, and the volunteer role demonstrates a lack of culture for assistance and support without any monetary gain.

### 10.2. Characteristics of an expert Mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment

Teachers seek out a Mentor who is involved in learning difficulties assessment to:

- be aware in recognizing the different learning difficulties cases within a school class,
- be able to advise on how to train students with different learning difficulties applying an educational program according to their specific needs and capabilities,
- be able to support them giving advices on how they should communicate and cooperate with students' parents,
- be able to assist teachers on how to make valid and scientist reports for Pedagogic Public Structures
- be able to enhance cooperative skills with all member staff for multiple effective addressing learning difficulties problems and finally,
- function as a mediator between school boss and member staff by informing him about learning problems, difficulties and discuss with him on ways to improve teachers work with learning difficulties students.

Some differentiations however are noted on the part of 11-20 and 21- 30 years in service groups where these target groups seem to be more aware than other target groups on organizing and implementation of new specific activities related to learning difficulties issues. Mentor's contribution in this educational area may be not important and effective for them.

It is unquestioned, however, that Mentor' specific role has come predominantly, as a result of increasing educational learning problems teachers have to cope with in the context of teaching work. Having not be actually informed about all teaching problems and the appropriate training program that they should apply, they do not feel quite secure to come up with any learning difficulty case in class. Thus, a specific



Mentor on learning difficulties problems should facilitate their efforts making their work less stressful and more productive for students' benefit.

### **10.3. Teachers' views on their benefits in a mentoring process participating**

As far as the perceptions of teachers are concerned with the benefit of their participation in mentoring procedures it is clear, that their participation in this process:

- provides opportunities for learning in a non-threatening environment for their professional career,
- improves their self-confidence,
- leads to acquire experience and specialized knowledge (in learning difficulties assessment),
- increases professional networking and collaboration opportunities,
- develops skills and training methods available applied to learning difficulties problems in classroom,
- makes effective communication and collaboration with students' parents as also with all member staff in a school unit.

Target groups 11-20 and 21-30 years in service believe that mentoring process helps teachers to overcome the difficulties in a school unit, so Mentor's role is essential and useful because it offers guidance and experiences that new educators do not have. Although they recognize Mentors' experience they do not believe this must be the only criterion for their choice. Experience will be in accordance with typical qualifications, knowledges and of course, their participation in expert training programs for Mentors duties and support.

These views are in line with Voyiatzakis findings (2015) where it is highly demonstrated the usefulness of the mentoring process in a school environment. Teachers, according to her, seem to benefit from taking part in mentoring process making even better their work and learning to effectively communicate and collaborate in a school unit.

### **10.4 Teachers' perceptions on Mentor's benefit from his involvement in mentoring process**

Teachers believe that a Mentor being involved in mentoring process improves his communication and cooperative interactive skills, develops its self-esteem as also his professional satisfaction, gains recognition from his colleagues and increases its influence on colleagues with little professional experience. A Mentor seems to benefit himself as he gradually acquires and enhances and enriches his interactive skills, become able to address a variety of school problems or to advise teachers and support them whenever they need his counseling assistance. He enhances also his self-esteem as he feels useful and

important member of a school unit, he gains recognition and respect, he cultivates a sense of deeper cooperation between him and the member staff, he functions as a friendly, supportive person who everybody can trust and take his assistance or support. Target groups 11-20 and 21-30 years in service seem to accept Mentor's role even better than older one.

An expert Mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment, according to teachers' views, can think critically about the educational processes and techniques he can use to address cognitive difficulties, he should be informed about any new teaching approaches and practices related to learning difficulties, he should be able himself to address educational problems in the classroom and apply expert training methods for such situations. He should also be able to organize workshops, seminars or other training activities supplying teachers with the appropriate skills for effective addressing difficult school problems.

### **10.5 Teachers' perceptions in relation to the benefit of the school unit from the use of the mentoring process**

As far as teachers' perceptions are concerned about the benefits of a school unit from the use of the mentoring process, it is noted that the largest percentage of teachers believes that such a process develops communication and cooperation skills among all teachers of a school unit that may have strong impact on addressing learning difficulties problems by all of them. Expert training methods should be applied by a variety of teachers getting involved with students with learning disabilities or they should be aware of such trainings. Students may have better performance if all member staff is aware of their problems and training programs have continuity and durance through school time.

The age group 25-35 years old seem to recognize mentor's role and contribution to school unit even he is not a teacher himself. He could be, under their views, another expert like musician teacher, or an expert teacher on computer sciences. Their criterions for the mentor's choice could be experience or his mature personality and responsibility for effective management school problems. Besides, the multiple roles they take and the flexibility of teachers' working hours may not be conductive for an expert and skilled Mentor on specific scientist issues.

Finally, further studies and extra qualifications seem to effect on the perceptions of teachers about the benefit of the school unit from the mentoring process. Doctorates do not believe to the same extent with other teachers that mentoring process develops equal teacher communication relationships on the issue of

dealing with students with learning disabilities. School teachers seem to take all the responsibility for addressing issues with learning difficulties problems than any other member staff.

A school unit may be benefited from the appliance of such an innovative program like mentoring process. Its implementation may contribute to a better school that respects students' personality and helps them to develop their competencies or to enhances their interactive skills. School is a pleasant place in the eyes of students where its one learns how to learn, to act, to cooperate, to communicate or to improve his personal skills and competences. Member staff also, may feel more secure when they have to prepare and therefore, to apply a training program for students with learning difficulties. All educators should have less stress addressing difficult learning problems and there should be able to effectively communicate and collaborate with students' parents.

School unit functions as better as it could be, eliminating problems related to parents' communication and cooperation that may contribute to improve teachers' self-esteem or to eliminate stressful working conditions.

In conclusion, and based on the results of this research, the expert Mentor focused on learning difficulties assessment seems to gain ground and to be a necessity for the modern educator for effective managing and addressing the daily schooling life problems. Before completing the study, we can mention the suggestion by Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan & Hopkins (2010) that mentoring should take into account the needs of all teachers (and not just new entrants) and not only an integral part of an effort for further in-school development and improvement. Mentoring should extend beyond the school environment to lead to the transformation and reform of a society in general.

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