

Postgraduate Students' Views on Mentoring in the Educational and Academic Context

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring has been a highly discussed issue in the education literature lately. This study explored Greek postgraduate students' views regarding mentoring in Greek primary and higher education. Unlike previous research, in the present study we did not use predefined themes or definitions to explore mentoring. Instead, the purpose was to allow participants' definitions and opinions about the issue to emerge. Therefore, the spontaneous texts written by the participants during an hour were used as a research tool, while the 38 written texts accumulated were analyzed by the qualitative content analysis method. Findings indicated that the prevailing themes of mentoring in the literature, such as mentoring functions, outcomes, and purposes, were referred by the participants. Despite the similarities found for mentoring in both contexts studied, some differences also emerged, concerning the type of the mentoring relationship preferred and the purposes of mentoring in each context. The findings are discussed in terms of their implications.

Keywords: Higher Education, Mentoring, Postgraduate Students, Primary Education, Qualitative Content Analysis, Tutoring

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mentoring, although topical and significant today, is not a new process and practice. Its origin can be traced back to ancient Greek mythology in Homer's epic poem "The Odyssey". When Odysseus, king of Ithaca, left for the Trojan War, he left behind his faithful friend Mentor to take on his son's, Telemachus', upbringing while Mentor also acted as the Telemachus' teacher, guide, counselor, and guardian. At the same time, the goddess Athena also appears to Telemachus as a Mentor (Stravakou, 2007). Since then and from around 1750, the word "mentor" had been used in many ways, but it was not until the mid-70s that mentoring gained prominence in the professional literature as a research theme (Anderson & Shannon, 1988) since it "was really rediscovered by the management gurus" (Brewerton, 2002, p. 364).

The concept of mentor provokes different meanings among humans and professionals (Viorel, 2018). That's why scholars investigating mentoring use in advance specific definitions to restrict the variability among participants' perceptions, although there lies the risk of the dominance of variant researchers' perceptions over those of participants (Haggard *et al.*, 2011) since the literature is abundant with

heterogeneous definitions (Agholor *et al.*, 2017). According to Haggard's *et al.* (2011) comprehensive meta-analytic review, the relevant definitions have altered over the years of research and are differentiated based on the scope and type of information they contain to identify mentors and their behaviors (functions) as well as to the boundary conditions they establish or not for these issues. The latter concerns especially the following: if mentors have higher organizational status in comparison to their protégés or not, whether a mentor can also be one's immediate supervisor, whether a mentor comes from inside or outside protégé's (mentee's) organization, as well as how intimate is the mentoring relationship being developed.

Despite this plurality and the consequences of selecting a definition for research findings, such as for the protégés' self-identification in research (Haggard *et al.*, 2011), according to the prevailing view about the contemporary use of the concept, a mentor is the person who impacts positively on his/her mentee's professional, personal, or academic development, helping the mentee to accomplish higher achievements (Stravakou, 2007; Wai-Packard, 2009). Mentors are traditionally said to be experienced, senior, and knowledgeable people that perform various functions to help their protégés prosper, advance, and develop in their career, as well as to help their protégés be socialized and familiarize

themselves in their professional environment (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007). Thus, mentoring denotes the nurturing relationship developed between an experienced and a novice person. This relationship, which is formed on mutual trust, has positive consequences both for protégés and for mentors, concerning their professional growth and development (Russell & Russell, 2011).

The traditional model of mentoring describes the dyadic relationship being developed between a mentor and his/her protégé in a face-to-face mode and on a long-term basis. Apart from this traditional model, several variations exist about the mentor's functions and the structure of the mentoring relationship. As for the latter, mentoring can take the form of a one-on-one relationship or it can be a network of various mentors; it can be short or long-term, formal or informal, face-to-face or electronic. On the other hand, the mentor's functions are categorized in two broad taxonomies, the psychosocial, such as counseling, and the career-related roles, such as sponsoring or coaching, with role modeling to be regarded either as a separate category or as a type of the psychosocial roles (Wai-Packard, 2009). While mentoring functions indicate mentors' behaviors and roles to mentees during their mentoring relationship, mentoring activities denote both mentees' and mentors' actions in or during that relationship, such as observation and the provision of feedback. Finally, mentoring outcomes concern the effects of the mentoring relationship on mentors, mentees, as well as on the organization itself (Agholor *et al.*, 2017).

Given the benefits that mentoring could have for human resources, it was established as a formal organizational process in organizations for staff development in the late 1970s (Ehrich *et al.*, 2002). Since then, mentoring has been used and now is frequently encountered in many professional fields, such as sport, social services, and the military (Strong & Baron, 2004). From 1980, mentoring has served many purposes in education since it has been incorporated in programs of teacher induction and professional development, in university-based teacher preparation programs, and in teacher incentive programs (Little, 1990); while it has also been used for the preparation of future school leaders (Clayton *et al.*, 2013).

Generally, in the educational context, the goals of mentoring are to make the protégés intellectually self-reliant, knowledgeable of the educational work, and able to perform this work both individually and collaboratively, as well as to prevent the protégés' isolation and alienation from the educational context, with the ultimate purpose to be their professional development (Stravakou, 2007). Several studies have shown the positive effects that mentoring programs had on beginning teachers' commitment, satisfaction, retention, and performance in teaching, as well as on the students' achievement (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In research studies, beginning teachers who had participated in a mentor-based induction reported that their mentors assisted them in lesson planning, in curriculum development, in analyzing students' work, and in implementing differentiating teaching (Fletcher & Barrett, 2004). Although mentoring is stressed to be important for newly appointed teachers to overcome the multiple challenges and difficulties they confront when they enter their professional arena (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011), the Council of Europe (2020) emphasized a year ago the need for

quality mentoring at all educational levels in the context of the need for teachers' continuing professional development and in light of the changes that the world undergoes in all spheres, as well as it called the Nations towards further improving their policies to support teachers' work in a directed and all-encompassing way.

Thus, although faculty mentoring is concluded to be a national priority, various mentoring relationships are found in the literature to exist in higher education and be beneficial, as in primary and secondary education. These relationships are developed between faculty and students, students and students, staff and students (Lunsford *et al.*, 2017), or faculty and faculty (academic mentoring) (Lunsford *et al.*, 2017; Woodd, 1997), showing great variability in terms of their forms, duration, goals, functions, and the source of mentorship (Lunsford *et al.*, 2017).

Traditionally, mentoring is exercised in academia informally between faculty and students (Stravakou, 2007) - where the traditional schema mirrors the relationship between a graduate student and a supervisor- and between senior faculty as mentors and faculty of lower seniority as mentees for the latter to be guided in their academic career and to gain a work/life balance. Nevertheless, various formal mentoring programs have been applied nowadays in higher education in many countries, such as the United States (US) and Canada, the United Kingdom (UK), Australia, or New Zealand (Lunsford *et al.*, 2017). For instance, there are formal mentors for newcomer undergraduate students to contribute to these students' smooth socialization in their academic life and provide them with information about their studies and career (Fullick *et al.*, 2012). Mentors for undergraduate students professors or older students can serve, taking the role of an advisor or instructor. In other cases, mentors are assigned to disadvantaged students to improve the students' socialization in college life (comprehensive mentoring programs) (Merriam *et al.*, 1987). For the most part, mentoring programs for undergraduate students are sorted into comprehensive, undergraduate research, and peer mentoring programs; with the purpose of the latter to be specifically the students' academic success and persistence as well as the improvement of their sense of belonging (Lunsford *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, as mentors are regarded the faculty who help former students to be employed in academia (Merriam *et al.*, 1987). There are also senior practitioners (professional qualification mentors) as mentors for students to enable them to apply the theoretical knowledge of their studies in the work field *e.t.c.* (Woodd, 1997), while formal mentoring programs for faculty are a modern occurrence coming from the USA (Lunsford *et al.*, 2017).

About the benefits of mentoring in higher education, Knippelmeyer and Torracco (2007) identified the positive consequences for protégés' career and professional development, stressing that mentees through their guidance enhance their analytical skills, are improved in research and writing, are better socialized, while they enhance their identity characteristics, too. Research findings suggest that mentoring in higher education promotes a caring and positive climate in a higher education institution (Husband & Jacobs, 2009) while mentoring for university students positively influences students' retention and integration into university (Collings *et al.*, 2014) as well as their academic achievement

(Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Numerous studies also found that mentoring programs are advantageous regarding faculty retention, satisfaction, tenure, and promotion (Bean *et al.*, 2014).

Despite the multiple advantages that the establishment of mentoring in education has worldwide and the Greek genesis of the process, mentoring has been only very recently applied formally in the Greek primary education. Although it was legislated in 2011 (with Law 3848) that more experienced teachers would be selected to support and guide newly appointed teachers, this ordinance was never put into practice. It was only some weeks ago that the new Right-Wing government brought a bill to the Parliament that was passed and stipulated the introduction of pedagogical counselors-mentors in schools for the support and guidance of newly appointed or any newcomer teachers in a school unit. Nevertheless, until 2018 (Law 4547/2018), there were School Counselors in the Greek educational system that were Educational Executives with mentoring responsibilities to teachers. On the other hand, in the Greek HEIs, the Academic Counselor's (tutor's) institution has been introduced for some years. The Counselor in HEIs is obliged to provide guidance and support to students throughout their studies (Law 4009/2011). Furthermore, in Greek Departments of Primary Education, some experienced teachers supervise and guide students during their short-time internship in their studies, serving thus as mentors to teacher students (Stravakou, 2007), although for a very short period. Except for the above, other mentoring relationships are not explicitly prescribed to exist in the Greek primary and higher education.

Therefore, because of the significance of mentoring generally as well as the topicality of the issue for the Greek educational system, this study seeks to explore Greek postgraduate students' views as potential protégés not only in primary education (PE) but also in higher education (HE) on mentoring. Unlike the methodology traditions in previous studies (Haggard *et al.*, 2011), we adopted an inductive approach, letting the research participants' plurality of the term emerge. Hence, we explored how the research participants defined mentors and mentoring, without providing to them any prior definition, and, generally, we let them freely express their opinions and thoughts regarding the issue under-study. Thus, the participants' schema about their ideal mentor and the mentoring relationship that they wish to have could come to the surface (Haggard *et al.*, 2011), and then comparisons can be made between the research findings and existing literature. Also, the dual role of the research participants serves the purpose of gathering some preliminary findings on how a different context might impact on defining the mentoring relationships, a recommendation for future research stated in the metanalytic review of Haggard *et al.* (2011). Finally, the findings of this study can contribute to the existing literature, where relevant studies from non-English-speaking contexts are limited (Agholor *et al.*, 2017).

II. METHODOLOGY

Thirty-eight (N=38) postgraduate students attending a Master's program provided by the Department of Primary Education of the School of Education at the Democritus

University of Thrace participated voluntarily in the research. Of those, 6 were males whereas the other 32 were females. Research data were gathered in the spring semester of the academic year 2020-2021. As a research tool, the written text was chosen (Taratori, 2004) because it eliminates researchers' potential bias in participants' opinions while allowing participants to be expressed without reservations (Stravakou, 2019a). Hence, the undergraduate students were asked to write for an hour a written text answering the following question: "What is your opinion regarding mentoring in the educational and academic context?"

After the data collection, the two authors read multiple times the written texts to understand their whole meaning. Then, they applied the content analysis as a research method (Taratori, 2004), as follows:

1. A word, a phrase, and a sentence were selected to be the units of analysis, and the written texts were enumerated. Then, the research material was coded according to the selected units of analysis.
2. Based on the repetition of the same units of coding by different participants, main categories and subcategories were formulated, while special attention was given to the requirements of mutual exclusiveness, one-dimensionality, saturation, and exhaustiveness to be met (Schreier, 2012; Taratori, 2004). The coding system was formulated both deductively, using the existing literature, and inductively, where the (sub-)categories emerged directly from the research material. For the analysis consistency, the two coders and authors of the paper implemented separately the coding while they gathered perennially during the process to compare their findings and resolve any discrepancies (Schreier, 2012).
3. At the final stage, the research findings were described and discussed both quantitatively and qualitatively, as shown below (Taratori, 2004).

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. A Frequency Analysis of the Research Findings

The analysis of the research data resulted in a total of 447 statements about mentoring both in PE and HE. However, the statements about PE (295) were almost twice as much as those of HE (152), according to Tables I and II. Regarding the main categories that were found in the research material, these reflect the themes which are commonly entailed in the proposed conceptual frameworks or models regarding the mentoring relationship and are found in the literature (Agholor *et al.*, 2017).

Thus, the participants referred in descending order to the mentors' behaviors and roles manifested during the mentoring relationship, to the consequences that mentoring has, to the reasons that necessitate the implementation of mentoring in Greek primary schools, to the mentoring relationships that the participants desired to be applied in primary education, to the aims of mentoring, to the conditions that need to be ensured for mentoring to be implemented, to the specific activities that are exercised by mentors during the mentoring process, as well as to the characteristics they wanted from their mentor to have:

TABLE I: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING IN PE

Mentoring in PE	N	Percent (%)
Mentoring functions	70	23,73%
Mentoring outcomes	56	18,98%
The necessity for mentoring implementation	41	13,90%
Mentoring relationships	40	13,56%
Purposes of mentoring	38	12,88%
Conditions for mentoring implementation	28	9,49%
Mentoring activities	12	4,07%
Mentors' characteristics	10	3,39%
Total	295	100%

The same themes were also emerged in the participants' opinions regarding mentoring in HE, although in that case, the participants did not mention the needs for the mentoring implementation in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) at all, as well as they gave more emphasis on mentoring relationships and the purposes of mentoring than on the mentoring outcomes. On the other hand, the participated students stressed more the mentors' desired characteristics in the case of HE:

TABLE II: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING IN HE

Mentoring in HE	N	Percent (%)
Mentoring functions	46	30,27%
Mentoring relationships	32	21,05%
Purposes of mentoring	22	14,47%
Mentoring outcomes	19	12,50%
Conditions for mentoring implementation	17	11,18%
Mentors' characteristics	9	5,92%
Mentoring activities	7	4,61%
Total	152	100%

However, one discrepancy between the themes found in this research and the prevailing themes about mentoring in the literature is the issue of mentor-mentee matching, which is regarded as a critical factor for the mentoring relationship to be successful (Agholor *et al.*, 2017). Although it has been previously supposed that students may find preferable a mentor who is alike to them (Wai-Packard, 2009), from the research findings regarding the preferable mentoring relationships such assumption seems weak. However, as this issue did not come to the surface in this research, it deserves to be thoroughly explored in the future.

In any case, a full description of the sub-categories that emerged in each category follows in the next part of the paper, where the findings are presented in a comparative mode between PE and HE for similarities and differences between the two different educational contexts to be found.

A. A Frequency Analysis of the Research Findings

According to Tables III and IV below, the postgraduate students selected as the most desirable mentors' behavior in schools and in HEIs that of coaching. The participants stressed that foremost mentors in school contexts should coach, teach, and assist the mentees in pedagogical and didactical issues, while mentors in academia should coach, teach, and assist the mentees in diverse academic matters. In a similar vein, they chose in both environments as the second most desirable function for the mentor that of counseling, which was followed by the need for the mentor to support his/her protégé. Still, few participants mentioned that

mentors, both in school and in HEIs, should function as positive role models for mentees, impacting with their actions, attitudes, and behaviors on their protégés' ways of conduct in their professional and academic context. The only difference in the participants' opinions regarding the mentoring functions between the two educational environments studied emerged for the function of empowerment. Thus, the participants wanted only for the mentors in PE to empower novice teachers at their first steps in their career into the demanding profession of teachers:

TABLE III: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING FUNCTIONS IN PE

Mentoring functions in PE	N	Percent (%)
Coaching	30	42,86%
Counseling	17	24,29%
Approval	11	15,71%
Empowerment	8	11,43%
Role modeling	4	5,71%
Total	70	100%

TABLE IV: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING FUNCTIONS IN HE

Mentoring functions in HE	N	Percent (%)
Academic coaching	24	52,17%
Counseling	13	28,26%
Approval	5	10,87%
Role modeling	4	8,70%
Total	46	100%

As for the mentoring outcomes, the postgraduate students, who were both in-service and pre-service teachers as well as novice and experienced educators, stated mostly the advantages of mentoring for mentees, while they mentioned in a lesser extent the positive outcomes of the mentoring process for the educational organization where it is practiced or/and for the educational system in general. More specifically and regarding mentees, the participants mentioned mostly for PE that mentoring helps novice teachers as protégés to develop professionally by improving their didactical and pedagogical skills and by building their professional identity, as well as mentoring contributes to the personal development of inexperienced teachers by boosting their self-confidence. On the other hand, the participants indicated almost exclusively the benefits of mentoring for university students-mentees' academic development and achievement, and specifically for their grades, as well as the continuing and completion of their studies. Nevertheless, the advantage that was referred mostly by the participants for HE was the improvement of the quality in education, which was also mentioned for PE, although to a lesser extent:

TABLE V: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING OUTCOMES IN PE

Mentoring outcomes in PE	N	Percent (%)
Cultivating novice teachers' pedagogical and didactical skills	14	25%
Improving novice teachers' professional identity	12	21,43%
Boosting novice teachers' self-confidence	12	21,43%
Improving education quality	8	14,29%
Helping teachers feel secure in their professional environment	5	8,92%
Optimizing school climate and building a professional culture	3	5,36%
Cultivating collaborative learning	2	3,57%
Total	56	100%

TABLE VI: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING OUTCOMES IN HE

Mentoring outcomes in HE	N	Percent (%)
Improving education quality	6	31,58%
Enhancement of students' academic achievement	4	21,05%
Continuing further the studies in upper levels	4	21,05%
Easier completion of studies	3	15,79%
Enhancing students' morale	2	10,53%
Total	19	100%

Regarding the mentoring relationships that the participants indicated as the most desirable to be implemented for them, the findings were striking. The mentoring relationship that accumulated the most statements for PE was the formal mentoring relationship between an experienced teacher as a mentor and a novice or newly appointed teacher as a mentee, whereas for HE the traditional schema of the informal mentoring between a university Professor as a mentor and a student as a mentee was predominated. Other interesting findings that emerge from Tables VII and VIII are the following: A) While the most desirable mentoring relationship for HE is informal, all the proposed relationships for PE are exclusively formal. B) Both for PE and for HE all the proposed relationships but one have a form of a dyadic, one-to-one relationship. C) Only for PE have been proposed relationships where the mentor (School Principal, former School Counselor) is also a mentees' supervisor in a strict sense:

TABLE VII: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS INDICATED FOR PE

Mentoring relationships for PE	N	Percent (%)
Formal mentoring between an experienced and a novice or newly appointed teacher	28	70%
Formal mentoring between a teacher and students	4	10%
Formal mentoring programs between a principal and teachers	4	10%
Formal mentoring for novice and experienced teachers	2	5%
Formal mentoring between a School Counselor and novice teachers	2	5%
Total	40	100%

TABLE VIII: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS INDICATED FOR HE

Mentoring relationships for HE	N	Percent(%)
Informal mentoring between Professors and students	20	62,50%
Formal mentoring during the internship in undergraduate studies	5	15,63%
Academic Counsellors	4	12,50%
Formal peer mentoring programs for students	3	9,37%
Total	32	100%

The participants did not differ on the main purpose that mentoring serves, advocating that mentors, either in school as a professional context or in the academic context, strive for developing professionally their mentees. At the same time and to a lesser extent, mentors facilitate their protégés'

acculturation and socialization in the social environment that the mentees enter. However, according to some participants, teacher mentors also contribute to their novice peers' personal development, while in the case of university students-mentees their mentors help them attain their academic or career goals:

TABLE IX: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING PURPOSES IN PE

Mentoring purposes in PE	N	Percent (%)
Professional development	27	71,05%
Novice teachers' acculturation and socialization	7	18,42%
Personal development	4	10,53%
Total	38	100%

TABLE X: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING PURPOSES IN HE

Mentoring purposes in HE	N	Percent (%)
Students' professional preparation and development	15	68,18%
Students' smooth socialization into the academic community	4	18,18%
Students attaining their goals	3	13,64%
Total	22	100%

An agreement was also reached among the participants' views on the conditions that need to be ensured for the implementation of mentoring in the school and academic environment. Thus, mentor's competence, namely the knowledge, focal skills, various virtues, abilities, and attitudes a mentor has (Johnson, 2003), came first in both cases, which was followed by the qualities of trust, collaboration, and communication that need to characterize a mentoring relationship:

TABLE XI: FINDINGS ABOUT THE CONDITIONS FOR MENTORING IMPLEMENTATION IN PE

The conditions for mentoring implementation in PE	N	Percent (%)
Mentors' competence	19	67,86%
Trust, collaboration, and communication in a mentoring relationship	9	32,14%
Total	28	100%

TABLE XII: FINDINGS ABOUT THE CONDITIONS FOR MENTORING IMPLEMENTATION IN HE

The conditions for mentoring implementation in HE	N	Percent (%)
Mentors' competence	13	76,4%
Trust, collaboration, and communication in a mentoring relationship	4	23,53%
Total	17	100%

An agreement was also noted among the participants' opinions regarding mentors' qualifications, which was stated to be their openness, their empathy about the diverse needs and differences that are found among mentees, whereas some postgraduate students also wanted a mentor to be committed to his/her mentoring role:

TABLE XIII: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORS' CHARACTERISTICS IN PE

Mentors' qualifications in PE	N	Percent (%)
Openness	4	40%
Empathy	3	30%
Commitment to the role	3	30%
Total	10	100%

TABLE XIV: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORS' CHARACTERISTICS IN HE

Mentors' qualifications in HE	N	Percent (%)
Empathy	4	44,45%
Openness	3	33,33%
Commitment to the role	2	22,22%
Total	9	100%

Concerning now the actions that the participants wanted their mentors to perform during their mentoring relationship, it was expressed that teacher mentors should provide knowledge and means as well as feedback to their teacher mentees, while only two participants wanted a more egalitarian procedure to be carried out with an opinion exchange between the mentor and the mentee. Interestingly, the postgraduate students who participated in the research selected as first the egalitarian procedure of the opinion exchange for the academic context, which can be attributed to the purpose of higher education (Knippelmeyer & Torracco, 2007), and as second the provision of knowledge and information from an experienced Professor-mentor to an inexperienced student-mentee:

TABLE XV: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING ACTIVITIES IN PE

Mentoring behaviors in PE	N	Percent (%)
Provision of knowledge and means	7	58,33%
Providing feedback	3	25%
Opinion exchange	2	16,67%
Total	12	100%

TABLE XV: FINDINGS ABOUT MENTORING ACTIVITIES IN HE

Mentoring behaviors in HE	N	Percent (%)
Opinion exchange	4	57,14%
Provision of knowledge and information	3	42,86%
Total	7	100%

Lastly, the postgraduate students attributed the need for the introduction and application of mentoring in school communities mainly to newly appointed and novice teachers' inexperience in performing the multiple and different tasks and roles that the educator's profession entails, as well as the diverse demands and responsibilities of the work itself. These two factors were also associated with the large psychological pressure that novice teachers often feel, and it was this pressure itself that was further indicated in the research as a necessity for the existence of mentoring in schools:

TABLE XVII: FINDINGS ABOUT THE NECESSITY FOR MENTORING IMPLEMENTATION IN PE

The necessity for mentoring implementation in PE	N	Percent (%)
Due to novice educators' inexperience	12	29,27%
Due to the multiple responsibilities and demands that the teachers' work has	12	29,27%
Due to lots of novice teachers' stress	10	24,39%
For the continuing improvement of the teachers' work and role	5	12,19%
Due to social changes	2	4,88%
Total	41	100%

Overall, from the frequency analysis of the findings, the following can be concluded:

- The issue of mentoring in PE seems to capture more the participated postgraduate students' interest than the issue of mentoring in HE. This discrepancy could be attributed to the participants' main status: since teaching in schools is the profession that they practice and will practice during their lives, it is logical to be more interested in their career development and their future mentors. Given this finding, future studies should focus on graduate students' opinions about mentoring in HE.

- Regarding the main findings of mentoring in PE, according to the participants, the formal establishment of mentoring is necessary due to the multiple responsibilities and demands that teachers' profession entails, for which novice teachers are inexperienced, having consequently a lot of stress while performing their work. Thus, the participants indicated that mentoring should be established in Greek schools between an experienced teacher, who has a lot of knowledge about pedagogical and didactical matters as well as multiple teaching skills, virtues, abilities, and a novice and newly appointed teacher, mainly for the professional development and socialization of the latter but also for new teacher's personal development. The experienced mentors should coach, counsel, support, and empower their protégés by providing knowledge, means, and feedback, serving also as a role model to them and helping the protégés cultivate and improve their pedagogical and didactical skills, develop their professional identity, and be confident in teaching, for the overall improvement of education quality.

- Turning now to the main findings of mentoring in HE, the participants stressed that mentoring has already been implemented since Professors during postgraduate studies function as mentors to postgraduate students, and this is the mentoring relationship that the participants desired the most for HE. This finding probably reflects the utilitarian criteria that the postgraduate students used to give their answers, which further indicates the need for the opinions of the other citizens in the academy about the issue to be explored. In any case, the participants found mentoring to have positive effects on the overall education quality as well as on their grades and studies. The postgraduate students wanted their mentors-Professors to provide coaching on academic issues and matters, counseling, and support, as well as to serve as positive role models, by discussing and providing knowledge and opinions to them. The participated mentees perceived that mentoring aims to their professional preparation and development as teachers and their socialization into the academic community.

Comparing the main findings about mentoring in PE and HE with the relevant literature, the following can be assumed:

- Although the participants preferred formal mentoring relationships to be established in the case of PE, they favored informal ones in HE. Based on the commonly used taxonomy of mentoring functions, it was observed a predominance of the psychosocial roles for mentors in PE, whereas the opposite was observed for HE, excluding role modeling which provokes equivocal opinions in the literature. In addition, while mentees' personal development was mentioned as a mentoring purpose for PE, students-proteges' academic and professional development were only mentioned for HE (Knippelmeyer & Torracó, 2007).

- Apart from the specific context studied, mentors' competence and personal characteristics seem to have an impact on an effective mentoring relationship, while trust, communication, and collaboration between a mentor and a mentee are also requirements for the latter. Furthermore, regardless of the educational context, mentoring is supposed to contribute to the improvement of education quality, whereas the mentoring function of coaching is anticipated to be predominantly manifested by any mentor. In any case, the indicated mentors were found to come from inside of each participant's organization and be mainly superior to them, as the traditional view of mentor supports. Also, the dyadic relationship was prevailed, which is the case in the traditional model of mentoring.

B. The Interpretation of the Research Findings

In this section, the main research findings are discussed, considering the existing literature.

As far as the mentoring in PE is concerned, it is evident from the postgraduate students' written texts that it is a necessary process for new teachers' professional development and support, as well as for their acculturation in their professional and each school's environment, opinions that support the existing literature. A female student (Participant 7) wrote for the latter: *"I think that is important a mentor to be able to introduce the teacher not only to the education matters, since it is the first time he/she enters the classroom, but also to the culture of a specific school..."*.

Regarding the necessity of the mentoring establishment in the Greek schools because of new teachers' inexperience and stress as well as due to the demanding teaching profession, one Participant (38) stated:

The difficulties that newly appointed teachers face when they take over their duties in a school unit are innumerable, and the knowledge that they have obtained from their academic education does not always cover them in solving all the problems. Issues of cooperation with colleagues or with students' parents or issues with "difficult" children in the classroom cause intense stress to teachers who have no experience in the classroom.

The findings above, regarding the factors that necessitate the implementation of mentoring in schools, reflect scholars' assertions in the area (See, 2014; Sundli, 2007). The profession of teachers contains many diverse roles as well as multiple demands from them by the society, with these demands to have been greater recently due to the changes brought about by the evolvement and growth in all areas (Chatzidimou, 2015). The complexity of the teachers' work,

because teaching is a multifaceted and complex process while the factors contributing to its success are also various, has been acknowledged by undergraduate students in a Greek study, where the participated students realized that the readiness of a teacher is a long process (Kougiourouki, 2013). Hence, as teachers cannot be fully prepared during their basic undergraduate studies for the school professional reality, mentoring is significant to novice teachers to overcome the well-known shock they experience when they enter their professional arena (Caspersen, 2013).

However, it is encouraging that our participants' opinions echo the modern point of view expressed in the Science of Pedagogy, that of the professional teacher or otherwise of the teacher who "is not born but becomes", through the acquisition of more and more knowledge about his/her work and the evolution, improvement, and development of his/her personality (Chatzidimou, 2015, p. 124). This finding can be attributed to the contribution of the Greek Departments of Primary Education to the evolution of the Science of Pedagogy in our country (Stravakou, 2003). Thus, the postgraduate students participated, having been exposed to the modern scientific knowledge of Pedagogy, recognized mentoring as a lever of their professional development and identified specifically its positive effects on the enhancement of their educational and teaching skills (Garza, 2012), on the building of their professional identity, on their self-confidence, helping thus mentoring also to novice teachers' personality growth as well as on their socialization to the culture of a school (Hobson *et al.*, 2009). With the words of a Participant (32): *"(With mentoring) novice teachers feel self-confidence about their choices, develop their knowledge and skills about pedagogy and teaching"*. Another Participant (4) added: *"(With mentoring) newly appointed teachers will be able to develop their identity and their self-perception as professionals for their better adaptation to the school class demands"*.

The findings above, regarding the positive effects of mentoring, encapsulate the three types of support that have been stressed by the European Commission that fulfill the needs of newly appointed teachers, namely the professional, the social, and the personal support, and that should comprise any coherent induction program for novice teachers (European Commission, 2010). In parallel, synthesizing the overall findings about mentoring in PE, a variety of the mentoring roles found in the literature can be identified for the desirable teachers' mentors, and mainly the roles of a supporter, a trainer/teacher, a collaborator, a facilitator, and a friend (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010), although the participants explicitly indicated in declining order the mentoring functions of coaching, counseling, approval, empowerment, and role modeling. All these mentoring functions are contained in the Participant's 5 written text as such: *"As far as the newly appointed teachers are concerned, those need systematic counseling, support, and empowerment at their first steps in their professional career"*.

As for the preferred mentor in school contexts, the postgraduate students mentioned an experienced, mature, knowledgeable, and skillful teacher. The following quote of a male Participant (33) is indicative: *"A more experienced, conditionally and older, as well as a teacher with the*

necessary skills, is suitable to perform the duties of a teacher mentor”.

Just as for the primary education context, so too for the academic context, the participants referred to the traditional view and definitions of mentoring, namely the hierarchical relation that is experienced between a mentor who is more experienced, older, and wiser than the mentee, and has superior skills and knowledge that the protégé needs or desires. Nevertheless, there has recently been the view of co-workers’ peer mentoring, who are equivalent in respect to their age and status (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010). Although there were some references about peer mentoring in academia, this was not the prevailing view among the participants. The most plausible explanation for this finding is the postgraduate students’ non-exposure to peer mentoring in their diverse educational contexts, since such relationships have not been established, at least formally, yet. This finding may also be explained by the fact that the career functions of mentoring were stressed more in each case since it has been said that career functions can be fulfilled by supervisory mentoring while the psychosocial functions by peer mentoring (Wai-Packard, 2009).

Hence, the participants mentioned as the most desirable mentoring relationship for academia the traditionally dyadic relationship (Wai-Packard, 2009) between their formal advisor or supervisor during their postgraduate studies and them, as it has also been found in previous studies (Merriam *et al.*, 1987). This finding stands in contrast with several previous research findings which have indicated that informal mentoring has proven to be beneficial for mentees than a formal one, due to the way that the relationship evolves in the former (Knippelmeyer & Torraco, 2007). From the students’ written texts, it was evident that they perceived their supervisor’s mentoring to be embedded in his/her duties, although it was characterized in the research as informal, following the relevant literature (Knippelmeyer & Torraco, 2007; Merriam *et al.*, 1987). Thus, the students who participated in the research included mentorship to faculty’s duties of formal supervision, where professors, through the provision of scientific knowledge and information as well as through opinion exchange, have to support and contribute to students’ academic development (Lunsford *et al.*, 2017). According to Participant 23:

Respectively, this institution is important in the academic field as well. Many postgraduate and doctoral students receive guidance from their mentor professor, which helps them develop a more personal relationship with each other, and students perform their work better. I think that the institution of the mentor is more common in academia than in education.

Although the formal mentoring of Academic Counsellors has already been introduced in the Greek universities for undergraduate students, this mentoring relationship was only referred to by a few participants. This may be because many of the postgraduate students who participated in the research are practicing teachers who had graduated from their universities for several years before the establishment of the institution, and they have returned now for their postgraduate studies. It is therefore expected that they do not know about it, since they had not had a similar experience.

In any case, for both contexts studied, the participants stressed the desired characteristics for mentors. These were the so-called in the literature dispositional characteristics and work variables, and mainly openness, empathy, as well as the commitment to the role; while the other taxonomy stressed in the relevant literature, that of demographic characteristics, was not mentioned at all by the participated students (Agholor *et al.*, 2017). However, the mentors’ competence, where the mentor’s knowledge and experience were included, was emphasized more by the participants both for PE and for HE. In this category, the participants indicated as a prerequisite of paramount importance for the mentors’ selection and effectiveness their continuing or sufficient training and education on mentoring process and relationship. For instance, Participant 28 stated: *“First of all, great importance must be given to the selection of the person who is considered to be suitable for the position of mentor, but also to the education and training that he/she must have to be able to carry out his/her role”*. This is the prerequisite that is also predominated in the relevant literature (e.g. Barrera *et al.*, 2010), while the overall findings presented above are in congruence with mentors’ perspectives as these have been found elsewhere (Cain, 2009).

Apart from mentors’ characteristics or otherwise the dispositions that they need to manifest while executing the mentoring activities and functions (Anderson & Shannon, 1988), according to the participants, the qualities of trust, collaboration, and communication should characterize a mentoring relationship. A Participant (16) wrote characteristically about trust: *“It is a complex process of development and support among active members that requires a relationship of trust”*.

The trust element is embedded in the definition of mentoring as can be seen in the introduction section. Furthermore, Leck and Orser (2013) found in their qualitative study that a key component for mentoring relationships to be effective was trust, while they also called future researchers to explore not only how trust in mentoring can be secured through the design of mentoring programs, but also how trust formation is differentiated in mentoring partners who are of the same and different sex. As this study did not provide evidence for such questions, these are interesting to be investigated in the future.

A last note here is that, although some scholars have expressed reservations about the solely positive benefits of mentoring by stressing the negative outcomes, such as the mentor’s control (Knippelmeyer & Torraco, 2007; Sundli, 2007); such negative effects did not predominate among the research findings. Nevertheless, one Participant (2) appeared concerned (or even disappointed) about the correct application of mentoring in the Greek educational context due to the political patronage that seems to exist in the educational field, and are particularly evident in the selection of Education Executives (Chatzidimou, 2015; Stravakou, 2019b). She characteristically wrote: *“Especially in our country with the established political patronage in all sectors, unfortunately, the role of mentoring risks not being able to be applied freely and unaffected to offer its benefits to the educational process”*.

IV. CONCLUSION

Mentoring has gained prominence in education in the last decades, having been used in educational contexts to serve multiple purposes, although it has not been a unanimous answer about what mentoring is, yet. Consequently, the existing literature is abundant with researchers' tries to define the mentoring relationship as well as their usage of predefined conceptions to explore the process. Contrary to this trend, this study attempted to explore Greek postgraduate students' definitions and conceptions regarding mentoring in the Greek PE and HE educational context, seeking simultaneously some preliminary answers about how mentoring may be different in diverse contexts, at least from the mentees' point of view. Although the research findings cannot be generalizable, they show congruence between the participated mentees' views on mentoring and the prevailing issues about the mentoring relationship in the literature. Thus, the participants referred both for the PE and HE context to mentoring functions, outcomes, purposes, activities as well as to mentors' dispositions for an effective mentoring relationship to exist.

In both contexts studied, the prevailing view was in favor of mentoring implementation, drawing the multiple advantages of mentoring mainly for mentees and the organization where the mentoring relationship is manifested. The preferred mentoring relationship was the traditional dyadic relationship between an older, wiser, and experienced mentor and a younger, inexperienced, and novice mentee. However, whereas in the case of PE the participants indicated as desirable mentoring relationship to be established the formal relationship between an experienced teacher and a novice or newly appointed teacher, in the case of HE, the traditional schema of the informal mentoring between a Professor-supervisor and postgraduate students was preferred. In any case, according to the participants' point of view, any mentors should have sufficient knowledge and training as well as be open, show empathy, and be committed to the mentor role; whereas the mentoring relationship should be characterized by trust, collaboration, and communication.

The findings show that the implementation of mentoring in the Greek school units is a definite need for novice teachers' professional and personal development as well as a welcomed novelty for the Greek education domain by future and practicing teachers. The challenge now is mentoring to be successfully implemented in the Greek schools. The findings of this research can inform future mentors, especially those in our country, about their mentees' expectations for the process; while future studies, after the implementation of mentoring in Greece, should shed light on how mentoring relationships are formed as well as on the possible problems that would emerge. Furthermore, the research findings regarding HE can be beneficial to Professors-supervisors to build an effective mentoring relationship with their students-protégés (see also Stravakou, 2019a). However, postgraduate students comprise only one category of mentees in academia. Therefore, future studies in Greece should explore the views of the other members of the academic community on mentoring.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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