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Effects of curriculum implementation on school climate and discipline in general and special kindergartens

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Abstract

The modern education system must listen to the needs of the members of the educational community and look for solutions to problems and impasses. Today's educational policy requires the upgrading of the quality of education, in order to provide the individual with knowledge and skills, in order to successfully respond to the ever-growing needs of society and the labor market. The teacher as the "head" of the learning process is called upon to apply pedagogical manuals in practice and to organize his teaching based on them. Curriculums offer important guidelines especially to new teachers, having incorporated modern practices and innovative programs. However, other factors, such as school climate and discipline, play a decisive role in successful teaching. The creation of a positive climate in the school environment has multiple benefits for the psyche of students and their interactions. The purpose of this research is to investigate the views of General and Special Education Kindergarten teachers on the implementation of the curriculum and its effects on the quality of the school climate and discipline. The results showed, among other things, that the teachers assessed it as very important to have a positive climate in the school, while there should be discipline and compliance with the rules, in order to avoid the manifestation of negative behaviors. In addition, it emerged that school climate and discipline are influenced by the years of professional experience of teachers, while the effect of position of service on the quality of discipline is significant.

Keywords: Modern education system, educational community needs, quality of education

Introduction

The term "quality education" refers to the extent to which the needs and expectations of the individuals involved in the learning process are met (Lazibat, Baković & Dužević, 2014) ^[18]. Quality in education is a multidimensional concept, which includes concepts such as institutionalization, teaching and learning outcomes (Poernamawijayai *et al.*, 2018) ^[24]. The central objective of quality in education is considered systemic, as it includes strategic planning, proper preparation of students, meeting social needs and providing the necessary skills to the individual in order to meet the demands of the labor market (Ochoa Tataje *et al.*, 2021) ^[22]. Institutions of all levels of General and Special Education, including Kindergarten, apply various strategies to ensure quality (Malo-Alain & Al Njadat, 2020) ^[19]. In addition, through this strategy, constructive competitiveness is promoted and students are provided with all the necessary elements that will help them successfully respond to social demands and challenges (Saeed, 2018) ^[27].

A basic structural feature of educational quality is the curriculum that is applied at all levels of education. The term "curriculum" is widely used in the educational community, but its complex content and targeting has not allowed the formulation of a commonly accepted definition. The existence of many different definitions for the curriculum highlights its potential and the changes it has undergone over the decades. According to scholars, each definition formulated for the curriculum indicates the perspective from which it is studied and at the same time reflects to a certain extent the educational philosophy in which it is included (Tsafos, 2014) ^[29]. The term "curriculum" in modern education could refer, inter alia, to a system, when for example the national curriculum is concerned, or to an institution, such as the school curriculum, or to an individual school, when we refer for example to the school's program for Geography (McLachlan *et al.*, 2017) ^[20].

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Ideological and political principles of a modern curriculum aim at the direct connection of scientific research with the needs of society and the organized state (Preece, 2020) [25]. Also, when designing a curriculum for Kindergarten, all areas of the child's development should be taken into account, while its effectiveness is often assessed by the type of skills it develops (Cahapay, 2020) [3].

A constitutive procedural characteristic of quality in education is the climate that prevails in the school unit. The quality of education is enhanced in environments with a positive climate, where parents of students participate through various activities in educational events, strengthening the psycho-pedagogical and socio-pedagogical role of the modern school. In addition, the school climate has a positive effect on the development of the individual's personality and learning performance (Decristan *et al.*, 2015) [6]. In environments with a positive climate, students interact better both with each other and with the surrounding space, as due to their innate need for exploration, their all-round development and maturation is favored, while at the same time their cognitive and social skills are cultivated (Kopas-Vukašinović, 2014) [16]. Also, the configuration of the school space could strengthen the positive climate in the classroom and encourage students to freely express their needs, ideas and interests, achieving student autonomy, the main goal of the curriculum (Zisopoulou, 2015) [31].

Materials and Methods

Purpose of the exploratory study

The purpose of this research is to investigate the views of Kindergarten teachers working in General Education and Special Education structures regarding the implementation of the curriculum and its effects on the quality of the climate and discipline that prevail in Greek Kindergartens.

A total of 1204 teachers from all the cities of Greece, who worked in General Education Kindergartens and in Special Education structures (Special Kindergartens, Integration Departments and Parallel Support) participated in the research. As shown in Figure 1 below, 72.0% (N: 867) of teachers worked in General Education and 28.0% (N: 337) in Special Education.

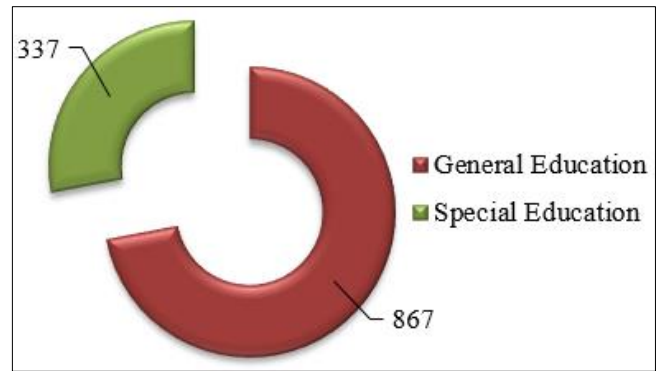


Fig 1: Type of education of participating teachers

Exploratory tool

The research tool chosen for the needs of this research is the questionnaire, which includes "open" and "closed" type questions. The participants were asked to evaluate proposals for the quality of the school environment in the Kindergarten where they work, stating on a 5-point Likert scale their degree of agreement or disagreement with the content. Completing the questionnaire was completely anonymous, without recording any personal information of the participants. The creation of the questionnaire resulted from a thorough investigation of three scales for the assessment of quality in education, namely the "ACEI Global Guidelines Assessment" scale (Association for Childhood Education International, 2006) (Rentzou, 2011) [26], the "Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Revised" (2014) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2014a) [13] and the "Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised" (2014) (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2014b) [14].

Results

The years of professional experience of the teachers who took part in the research varied, as shown in Figure 2 below. In particular, 18.9% (N: 228) of the teachers in the sample have served from 1 to 5 years, 17.2% (N: 207) have from 6 to 10 years of work experience, 27.2% (N: 327) has 11 to 15 years of experience and the largest percentage of teachers (36.7, N: 442) has been teaching for more than 16 years.

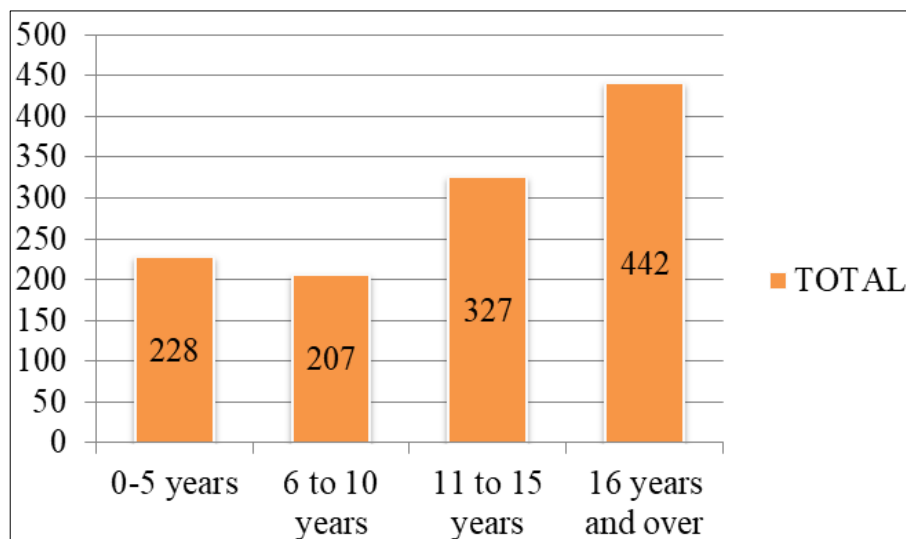


Fig 2: Years of professional experience of educationalists

With regard to the position where they serve in the Kindergarten (Figure 3), the majority have taken over classic (morning) classes (44.9%, N:541), while with a percentage of 18.9% (N:227) they are followed by Parallel Support teachers. Supervisors-Directors amount to 15.0%

(N:180), while teachers working in full day classes reach 13.3% (N:160). Finally, teachers working in special schools (4.3%, N:52) and in Integration Departments (3.7%, N:44) gather smaller percentages.

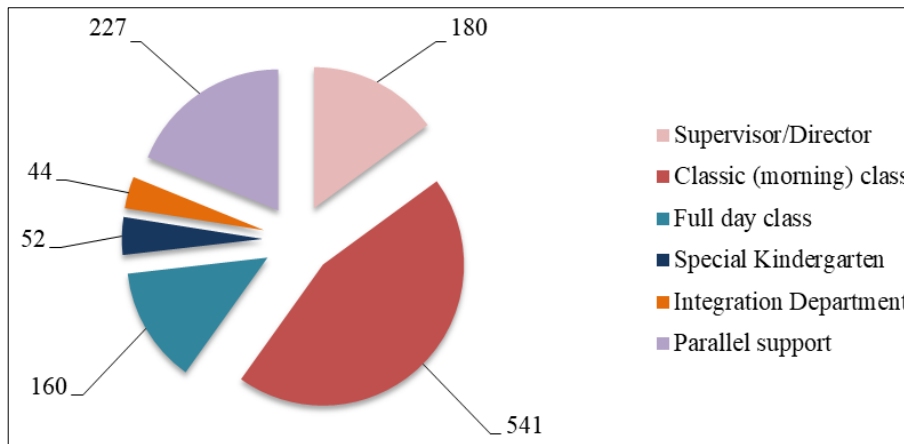


Fig 3: Position of service of participating Kindergarten teachers

The teaching staff creates a calm atmosphere in the classroom, meeting the needs of the children, with 48.7% of the participants considering it very important, while 39.3% consider it extremely important. According to 46.5% of the

sample, it is of great value for the educational staff to share moments of laughter with the children during the day, while for 42.4% it is extremely important (Table 1).

Table 1: Evaluation of the climate in Kindergarten

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
The teaching staff creates a calm atmosphere in the classroom, satisfying the socio-emotional needs of the children.	5 (0.4%)	17 (1.4%)	123 (10.2%)	586 (48.7%)	473 (39.3%)
The teaching staff shares moments of laughter with the children during the day.	4 (0.3%)	22 (1.8%)	108 (9.0%)	560 (46.5%)	510 (42.4%)

Additionally, Table 2 below shows that 45.4% disagree that discipline is lax and that there is a lack of order and control. 47.7% believe that the educational staff maintains control and prevents children from exhibiting aggressive behaviors among themselves. 49.5% of the sample considers that the educational staff greatly promotes the active participation of children in resolving their disputes. 47.5% report that educational staff uses many activities to enhance children's social skills. 47.3% consider that educational staff largely seeks counseling support from other specialties to manage

behavior problems. Also, 47.4% report that supervision of free play is used a lot as an educational interaction, while 45.9% consider it very important that many playful activities take place in small groups or individually. 47.1% report that the educational staff is very involved in the educational interaction with small groups, individually with the children and with the whole group. 43.2% consider it very important that the members of the educational staff exchange information daily for the best satisfaction of the individual needs of the children.

Table 2: Evaluation of discipline in Kindergarten

	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Discipline is lax so there is a lack of order and control.	547 (45.4%)	360 (29.9%)	118 (9.8%)	107 (8.9%)	72 (6.0%)
Educational staff maintains control and prevent children from exhibiting aggressive behaviors among themselves.	12 (1.0%)	23 (1.9%)	120 (10.0%)	574 (47.7%)	475 (39.5%)
The educational staff promotes the active involvement of children in the management and resolution of their differences and problems.	6 (0.5%)	12 (1.0%)	110 (9.1%)	596 (49.5%)	480 (39.9%)
Educational staff uses activities to enhance children's social skills.	5 (0.4%)	13 (1.1%)	107 (8.9%)	572 (47.5%)	507 (42.1%)
Educational staff also seeks counseling from other specialties to manage behavior problems.	11 (0.9%)	38 (3.2%)	168 (14.0%)	569 (47.3%)	418 (34.7%)
Supervised free play is used as an educational interaction.	11 (0.9%)	40 (3.3%)	165 (13.7%)	571 (47.4%)	417 (34.6%)
Many playful activities are carried out in small groups or individually.	8 (0.7%)	35 (2.9%)	186 (15.4%)	553 (45.9%)	422 (35.0%)
Educational staff is involved in educational interaction with small groups, individually with children and the whole group.	5 (0.4%)	28 (2.3%)	158 (13.1%)	567 (47.1%)	446 (37.0%)
The members of the educational staff exchange information daily to better meet the individual needs of the children.	14 (1.2%)	22 (1.8%)	146 (12.1%)	520 (43.2%)	502 (41.7%)

From the analysis of variance that follows, statistically significant differences are found between the "Climate" dimension and the years of professional experience with $p < 0.001$. In particular, we observe that $F(3) = 4.951$ and in the category "16 years and over" (4.35) there are statistically significantly higher values compared to the category "0-5 years" (4.20) and the category "6-10 years" (4.13), that is,

participants with 16 years of professional experience or more declared a greater degree of satisfaction with the climate than participants with 0 to 5 years of experience and 6 to 10 years of experience. The estimates are shown in Table 3 below, while the statistically significant differences are attributed by the comparative boxplot below (Figure 4).

Table 3: School climate in relation to years of professional experience

	Climate						
	N	Mean value	Standard variation	Standard error	95% C.I.		p
					Lower limit	Upper limit	
0-5 years	228	4.20	.75	.05	4.11	4.30	<.001
6-10 years	207	4.13	.70	.05	4.03	4.22	
11-15 years	327	4.30	.66	.04	4.23	4.37	
16 years and over	442	4.35	.60	.03	4.29	4.40	
Total	1204	4.27	.67	.02	4.23	4.31	

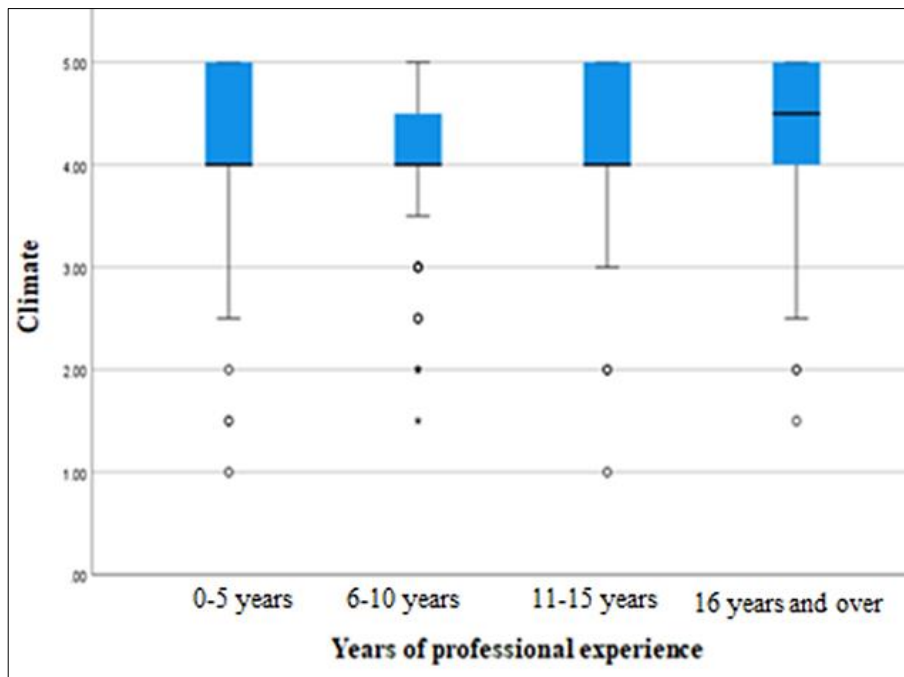


Fig 4: Boxplot showing climate in relation to years of professional experience

From the analysis of variance carried out, it appears that statistically significant differences are found in the "Discipline" dimension in relation to the years of teaching experience with $p=0.046$. In particular, we observe that $F(3)=2.668$ and in the category "16 years and over" (4.00) there are statistically significantly higher values compared to the category "6-10 years" (3.87), i.e. the participants who

have 16 years of teaching experience and above reported a greater degree of satisfaction with the prevailing discipline than participants with 6 to 10 years of experience. The estimates are detailed in Table 4 below, while the statistically significant differences are attributed by the following comparative histogram (Figure 5).

Table 4: Dimension "Discipline" in relation to years of professional experience of the participating Kindergarten teachers

	Discipline						
	N	Mean value	Standard variation	Standard error	95% C.I.		p
					Lower limit	Upper limit	
0-5 years	228	3.95	.60	.04	3.88	4.03	.046
6-10 years	207	3.87	.61	.04	3.79	3.96	
11-15 years	327	3.98	.54	.03	3.92	4.04	
16 years and over	442	4.00	.54	.03	3.95	4.06	
Total	1204	3.97	.57	.02	3.93	4.00	

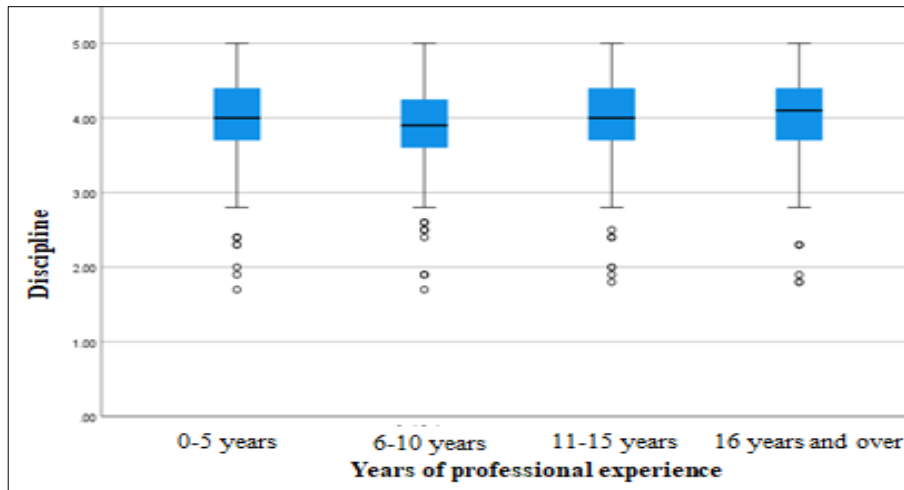


Fig 5: Boxplot showing discipline in relation to years of professional experience

The analysis of variance carried out identified statistically significant differences between the "Discipline" dimension in relation to the teachers' service position with $p < 0.001$. In particular, we observe that $F(5) = 4.340$ and in the category "Full day class" (3.85) there are statistically significantly lower values compared to the category "Supervisor/Director" (4.06) and the category "Classic

(morning) class" (4.01), that is, participants where they belong to the category "Full day class" declared lower degrees of pleasure with the discipline than those who belong to the other two categories. The estimates are presented in detail in Table 5 below, while the statistically significant differences are attributed by the following comparative histogram (Figure 6).

Table 5. Dimension "Discipline" in relation to position of service of the participating Kindergarten teachers

	Discipline						p
	N	Mean value	Standard variation	Standard error	95% C.I.		
					Lower limit	Upper limit	
Supervisor/Director	180	4.06	.53	.04	3.98	4.14	<.001
Classic (morning) class	541	4.01	.53	.02	3.97	4.06	
Full day class	160	3.85	.60	.05	3.76	3.94	
Special Kindergarten	52	3.83	.52	.07	3.68	3.98	
Integration Department	44	3.93	.66	.10	3.73	4.13	
Parallel Support	227	3.90	.60	.04	3.82	3.98	
Total	1204	3.97	.57	.02	3.93	4.00	

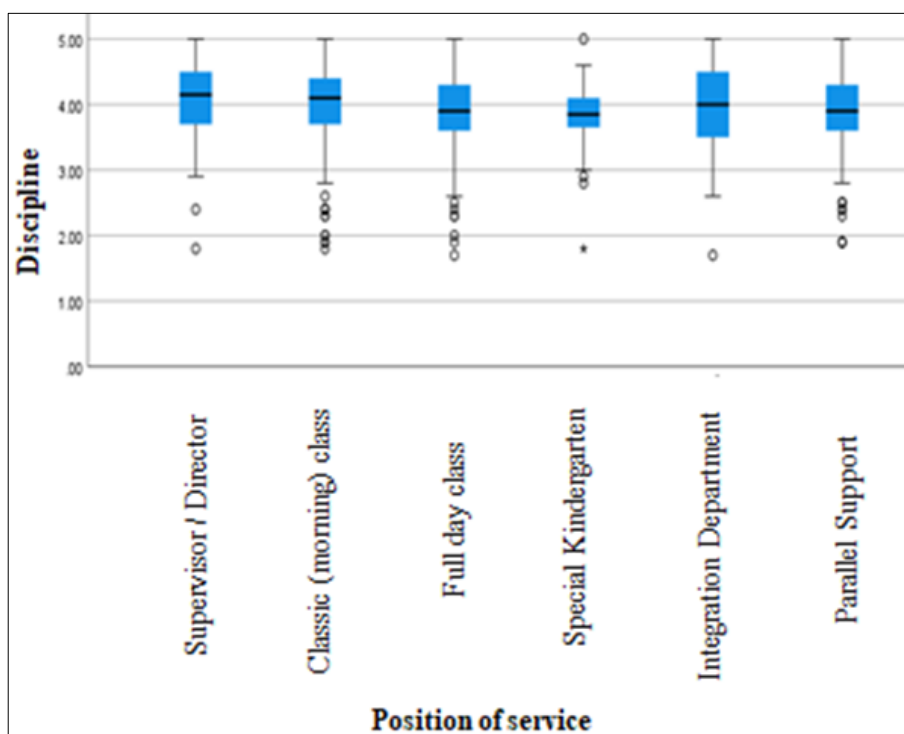


Fig 6: Boxplot showing discipline in relation to position of service

It should be noted that no significant statistical differences emerged between the climate dimension with the gender of the teachers and the number of children studying in each department. Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between the dimension of discipline and the level of study of the participating teachers and the number of children per class.

Discussion of the conclusions

In the context of the present study, the views of General and Special Education Kindergarten teachers on the implementation of the curriculum and its effect on the quality of the school climate were investigated. The majority of teachers argued that it is very important for Kindergarten teachers to create a beautiful and calm atmosphere in the classroom, thus satisfying the socio-emotional needs of the students. Then, sharing moments of laughter with children is particularly valuable for most participants, findings that agree with those of other research (Grammatikopoulou & Eleftherakis, 2021; Mejah, Bakar & Amat, 2019; Wentzel *et al.*, 2018) ^[11, 21, 30].

Continuing, there was a unanimous rejection of the laxity of discipline, which leads to the loss of order and control in the class. The teachers unanimously stated that the teaching staff must have absolute control of the class and prevent aggressive behaviors on the part of the students (Chang, 2013) ^[4]. The effort of teachers to actively involve students in solving their problems and differences within the school was also assessed as very important (Kilday & Ryan, 2019) ^[15], while several activities are carried out for the social development of students (Budianti & Arsyad, 2022) ^[2]. Participants agreed that they seek expert help from other specialties when they have difficulty managing problematic situations and use supervision of free play to enhance social interaction (Birbilis & Kontopoulou, 2016) ^[1]. In agreement with the research of Egert, Dederer and Fukink (2020) ^[9]. It emerged that for teachers it is very important for the interaction of children and educational staff to perform a variety of individual or group activities. Teachers as a whole stated that it is very constructive and beneficial to meet the individual needs of children to share information about students with their colleagues on a daily basis (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) ^[12].

Then, in the research, it emerged that the years of teaching experience of the teachers are a determining factor of the quality of the school climate. In particular, it was found that teachers who have worked for more than 16 years feel more satisfied with the quality of the climate in their Kindergarten compared to their colleagues who have worked for less than 10 years. The direct relationship between teaching experience and school climate has been studied and established in many other researches (Debnam, Edwards & Cornell, 2021; Sanchez, Paul & Thornton, 2022) ^[5, 28]. At the same time, years of teaching experience were found to have a significant effect on classroom discipline, as Kindergarten teachers with more than 16 years of teaching experience reported higher levels of satisfaction with the quality of discipline than those with 6 to 10 years of experience (Kropáč, Buchtová & Chudý, 2023) ^[17].

A particular finding of the present research is the correlation between the position of service and the discipline imposed in the Kindergarten. More specifically, the teachers who work in the full day class expressed their dissatisfaction with the degree of discipline that prevails in the class,

compared to the Supervisors/Directors and the teachers of the morning classes. This finding could be attributed to chronic pathologies plaguing the Greek education system. Students who attend the full day class are already tired from the morning program, making it significantly more difficult for them to participate and perform in additional activities. Also, the lack of adequate spaces and suitable equipment, such as mattresses and beds, often does not allow children to rest properly at midday, resulting in irritability and hyperactivity. Furthermore, students with some kind of disability or disorder, who in the morning class have the support of specialized staff (Special teacher, support staff), in the full day class are deprived of this support, unable to follow the program and observe the rules. In addition, discipline in the full day program is also affected by the existence of only one teacher, who in many cases stays alone in the building with the children after his colleagues have left. The fact that there is no other adult person present in the area to help manage the children or to take over the class completely in emergencies, such as in the case of illness or an accident, causes reasonable anxiety and nervousness in the teacher, which, as a consequence, is perceived by the students negatively affecting the general climate.

In conclusion, the findings of this research revealed interesting opinions of General and Special Education Kindergarten teachers about the climate that prevails in the country's Kindergartens, with the majority placing a positive sign on the quality of the school climate. However, the views expressed on the subject of discipline are of concern and would benefit from further investigation. Improving the learning conditions for children in Kindergarten could start from placing a second teacher in the classroom, reducing the number of students in each section and ensuring adequate logistical equipment. Children at the sensitive age of Kindergarten need clear boundaries and rules in order to develop their abilities to the maximum and satisfy their individual needs, fulfilling the basic purpose of Kindergarten.

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