



## Country Background Report Cyprus

### 1. Background

#### The national/societal cultural portrait of Cyprus

Cyprus is an island in the north-eastern part of the Mediterranean with a surface area of 9,251 square kilometres. As of 2006 the estimated population was 867,600 (Statistical Service, Republic of Cyprus, 2007), of whom the majority are ethnically Greek, living in the southern part of the island. About 200,000 Turkish Cypriots and Turkish immigrants live in the northern part of the island, separated from the south by a UN-supervised buffer zone. There are also a few foreign residents, Maronites, Armenians, and Latins, who live in the country (Tsiakkios & Pashiardis, 2007, p.73). Cyprus became a member of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) upon accession to the European Union on 1 May 2004. As of 1 January 2008, Cyprus adopted the Euro, giving up its national currency (the Cyprus Pound). At the same time, it entered the Eurozone and benefited from a single monetary policy (European Commission, 2008).

Cyprus's economy is small, open and flexible. At the same time, it is characterised by conditions of rapid growth, full employment conditions and external and internal stability (Cyprus State Fairs Authority, 2007). Human resources are characterised by a high level of educational attainment. The island has experienced strong economic growth since independence from the United Kingdom in 1960, based mostly on industrial and agricultural sectors and advanced physical and social infrastructure (Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus, 2007). In terms of per capita income, Cyprus is classified among the upper middle-income countries. The public expenditure on Education accounted for €942.3 million in 2006 (Statistical Service, Republic of Cyprus, 2007). Thus, the quality of life is high and the standards of health provision, the functioning of other social organisations and the provision of public education can be favourably compared to other countries in the European Union (Tsiakkios & Pashiardis, 2007, pp 73-74).

When Cyprus gained its independence in 1960, it also joined the Commonwealth and the United Nations. The provisions of the

London and Zurich Agreements placed education under two parallel Communal Chambers, one for the Greek community and one for the Turkish community. The system of school committees continued to function under the same rules and regulations as those during the British era (Anastassiades, 1979). In 1963, violent actions broke out between the two communities (Greek and Turkish). As a result of those disturbances, the parallel system of the two Communal Chambers had to be abolished, and furthermore, the two communities took steps towards separation. Following the separation in 1965, all the administrative functions of the Greek Communal Chamber were transferred by law, to a new Ministry, the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education was responsible for all Greek schools, and for the schools of all the other ethnic groups which aligned themselves with the Greek Community.

#### The Organizational Profile of Cypriot Schools

##### Organizational structures

The educational system in Cyprus is provided in a compulsory, nine-year comprehensive school (legislated in 1981), followed by a non-compulsory three-year high school (grades 10-12). This separation between compulsory and non-compulsory education is launched under the general humanistic ideals of the system "to create free, democratic, and autonomous citizens who have well-rounded personality, they are healthy, honest, active and creative, and who contribute, with hard work and willingness, to the social, scientific, economic and cultural advancement of the country, and to the promotion of cooperation, understanding and love among people and nations, with the aim of sustaining freedom, justice and peace, and with a clear direction towards the idea of a free country, that manages to keep the Greek identity and the Christian Orthodox tradition as well" (National Curriculum for Primary Education, 2002, p.17). The nine-year comprehensive school is divided into two levels: elementary (grades 1-6) and gymnasium (7-9). In the context of the paper the terms 'primary' and 'elementary' are used

interchangeably and refer to free, compulsory education starting from the age of six to twelve. All students are taught the same subjects, and use the same books, in the nine-year comprehensive school (Zembylas & Papanastasiou, 2006).

In general, despite its traditions of classical education and Aristotle's dictum that "state education is not worthy of free citizens" (The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2008), Cyprus is a country with a highly centralized public educational system. The Ministry of Education, which was renamed as Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) in 1994, is the policy-making and administrative body of the Government for education. It is responsible for the enforcement of educational laws and the preparation of educational bills. It also prescribes the syllabi, curricula and textbooks, and, finally, regulates and supervises all the institutions under its jurisdiction (Pashiardis, 2004).

Appointments, secondments, transfers, promotions and discipline of all teaching personnel and the Inspectorate of the Cyprus Educational System are under the responsibility of the Educational Service Commission, a five-member independent body, appointed by the President of the Republic for a period of six years (MoEC, 2001). Newly qualified teachers are usually appointed to small schools, since a points system is used for assignments and they all start with zero points (the more points you have, the better the assignment you get). The assignment to a small school is seen as undesirable by the majority of teachers. Even teachers from the local area prefer to work in larger schools and, as a result, small schools have teachers from other communities. Inspectors visit schools at all levels and offer consultations, advice and supervision. School evaluation is also their responsibility (Pashiardis and Tsiakkiros, 2004).

### **The Role of Local School Boards**

Local School Boards are committees formed by 5-11 elected members of each community or district and serve for a period of five years. The government has given them the responsibility to administer schools in their district. They undertake the financial management of schools and cooperate with the schools' headteachers to achieve their best operation. Local School Boards manage schools' budgets; give suggestions about the reallocation of pupils in the district's schools and are responsible for schools buildings and equipment. Their role is similar to the role of LEAs in England, especially prior to the reforms, because they are transitional agents between central authority and schools (Theodorou, 2006).

### **The Profile of Cypriot Headteachers**

Because of the way the Cypriot Educational System works, the majority of primary school headteachers are in their late 50s, which is an age close to retirement. Promotion is based on their age and long service in teaching (about 20 years), as well as on the evaluation of their performance as teachers (Pashiardis and Orphanou, 1999). Moreover, according to Pashiardis and Orphanou (1999), most of these principals are graduates of the Pedagogic Academy of Cyprus (PAC, *three years*) and only 2% are qualified with a Master's degree. The educational system in Cyprus has been steadily transformed through a succession of improvements after the independence of the island from the British in 1960 (Zembylas and Papanastasiou, 2004). These improvements include the necessity for Cypriot headteachers to have at least a first University degree in Education Sciences (which is a four-year degree) (Constantinou, 2001).

Headteachers hold the most critical posts in Cypriot schools, as they are responsible for their schools' operation and functioning, both in the educational and administrative sphere. Their duties include class teaching; guidance, evaluation and reports on the teachers' work; collaboration with the Local School Board; writing down and submitting schools' needs to be included in the following year's budget; managing any money given by the Board or Parents Association; and handling the schools' paperwork and mail (Law 223 of 1997 cited in Theodorou, 2006).

Headteachers are mainly responsible for the administration and management of the school. That good teachers can become effective managers and leaders without pre-post preparation is still an assumption in Cyprus. As a result of this, headteachers work from personal experience, figuring it out as they go. During the first few years after appointment to the post, headteachers receive compulsory in-service training provided by the Pedagogical Institute, related to general management and administration issues, educational issues and the duties of the post. However, as Nicolaidou (2008) argues, even this training is primarily bureaucratic in nature and inadequate to prepare future school leaders. As Trisokka's (2006) research results showed, Cypriot primary school headteachers categorically believe that their education system does not adequately prepare them to meet the demands of their new role and that the compulsory preparation for headship provided by the Pedagogical Institute following promotion is poor in both content and delivery. They also complain about their many and exhausting duties at school that make them feel physically and emotionally unproductive.

As Angelides (2005) pointed out, current Cypriot schools need headteachers who are trained to recognise existing practices and reformulate ineffective policies within the framework of continuous professional development.

### **Leadership and management processes**

As mentioned above, the educational system in Cyprus can be characterized as centralized, conservative and bureaucratic in all its functions (UNESCO, 1997). Headteacher preparation is regarded as a weak point of the Cypriot system, as no specific long-term training is offered to them and no appropriate professional qualification in management is required of applicants for the post (Nicolaidou and Georgiou cited in Nicolaidou, 2008).

The introduction of management and leadership training programmes in education is still at an embryonic stage. It can be argued that primary headteacher preparation and professional development is virtually non-existent (Georgiou et al., 2001) and does not address the actual needs of headteachers. Those responsible for organising in-service training programmes at the Pedagogical Institute have conceded that they have failed as a system, due to the fact that they have neither trained nor created effective school managers nor developed good school leaders (Charalambous, 2004). This, combined with weaknesses in the procedures for leader selection, has been characterized as a stigma on this particular educational system (Georgiou et al., 2001).

(Lambri Trisokka)

Doctoral Researcher in Educational Leadership, University of Warwick, UK

Head teacher of Coventry Greek School, UK

