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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# THE EFFECT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF DIFFERENTIATED TEACHING

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### ABSTRACT

International research associates transformational leadership applied by the school leader with the effective teaching of the teacher. Differentiated teaching is considered a holistic way of approaching the learning process and a vital component of effective teaching. The purpose of the present study is to investigate whether Greek teachers differentiate their teaching according to their students' interests and needs and whether transformational leadership influences this implementation. The sample of the research consisted of 147 secondary education teachers in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. The results revealed that the 73.5% of teachers apply differentiated teaching. There was also a statistically significant but weak positive correlation between the three sub-factors of transformational leadership, charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation, with differentiated teaching. Principal's charisma has the highest positive correlation than the other two sub-factors and can predict the application of differentiated teaching at 9.3%. The findings of the research could be used to train potential principals in transformational leadership practices.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that education is the key to the well-being of a society and that the type of school leadership is critical to the successful functioning of a school unit (Sun and Leithwood, 2012). Among the many leadership theories that have emerged in the field of education, prominent in the last two decades has been the theory of transformational leadership. A large number of scholars have explored this type of leadership and identified the association between it and the effectiveness of school organizations. Of the various characteristics which were recognized to exist in effective schools, most referred to their teacher and teaching (Mortimore et al, 1988). Differentiated teaching is also considered an effective teaching technique (Valianties, 2015). The purpose of the present research work is twofold: first to investigate whether differentiated teaching is applied by the sample teachers and secondly whether the transformational leadership exercised by the principal influences the implementation of differentiated teaching. More specifically, it is investigated whether the charisma of the principal, his individualized consideration for teachers, and the intellectual stimulation he provides them, are positively correlated with teachers' application of this type of teaching.

### Theoretical approach

**Transformational leadership:** Transformational leadership is defined as the anthropocentric type of leadership that associates all members and leaders in such a way that leaders and subordinates elevate each other to higher levels of motivation and ethics (Burns, 2003). According to Sergiovanni (2001) transformational leadership aims at profoundly changing leaders as well as the organizations they lead. It is based on the power of influence that is relevant to the functions of the organization and is characterized by an emphasis on people rather than structures, as well as a change in culture (Vassiliadou and Dieronitou, 2014). Leithwood and Jantzi (2000b) adapted and presented transformational leadership to the educational community that welcomed it, thereby responding to the guiding model applied in the 1990s as a result of effective school research. Some of the characteristics of transformational behavior are the charisma of the principal, the individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation he provides to teachers (Bass, 1985). Charisma includes the confidence and respect the leader inspires as well as personality traits such as optimism, confidence, self-esteem, self-control, and communication ability (Louis et al, 2010). Individualized consideration is expressed by the leader through personal respect for his subordinates, treating them as separate individuals and recognizing their unique needs. Also, through the help he or she offers, he or she highlights their abilities and

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skills. In addition, individualized consideration is manifested through his or her concern for training and professional development (Photopoulou, 2013). Intellectual stimulation occurs when the leader encourages innovation and creativity by re-examining problems and approaching older issues in new ways (Timothy and Ronald, 2004).

**Differentiated teaching:** The diversity of students in the age of globalization is an undeniable reality. Different cultures, languages, socioeconomic levels, abilities and interests are some of the many areas where a school classroom varies. Equal education for all, regardless of cultural background, is identified with the need for European inclusion and social cohesion, non-marginalization and the elimination of marginalization (Ferrona, 2013). In relation to the modern world, diversity is recognized and valued. Therefore, responding to it with the ultimate goal of inclusion is both a moral and an institutional obligation (Neophytou and Valiant, 2017). The answer to diversity is differentiation. In education, differentiated teaching is an anthropocentric and anthropomorphic pedagogical proposal and promotes equality in access, opportunity and success (Valiandes, 2015). Differentiation of teaching is therefore "the process of adapting learning objectives, tasks, activities, resources to individual needs, learning style, pace, learning history and the overall biography of each and every student" (Koutselini and Agathangelou, 2018). Differentiated teaching is confirmed by the theory of constructivism, different types of intelligence and brain development, with research data on how readiness, interests and learning preferences affect learning and academic performance (Anderson, 2007).

The concept of differentiated teaching is based on the following principles: a) every student and every teacher can learn, b) all students have the right to access high quality education, c) all students' progress is expected, recognized and rewarded, d) all students have some common and distinct individual needs (Logan, 2011). It is pointed out that differentiation is not a set of teaching models, but a way of thinking about teaching and learning, and without being an additional one, it is a vital component of effective teaching. Accordingly, differentiated teaching is not a strategy but a comprehensive way of dealing with students and the learning process (Tomlinson, 2014). The implementation of effective differentiated teaching is based on the dynamic interaction of a five-factor system, namely continuous and systematic evaluation, the construction of a 'quality' curriculum, the formation of an appropriate learning environment, the students' response to teaching and management. One factor malfunction leads to malfunction of the whole system (Tomlinson & Moon, 2013). Implementing teaching differentiation is a huge challenge for teachers who are not only invited to utilize multiple teaching methods, techniques and strategies (Valiandes, 2015) but in many cases they change their way of thinking, their educational philosophy and their personal theory (Neophytou et al, 2011).

**The Relation between Differentiated Teaching and Transformational Leadership:** There are many researchers who associate leadership with values and vision and characterize it as a process of influence (Bush and Glover, 2014). Others correlate it with the changing culture and point out that the principal plays an important role because it can motivate teachers, guarantee good working conditions, promote a learning culture in the school community and

increase efficiency and effectiveness (Fullan, 2010). Diversity in a school organization is observed not only in students but also in teachers and has a catalytic effect on learning and professional development respectively (Koutselini, 2007). Leadership is therefore "expected to be diversified: to adapt so that it can respond to the diversity of the student population through the optimal use of teacher diversity" (Neophytou and Valiant, 2017). The role of the educational leader is to apply personalized approaches and action plans for each or every group of individuals and to work consciously to improve the learning outcomes of the school unit (Hallinger, 2011) by improving the students' learning performance (Day et al, 2010). In international literature, transformational leadership and its practices are related to school organization restructuring (Vassiliadou and Dieronitou, 2014), cultural change organizational commitment of teachers, transforming the school organization into a professional learning community and school effectiveness in general (Sun and Leithwood, 2012). In particular, it is shown that traits of the principal's charisma such as communication ability, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-control, help the teacher to plan and organize his lesson properly, to achieve the teaching goals he has set and to provide students with positive feedback (Louis et al. al, 2010). The individualized consideration shown by the principal for each teacher, the encouragement for his professional development (Photopoulou, 2013) and the focus on his strengths affect the sense of teacher responsibility and student success (Kurland, 2018), in creating a pedagogical community with a strong culture (Valiant and Neophytou, 2017), fostering a collaborative learning environment (Hauserman, et al, 2013) and leading to teacher self-efficacy. The intellectual stimulation of the transformational leader, his positive attitude and encouragement for anything innovative, the development and transmission of a common vision for the school and his high expectations for students and teachers, contribute significantly to teacher effectiveness (Moolenaar et al, 2010).

Transformational leaders are inspiring and point the way to their visions or missions. They tend to be more visionary (Avolio, and Bass, 1995), less focused on managing the daily context, choosing instead to focus their attention on the actions needed to inspire and lead. They are more open to the types of innovative practices thus transforming schools (Heissenberger, and Heilbronner, 2017). Transformational leadership therefore creates the right conditions for promoting diversity. Educational leaders can employ staff-focused strategies, structured strategies that offer specific assistance in diversification, and strategies that promote the exchange of ideas. Some of these practices are as follows (Tomlinson and Demirsky, 2004):

- They encourage teachers to try out new practices to gain a different perspective on students, teaching and learning
- They are themselves an example of effective differentiation
- Help parents understand the concept of differentiation and to realize the benefits it has for their children
- Seek, using a variety of means, evidence of change and the effects of differentiation for both students and teachers, in order to further their development and progress.

**Objectives and Hypotheses:** The purpose of the present study is to examine whether sample teachers apply differentiated teaching and whether its application relates to transformational

leadership factors, namely the charisma, individualized consideration of the principal, and the intellectual stimulation it provides teachers. The hypotheses were:

**Hypothesis 1:** Secondary education teachers in Greece apply differentiated teaching.

**Hypothesis 2:** Principal's charisma affects teachers to apply differentiated teaching.

**Hypothesis 3:** Principal's individualized consideration affects teachers to apply differentiated teaching.

**Hypothesis 4:** Principal's intellectual stimulation affects teachers to apply differentiated teaching.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample

The sample of the study consisted of 147 high school teachers from the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (90 female and 57 male). The research was conducted in the 2016-17 school year and was implemented in two phases, the pilot and the main research.

### Research instrument

**Transformational Leadership Practices:** Transformational practices were investigated by a section of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass, and Avolio, 1995). The factor Transformational Leadership has been studied with three sub-factors, the charisma of the principal, his individualized consideration, and the intellectual stimulation he provides to teachers, measured by twenty-five questions.

**Effective teaching:** The effective teaching factor was investigated with a new questionnaire structured for this research, and tested for its reliability (Cronbach Alpha = 0.979) and its validity (Normed X<sup>2</sup> = 3.491, GFI = 0.994, Structural Reliability = 0.744, Exported Variance = 50,099%, CFI = 0.994, NFI = 0.908, RMR = 0.021, RMSEA = 0.080). It contains fifteen questions referring to the techniques used by the teacher in teaching. One of them examines whether the teacher applies differentiated teaching: *Do you adapt your teaching to your students' interests and abilities?* The responses were provided on a 5-point Likert-scale, where (1) meant "not at all", (2) "a little", (3) "moderately", (4) "a lot of" and (5) "very much". Statistical data processing and analysis were performed using SPSS V21 statistical package.

## RESULTS

Basic statistical tests (frequency tables, mean, dominant value and standard deviation) were performed in order to answer the first research hypothesis. The results showed that teachers apply differentiated teaching to a very large extent, with 73.5% saying that they adapt their teaching very much to the interests and needs of their students. A small percentage of 1.4% stated that they did not differentiate their teaching at all or very little 2.7%, while 22.4% moderately applied differentiated teaching (Table 1). On the case "Principal's charisma affects the implementation of differentiated teaching by teachers" and in order to explore possible associations between the two factors,

principal's charisma and teacher's differentiated teaching, was applied the Pearson's correlation coefficient. The results showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between factor *charisma* and factor *differentiated teaching*,  $r = 0.305$ ,  $p < 0.01$  (Table 3). Linear regression analysis was also used to examine the contribution of charisma to the prediction of teachers' differentiated teaching. The results showed that principal's charisma contributed statistically significantly to the prediction of differentiated teaching (Table 4). 9.3% of the variation in differentiated teaching is explained by the variation in the dimension of transformational leadership, charisma. The rest of the variation in "differentiated teaching" that cannot be interpreted (cannot be predicted) by "charisma" is Residual Sum of Squares (= 90.7%). Pearson's correlation coefficient was applied to investigate possible correlations between the two factors, principal's individualized consideration and teacher's differentiated teaching. The results showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between factor *individualized consideration* and factor *differentiated teaching*,  $r = 0.237$ ,  $p < 0.01$  (Table 5).

Linear regression analysis was used to examine the contribution of principal's individualized consideration to the prediction of teachers' differentiated teaching. The results showed that individualized consideration had a statistically significant effect on predicting teachers' differentiated teaching (Table 6). 5.6% of the variation in differentiated teaching is interpreted by the variation in the dimension of transformational leadership, individualized consideration. Finally, about the third hypothesis «the intellectual stimulation provided by the principal influences the application of differentiated teaching by teachers» Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to investigate possible correlations between the two factors. The results showed that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the factor *intellectual stimulation* and the factor *differentiated teaching*,  $r = 0.249$ ,  $p < 0.01$  (Table 7). Linear regression analysis was used to examine the contribution of principal's intellectual stimulation to the prediction of teachers' differentiated teaching. The results showed that intellectual stimulation contributed statistically significantly to the prediction of teachers' differentiated teaching (Table 8). 6.2% of the variation in differentiated teaching is interpreted by the variation in the dimension of transformational leadership, intellectual stimulation

## DISCUSSION

Leadership clearly has a critical role in the success or failure of efforts to create or sustain organizational change (Murray, 2012). Implementing the differentiation of instruction is a huge challenge for school principals who are required to adopt a vision for the school, to be able to transmit it, and to provide ongoing instructional support to their teachers. The principles of transformational leadership are consistent with these characteristics (Avolio and Bass, 1995) as well as influencing and changing culture (Vassiliadou and Dieronitou, 2014), thus creating a fertile ground for the cultivation of differentiated teaching. In the present work, it was investigated whether differentiated instruction is applied and whether the sub-factors of charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation of transformational leadership influence this implementation. The answers to the research hypotheses are as follows:

**Table 1. Frequency table: Do you adapt your teaching to your students' interests and abilities?**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	2	1,4	1,4
	A little	4	2,7	4,1
	Moderately	33	22,4	26,5
	A lot of	71	48,3	74,8
	Very much	37	25,2	100,0
	Total	147	100,0	100,0

**Table 2. Statistics of the Differentiated Teaching Factor. "Do you adapt your teaching to your students' interests and abilities?"**

N	Valid	Missing
		147
		0
Mean		3,93
Median		4,00
Mode		4
Std. Deviation		,841
Minimum		1
Maximum		5

**Table 3. Results of a correlation analysis of principal's charisma and teacher's differentiated teaching**

Correlation Analysis			
		Charisma	Differentiated Teaching
Charisma	Pearson Correlation	1	,305**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	147	147
Differentiated Teaching	Pearson Correlation	,305**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	147	147

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 4. Regression model-Charisma in relation to Differentiated Teaching**

Predicting Factor of Teachers' Differentiated Teaching			
	$\beta$	t	p
charisma	0,279	3,863	0,000

N=147, R=0,305, R square=0,093, F=14,923, p<0,01

**Table 5. Results of the correlation analysis of the principal's individualized consideration and the differentiated teaching of the teacher**

Correlation Analysis			
		Individualized consideration	Differentiated teaching
Individualized consideration	Pearson Correlation	1	,237**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,004
	N	147	147
Differentiated teaching	Pearson Correlation	,237**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,004	
	N	147	147

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 6. Regression model- individualized consideration in relation to the Teachers' Differentiated Teaching**

Predicting Factor of Teacher Differentiated Teaching			
	$\beta$	t	p
Individualized consideration	0,195	2,938	0,004

N=147, R=0,237, R square=0,056, F=8,633, p<0,01

**Table 7. Results of the analysis of the association between the principals' intellectual stimulation and the teacher's differentiated teaching**

Correlation Analysis			
		Intellectual stimulation	Differentiated teaching
Intellectual stimulation	Pearson Correlation	1	,249**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,002
	N	147	147
Differentiated teaching	Pearson Correlation	,249**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,002	
	N	147	147

**Table 8. Regression model- Intellectual stimulation in relation to the Teachers' Differentiated Teaching**

Predicting Factor of Teacher Differentiated Teaching			
	$\beta$	t	p
Intellectual stimulation	0,227	3,096	0,002

N=147, R=0,249, R square=0,062, F=9,585, p<0,01

**Applying differentiated teaching:** The results revealed that 73.5% of teachers state that they are adjusting their teaching according to their students' interests and abilities. That means they believe that they are applying differentiated teaching. Similar surveys have shown that teachers try to integrate differentiation techniques into the learning process, but they face many obstacles, such as the size of the classroom and the variety it presents, the time and the lack of training (Wan, 2016, Robinson et al, 2014). Previous research in Greece also confirms that teachers do not significantly differentiate their teaching although they perceive its necessity (Filippatou and Ventista, 2017). However, recent research (Gaitanidou et al, 2019) has shown that primary school principals in Greece, differentiate their teaching on the kinesthetic type of intelligence, but their gender does not have a statistically significant effect on this differentiation. The contrast of the results of the present work with those of earlier research may be due to teachers perceiving differentiation as a simplification of curriculum or as an enrichment of experiential teaching (Subban, 2006), especially when have not received proper training.

**The Impact of Transformational Leadership on the Application of Differentiated Teaching:** The findings of the present study show that all three sub-factors of transformational leadership have a statistically significant positive correlation with the sub-factor *differentiated teaching* of the factor *effective teaching*. This confirms Neofytos and Valianti's (2017) research in Cyprus, which points out that the characteristics of transformational leadership such as protection, and care for instructional, moderation-empowerment, and the creation of a pedagogical community with a strong culture are related to the incorporation of differentiated teaching into the methods used by teachers. More specifically:

**Charisma:** The research revealed that the charisma of the Greek school principal presents a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.305$ ,  $p < 0.0$ ) with the differentiation of teaching and could even predict it at 9.3%. The study also corroborates the findings of previous relevant researches concluding that communicative competence, self-esteem, self-control (Louis et al, 2010) and other traits of principal's charisma contribute to the effectiveness of teaching, and thus to differentiation since it is consistent with effectiveness (Tomlinson, 2014).

**Individualized consideration:** For what is about the sub-factor, individualized consideration, the results proved a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.237$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with teaching differentiation and a predictive factor of 5.6%. The finding confirms the results of international researches that point out the transformational leader's ability to understand and care for the needs of his or her colleagues. So that it helps the teacher to sense collective responsibility and through effective teaching it leads the pupil's success (Van der Vyver et al, 2014).

**Intellectual stimulation:** Concerning the Intellectual stimulation caused by the principal, the results also revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.249$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with the differentiation of teaching and can predict it by 6.2%. Similar studies confirm that the vision which inspire the transformational leader (Avolio and Bass, (1995), its innovative spirit and his high expectations for students and

teachers (Heissenberger and Heilbronner, 2017) lead to effectiveness (Moolenaar et al, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

Transformational leadership is the type of leadership that transforms the school organization into a learning community with a shared vision, which among other, acts as a catalyst for the implementation of differentiated teaching (Tomlinson, 2014). The school leader's contribution is important in creating the right conditions that will change the school's culture and incorporate into this concept of teaching differentiation. The present study has proved that a large proportion of sample teachers, according to their perceptions, differentiate their teaching according to the needs and interests of their students. The results certainly present a view of what is happening in secondary schools in Greece, but the sample of the research does not allow for their generalization (Cohen, et al, 2007). In addition, since education lacks, at least until now, adequate training in differentiating teaching, the result is given with caution since the knowledge of what differentiation means is limited. All in all, the findings indicate a statistically significant but weak positive correlation of all components of transformational leadership, charisma, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation with differentiated teaching. Principal's charisma has the highest positive correlation than the other two sub-factors and can predict the implementation of differentiated teaching at 9.3%. Because changing culture is a time-consuming process and the implementation of differentiated teaching is based on it, a sustained and laborious effort on the part of the school leader is needed to achieve it. But the autonomy of schools is a precondition and at the same time the empowerment of principals in their difficult task. Moreover, appropriate training of the Greek teacher is required in order to consider differentiated teaching as an integral part of the learning process in a common classroom and not only in multicultural classes. Finally, it would be advisable for prospective principals' training programs to aim at developing charisma characteristics, as this is a key factor in providing effective teaching through its differentiation.

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