Chapter 4

In Search of Quality in School Distance Education:
The Case of Two Public Primary Schools in Athens

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this chapter is to research characteristics and main issues of quality school distance education, issues of support for those involved, but also to develop a reflection on what this experience will leave behind. In the context of a case study, focus groups were conducted with students, teachers, school principals, even parents in two public primary schools in Athens. Thematic analysis of data by informants highlighted key thematic areas in a quality system such as inclusion, leadership, professional development, infrastructure and equipment, teaching and learning methodology, the legacy of the widespread use of distance education. The educational institution evolves in the context of developing a culture of quality and evaluation. Schools should reflect on their practices. All stakeholders in the school community should be empowered to shape each school's identity and character, aiming to continuous quality enhancement and development for all.

INTRODUCTION

Distance education is more than uploading educational content, it is about students' taking the responsibility for their learning, flexibility, choice, and that demands careful planning, designing and development of effective learning environments (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). Because of the pandemic COVID-19 and the sudden huge expansion of school distance education, or even emergency remote teaching (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust, & Bond, 2020), issues of quality have been raised (Tait, 2021).

The main aim of this chapter is to highlight characteristics and issues of quality school distance education. This purpose has been developed into the following research questions:

1.   What are the main issues of quality in school distance education raised during the pandemic?
2.   How can a school community support its members to function effectively in times of a crisis?
3.   What legacy does the schools' experience from distance education during the pandemic leave for the future?

To answer these research questions, a flexible research plan has been designed (Robson, 2013). In the context of a case study focus groups were conducted with students, teachers, school principals, even parents in two public primary schools, XXth and ΥΥ[th] in Athens. These schools share the same premises and all members of school communities cooperated during the implementation of school distance education in the two-year COVID-19 period (2019-2021). Thematic analysis for gathered quality data was used.

So, this chapter starts with a brief bibliographic review on issues of quality in school education and then in school distance education. A case study of two primary schools that functioned effectively during the recent use of distance education was developed and finally a discussion is raised with some concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

QUALITY ISSUES IN SCHOOL DISTANCE EDUCATION

The Background: Quality in School Education

Quality in education is an old aim for education and at the same a dynamic concept whose meaning depends on who, when, where and for what reason defines it (Harvey

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