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School Leaders and Anti-racism. Political obstacles and pedagogical problems in Greece

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Abstract

Nowadays in Greece -like elsewhere in Europe- racism, anti-Semitism and neo-Nazism are expanding. The rise of racist violence is a very worrying phenomenon, which is actually intensified by the economic crisis and the social problems in Greek society. Racism and xenophobia are fuelled by an anti-immigration rhetoric of politicians, mostly carried out by supporters of far-right groups like Golden Dawn. In the Greek educational field we also come across violent expressions of racism, especially in the secondary and vocational education. It appears that the role of the school principal and the whole group of educators in the educational unit is crucial. In this proposal we analyse 53 questionnaires addressed to school principals of secondary education in the Corinthian region. Our aim is to investigate the problems they face in their everyday life within the school community in relationship with racism and bullying and the way they deal with that. Our hypothesis is that the majority of these school managers do not understand the nature and extent of racism and are ill-equipped to deal with the more covert expressions of racism. It is also among our intentions to analyse the connection of school leadership with the terrain of antiracism pedagogy and human rights education and to develop the adequate conceptual and theoretical equipment for dealing with different problematic situations and achieving transformational tasks. Our aim is to shed light on various school-based behaviour management, antiracism pedagogical tools or anti-bullying policies that tackle race equity, community engagement and social justice within schools.

Keywords: *school leaders, antiracism, xenophobia, pedagogical tools.*

1. Introduction

Direct racism can be seen in schools in incidents of racist abuse, harassment and discrimination. But racism is also manifested indirectly, in the form of prejudiced attitudes, lack of recognition of cultural diversity and culturally biased practices. The sorts of racist incidents that are most commonly reported at school are name-calling, teasing, exclusion, verbal abuse and bullying. An experience commonly reported is that racism in schools is often not acknowledged or addressed by teachers or others in authority (like school directors-managers), who have the ability to do something about it. It seems that those who do not themselves experience racism either do not recognise it or dismiss it as trivial and do not see its potential for damage. The danger is also that when racist attitudes and behaviours are permitted to go unchecked in a school, a climate develops which sees these actions as normal and so allows racism to become entrenched.

In this context, dealing with racism and seeking equal opportunities in education, the mode of organization of educational institutions, and the attitudes of teachers and school managers towards issues related to multicultural contact and education, remains an object of numerous studies and great importance. The objective of this paper is to discuss the attitudes of Greek school managers working in secondary education towards issues related to intercultural contact/racism and xenophobia in education, through a social-psychological approach. In particular, using the questionnaire as a research tool, we analyse the attitudes of school managers towards immigrants and multiculturalism, as well as the type of contact teachers have with immigrants. We analyse whether this contact affects their attitudes towards immigrants and towards multiculturalism, whether they express racist views and whether the feelings of stress that contact with immigrants may cause are related to their attitudes towards immigrants and towards multiculturalism. The theoretical part of the paper discusses key concepts used to answer the above questions, e.g., attitudes, stereotypes, racism and racial prejudice.

2. Theoretical Discussion

2.1. Racism-stereotypes and prejudice

In the past thirty years, particularly in the 1990s much has been written about stereotyping and prejudice. Many researchers dealing with racial prejudice agree that its expression had become more subtle in modern society. For example Dovidio and Gaertner have argued that discrimination occurs when an aversive racist can justify or rationalize a negative response on the basis of some factor other than race. Sears characterized modern racism by three components: denial of continued discrimination, antagonism toward minority group demands, and resentment about special favours for minority groups. Similarly, Pettigrew and Meertens (1995) have argued that blatant prejudice is the manifestation of three components: defense of traditional values, exaggeration of cultural differences, and denial of positive emotions. We believe that these classifications are current and identifiable in today's societies.

Although most researchers agree on the subtlety of modern racial prejudice, they differ in their labels for the new form of racism, which has been denoted, for example, *symbolic racism* (Sears, 1988) *aversive racism* (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998) *modern racism* (McConahay, 1983) and *subtle prejudice* (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995). These types are assumed to be the covert expressions of old-fashioned racism (McConahay, 1986). In the present article, we use the terms modern and classical racism to refer to the new and the old expressions of *racial prejudice*. At the same time, debate in the public sphere marks a net shift and improvement towards a progressively more visible discourse about immigrant and minorities' rights and their integration into the Greek society. Nevertheless, this remains a declarative rhetoric, yet to lead to concrete policies, as surveys and numbers show a persistent intolerant attitude and racist violence trend. The migration management system is in perennial crisis. The relevant legislation is subject to repeated amendments and is mostly expressed through successive regularization programs. The discussion highlights the importance of developing measures that tap the covert forms of prejudice. Therefore, the primary aim of the present study was to develop and validate racial prejudice scales for a Greek context and examine, whether classical and modern racism can be distinguished in this cultural context.

Prejudice against immigrants is probably not a recent problem in Europe, a continent with an immigrant population of many different ethnic groups. However, most European countries have experienced an increasing influx of immigrants the last decades. Modern societies are characterized by contradictory elements: acceptance of cultural diversity, protection of human rights and acculturation, on the one hand, xenophobia and racism, on the other. The covert manifestation of racial prejudice and racism has, most probably, not declined. Nowadays those phenomena are in increase. Discrimination or racial prejudice as experienced by immigrants is a serious problem for various groups of immigrants. Consequently immigrant groups have increased their demands for equality and legal provisions against discriminatory acts. In this context, dealing with racism and seeking equal opportunities in education, the mode of organization of educational institutions, and the attitudes of teachers and school managers towards issues related to multicultural contact and education, remains an object of numerous studies.

2.2. The Greek context

One of the most widely accepted concepts about migration and minorities in Greece, that in fact resembles a myth, is that the latter as a nation-state has always been a homogeneous country and that only recently, namely in the 1990s, it has become that of immigration-reception. Moreover, the state acknowledges the existence of only one minority - the Muslim one of the Western Thrace - recognized through international treaties of the early 20th century. It denies such connotation ('minority') for social groups like Roma, gypsies etc. In reality however, Greece of the 20th century has been an emigration, as well as an immigration country, especially following the exchange of populations after clashes with the vanishing Ottoman Empire, and due to territorial enlargement whether through wars and treaties, bilateral agreements, or by opening to the Arab world in the second half of the 20th century. On the other hand, Greece has indeed seen the growth of the percentage of foreign residents from a modest 2,5% in 1990, to 10% in 2001, according to the national census and other estimates. Immigrant population has increased four times its size since 1991, from 270.000 to 1,15 million persons. Most of them live in Athens (17% of the population total) and in Thessaloniki (7%). The landscape of immigration, minority and anti-discrimination policies in Greece is largely marked by issues of recognition and of articulation of long term state initiatives and planning, as well as by shortcomings, critical social exclusion, racism phenomena and macro-political challenges.

On the one hand, between the years 2000-2005, some significant steps were taken by the Greek government regarding Roma housing and minorities' education programs, as well as introduction of anti-discrimination legislation (transposing the Race and Equality EC Directives). Furthermore, a major shift of public debate has taken place, especially as far as integration of immigrants and religious freedom are concerned. On the other hand, state policies and initiatives in relation to racism, discrimination and the respect of equality are far from efficient while some are not even existent. There is a progressively more visible discourse about immigrant and minorities' rights and their integration into the Greek society, which sometimes appears as a declarative rhetoric, because there is also a persistent intolerant attitude and racist violence trend. The neo-fascist party *Golden Dawn* is dominating discussion of racism in Greece. A glance at the website of the party is instructive. Narcissism is large in the glorification of ancient Sparta, Thermopylae, Alexander of Macedon, the dictator Ioannis Metaxas, the Greek Junta.

From the other side we see a conservative reluctance from the government to implement a Law for antiracist attitudes (a debate and conflict of the last period in spring 2013. The basic argument is that existing legislation was sufficient to deal with racist attacks that have been spawned by Golden Dawn.

2.3. Educational challenges

The rapidly increasing participation of 2nd generation immigrant children in education is accompanied by an ever larger dropout rate, which remains higher for immigrant children in relation to the total students' population in primary and secondary education, though it is not to attribute to school performance. Isolated incidents of exclusion and discrimination against them are recorded, especially in relation to national festivities and parades, mainly due to the strongly ethnocentric aspects of Greek education.

The main issues raised during the past years were one, the prohibition of enrolment of children of undocumented immigrants, later on withdrawn due to the Ombudsman intervention, and two, the question of whether alien pupils should carry the national flag during school parades. The later issue provokes intolerant reactions at the local level every year. The state intercultural education consists of providing language support by teachers and is implemented only in 26 intercultural schools operating throughout the country. It serves the needs of the children of over a million of immigrants. Measures for immigrant children in school do not challenge the structural and systemic role of the education system in the Greek society, still based on exclusion rather than inclusion and on ethnocentrism rather than multiculturalism.

3. Our Research

We conducted our research in high schools situated in Corinthia (Κορινθία - *Korinthía*), one of the regional units of Greece, part of the region of Peloponnese, situated around the city of Corinth, in the north-eastern part of the Peloponnese peninsula. We have chosen this region firstly because this is the region of our Department at the University of the Peloponnese and secondly because according to the recent elections (June 2012) the extreme right (Golden Dawn) has in Corinthia acquired the highest rate in the whole country.



Year	Population
1991	132,129
2001	144,527
2011	145,082

3.1. The Questionnaire and methodology

Responses to all items were made on 4-point scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Items were randomly mixed and appropriate items were reversed. Responses to all items were made on 7-point scales ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7).

From 45 school managers in Corinthia region 31 answered (69%)

- 18 men (58%)
- 13 women (42%)
- 18 over 25 years in education (58%)
- 13 over 25 years (42%).
- Age: 22 over 50 years old (71%)
- 9 between 30 and 50 (29%)

Categories of the Questions

1. First category

- Opinions and perceptions of school managers about phenomena of xenophobia and racism in the Greek society.
- Opinions in comparison with massive arrival of immigrants in Greece (90's)
- Local and national level (general idea, relations with immigrants)

2. Second Category

- Personal opinions/ideas of school managers about immigrants through human and interpersonal relationships and contacts

3. Third Category

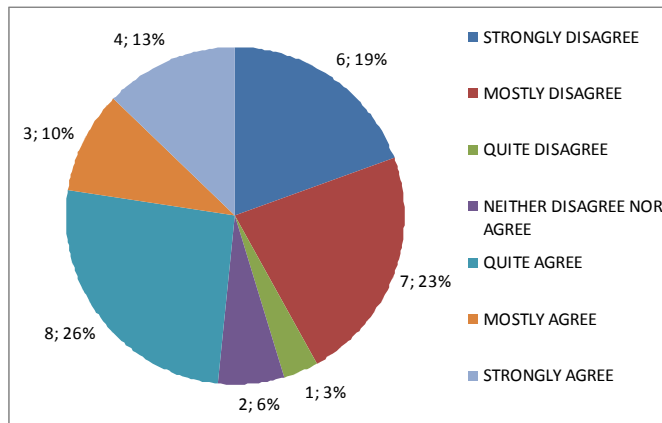
- Opinions of school managers for the coexistence of Greek pupils with immigrant children inside and outside the schools
- Their views about these relationships and the presence of immigrants in the schools. According to the fourth category we try to estimate the role of the educational system and the role of school managers in this.

4. Results

A1) *Do you think that xenophobia and racism are phenomena that existed in the Greek society before the massive arrival of immigrants in the 90's?*

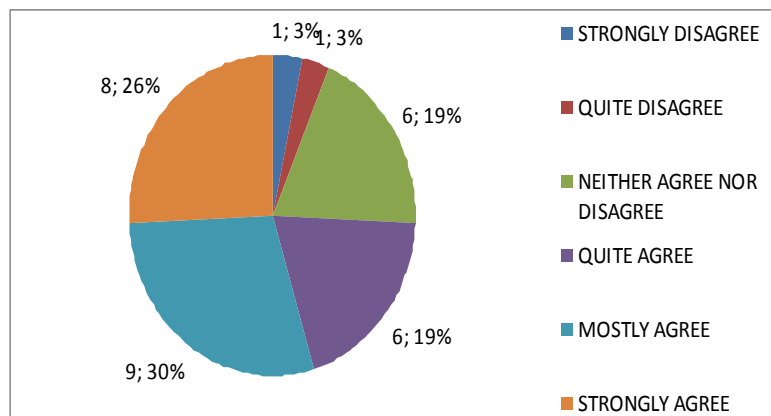
49% of school managers believe that these phenomena existed already before the massive arrival of immigrants, 45% believe that these appeared after the arrival.

Figure 1



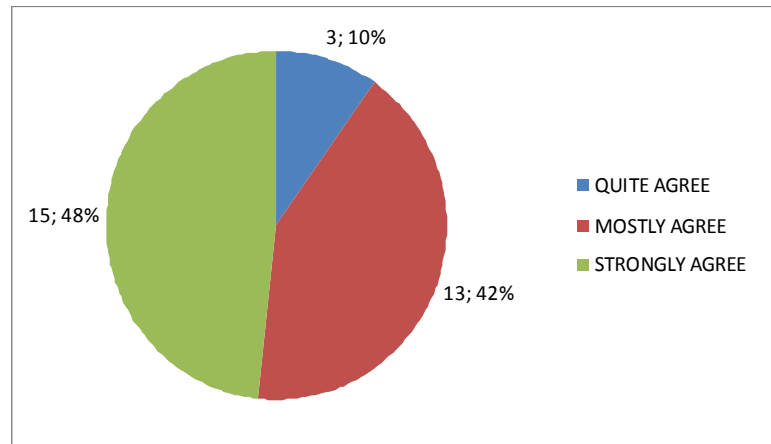
B1) *Do you think that the massive arrival of immigrants, their stay in Greece and their coexistence with local people provoked the rise of racism and xenophobia?* 74% of school managers believe that the rise of racism and xenophobia was provoked by the massive arrival of immigrants.

Figure 2



C1) *Do you think racism and xenophobia have increased because of the economic recession in the Greek society?* The majority of the school managers strongly agree with the idea that racism and xenophobia were increased because of the economic recession.

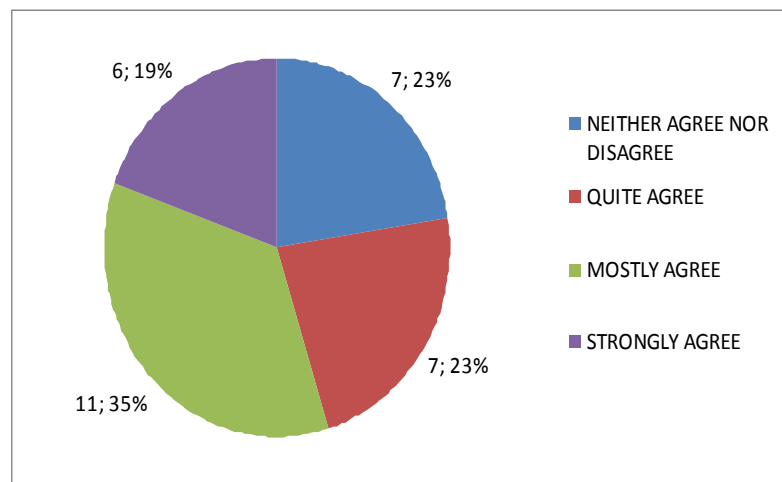
Figure 3



D1) *Do you believe that the forms of expression of such phenomena in the society has changed?*

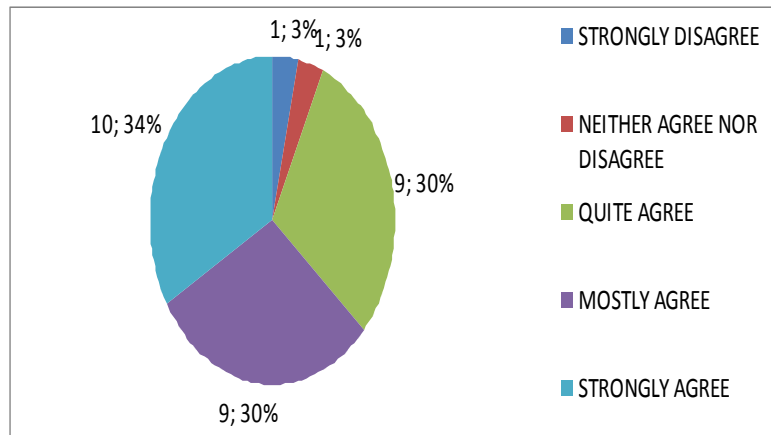
80% agree that these forms have changed

Figure 4



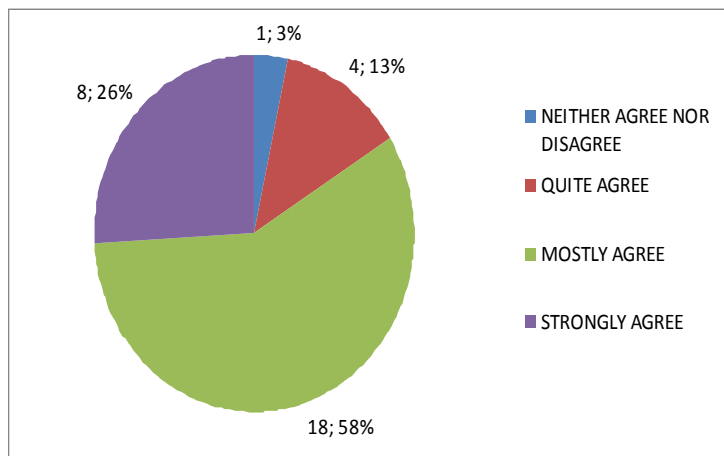
E1) *If you think that these expressions have changed, do you think that these became more violent and derogatory;*
 90% believe that these expressions became more violent and derogatory

Figure 5



G1) *Do you believe that phenomena of racial violence have occurred in the region of Corinthia-*85% haven seen or heard that such phenomena have really occurred in Corinthia

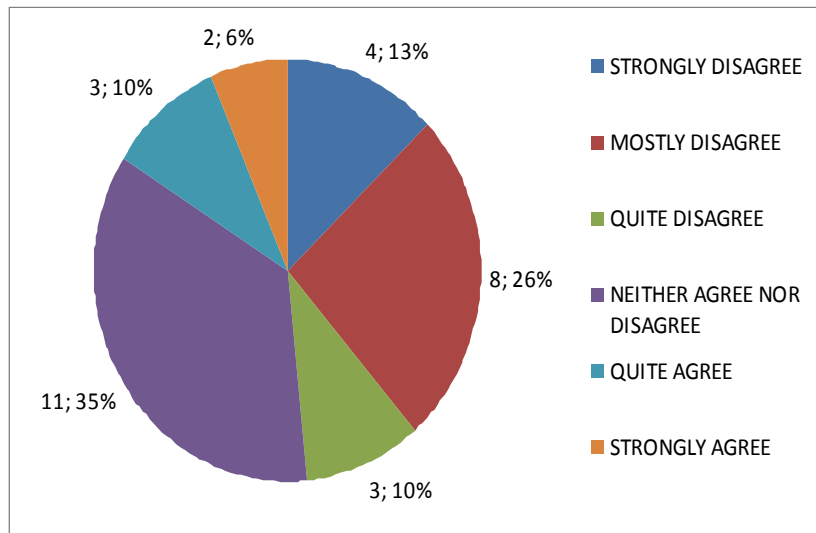
Figure 6



E2) *Immigrants are less civilized than local people*

49% believe that they are not less civilized and agree for their equal place in the Greek society and school.

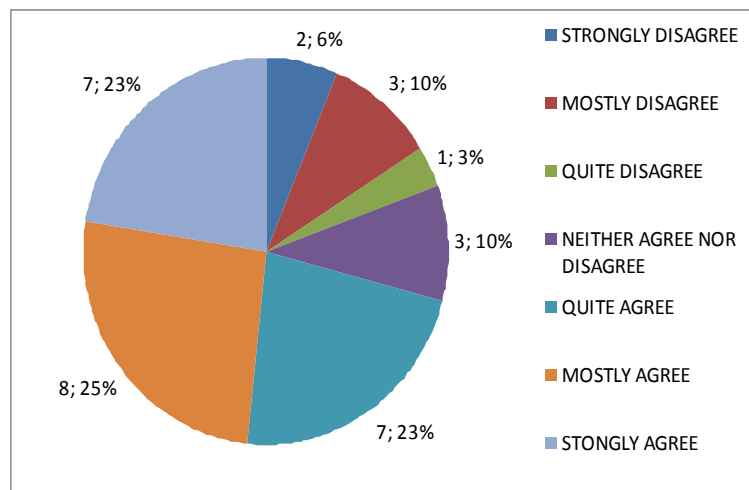
Figure 7



F2) *It is fair that immigrants claim for equal rights with local people?*

71% believe that this is fair!

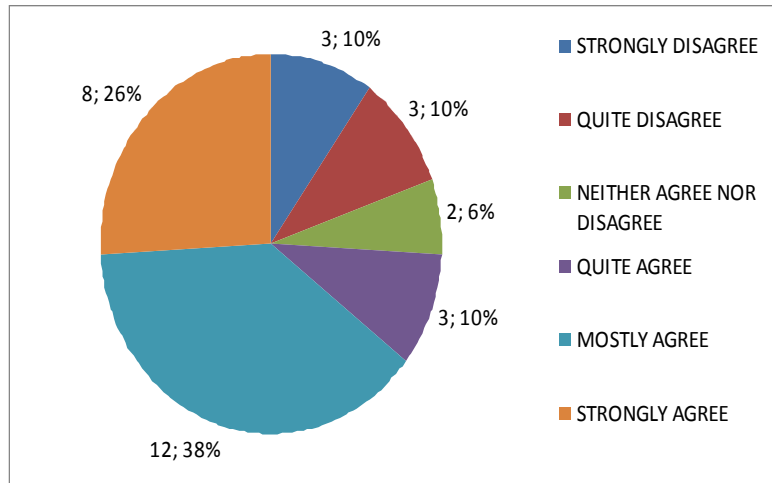
Figure 8



I2) Do you agree with attributing citizenship to immigrant students of second generation?

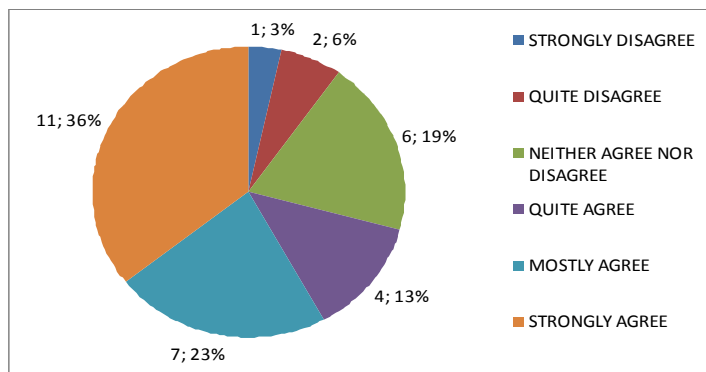
75% believe that citizenship should be attributed to those children

Figure 9



I3) Do you believe that immigrant students should participate to the celebrations of national days in the school and to the parades? 72% believe that they should participate

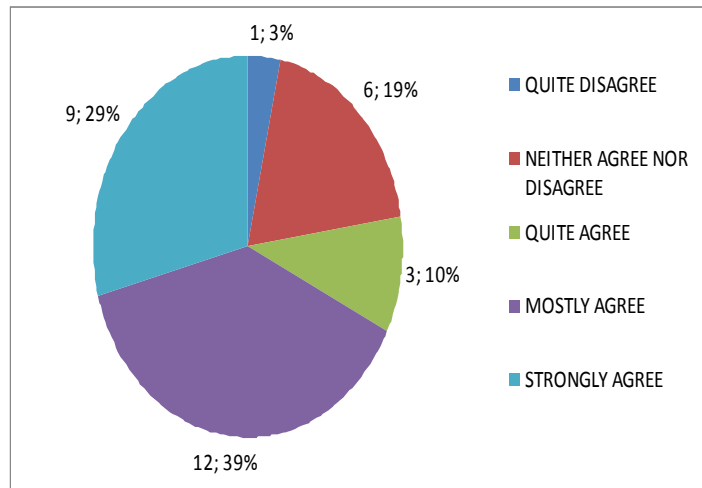
Figure 10



C4) *Do you think that school should enhance the national identity through practices and celebrations?*

80% believe that school should enforce-enhance national identity

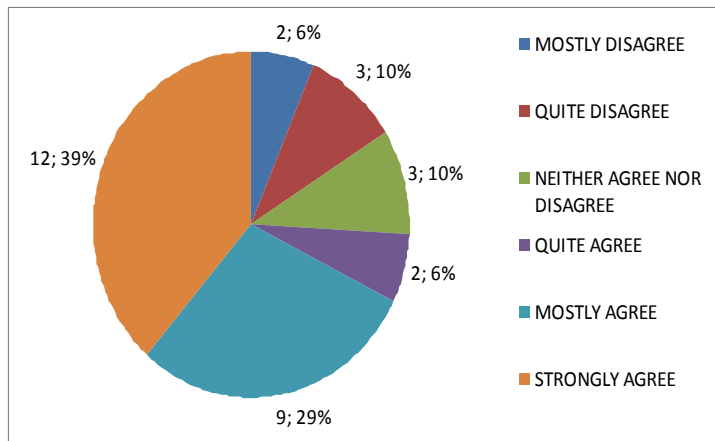
Figure 11



E4) *Do you believe that the restriction of courses related to law and democratic education will contribute to the development of racist opinions/perceptions?*

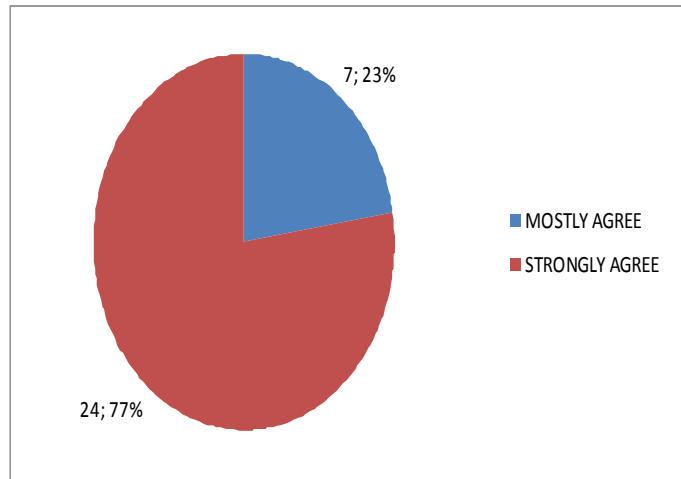
75% believe that the restriction of these courses would develop racism

Figure 12



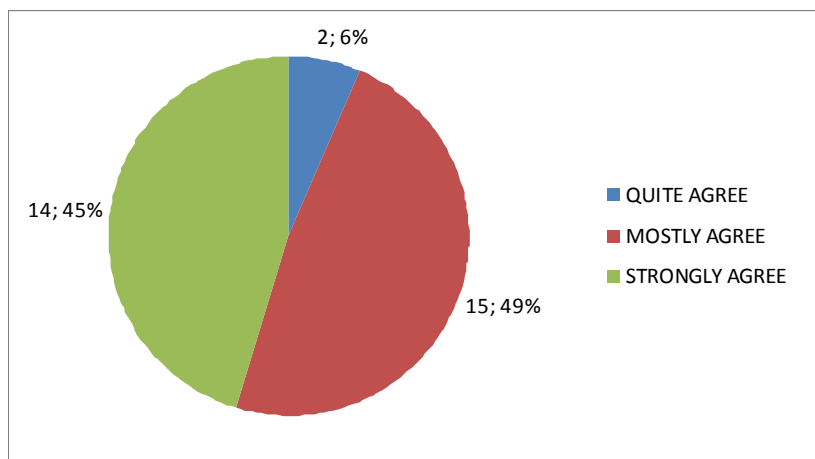
G4) *Do you think that school manager should take some initiatives if he/she sees phenomena of violence and racist attitudes?* The majority believes that the school manger should take initiatives for dealing with violence and other racist attitudes.

Figure 13



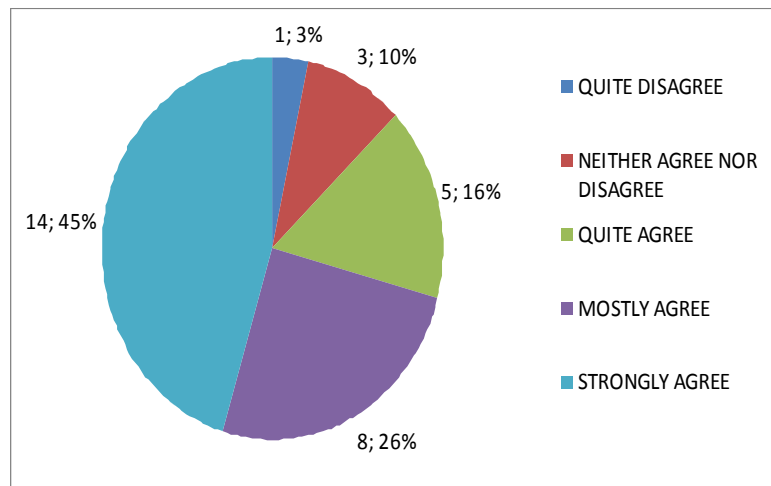
F4) *Do you believe that teachers' attitude toward such phenomena is determinant for the creation of students' perceptions and behaviours?* All of them believe that this is determinant

Figure 14



14) *Do you believe that the school manager has an important role to play in the formation of the racial phenomena inside and outside the school?* The majority believes that he/she should undertake an important role

Figure 15



Results

The school managers involved in our research overwhelmingly reported that racism was not a big problem within their schools. They constructed racism in terms of individual pathologies and suggested that any racist incidents, should these arise, could be dealt with more than adequately under various school based behaviour management or anti-bullying policies. The findings suggest that the majority of these school managers did not understand the nature and extent of racism and were ill-equipped to deal with the more covert expressions of racism. School directors' knowledge of the cultural diversity within their classrooms and within the broader Greek community varies. They may have little knowledge or understanding of the home lives and culture of students whose cultures and backgrounds differ from theirs. As a result, some directors carry with them stereotyped views of what students can achieve or how they are likely to behave according to their culture or ethnicity. These expectations influence the directors' behaviours and leadership styles. There is little room left for principals to be the sort of leaders who are able to develop "proactive, rather than only reactive, approaches to addressing conflict and building positive interethnic relations" (Henze, Katz, & Norte, 2000, p. 195). They agree that despite the difficulties and complexities of the job, principals are "pivotal in shaping the culture of schools" (McInerney, 2003, p. 75) they "can have a decisive effect on racist and anti-racist practices in their respective schools". This can only happen, however, through "strong and radical transformative leadership" and authentic leadership. Authentic leaders are defined as, those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of

the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character (Avolio, Luthans et al., 2004, p. 4, as cited in Avolio, Gardner et al., 2004). Authentic leaders fundamentally influence their own and followers' sense of self-awareness of values/moral perspective, which in turn provides a relational base for sustainable, veritable performance (Avolio, Luthans et al., 2004, p. 15).

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