

“Philosophy of didactics” as critical and reflective evaluation of teaching

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ABSTRACT

Lately in the research field of didactics, it has been observed that researchers focused preliminary on the limiting “predefined methodology of teaching”. This resulted in the degradation of the qualitative-philosophical and reflective dynamics of teaching. This realization created the need to redefine the didactic role of the educator, especially in regards to the term, to be introduced in this paper as a new epistemological paradigm for the first time in the literature of the pedagogical science, the “philosophy of didactics” (PhDi). The aim of this research is to investigate primary and secondary educators’ views and attitudes toward PhDi, examining how it contributes to redefining the educator’s didactic role and fostering reflective thinking, particularly when considering “who” and “what” in their teaching practices. The research employed a quantitative methodology using a 17-item questionnaire on a five-point Likert scale, examining teachers’ philosophical orientations, instructional planning approaches. Participants were 610 educators. SPSS analysis included descriptive statistics, reliability (Cronbach’s alpha), and inferential techniques. Findings show positive responses (mean 3.80-4.12, “very”), indicating that through PhDi educators can reflect on, analyze, and question teaching’s structural elements, while systematically and critically justifying them to make informed, well-structured decisions in lesson planning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The new reality in the field of education make it necessary to redefine didactics and in particular the educational/didactic role of the teacher [1]–[3]. At the same time, over the last two decades, numerous studies have focused on measuring, quantifying and comparing learning outcomes in classrooms [4]–[6]. In this way, the research approach to didactics and teaching focuses on a predefined methodology, downplaying other aspects of teaching related to student interaction, communication, collaboration [6], [7] and the reflective evaluation of teaching [8], [9]. Taking into consideration the core of all these researches, it is clear that the need arises to redefine the “identity” of didactics, where researchers in the field will need to explore in depth the issues of theory and practice of teaching in order to define a new epistemological paradigm. This Paradigm will not only focus on creating new methodology approaches to teaching, but also focuses on deeper issues of teaching and learning [6], [10]–[12].

In this context, the present research innovatively introduces the term “philosophy of didactics” (PhDi), as the basis for the exploration of the “didactic thinking”, the reflection for the teacher and his/her teaching

practices. The PhDi is defined as the reflective and systematic process in which the teacher takes into account basic principles, theoretical assumptions and scientific data. This supports the educator in his/her need to deepen the reasoning in the construct and operation of teaching before planning, implementing and evaluating [7], [11]–[14].

This research does not relate to the controversial “philosophy for, or with children” and other related themes. Instead, it approaches PhDi as a necessity in the teacher’s reflective-theoretical understanding of “about” and “for” teaching. On this basis, the requirement for a systematic and comprehensive approach to the above challenge is apparent, in order to formulate a new epistemological paradigm on PhDi, the construction of which requires the formulation of well-founded arguments, emerging through valid and reliable research data. In order to satisfy the prospective output of PhDi, we present you this research. Through this we are looking to explore the attitudes and views of Greek primary and secondary level educators in order to contribute through PhDi in the redefining of the didactic role of the educator and the critical and reflection evaluation of teaching, “about who” and “about what” in his/her teaching practices.

Although previous studies have examined teachers’ beliefs, instructional models, and reflective practices in relation to the “philosophy of teaching”, no empirical research has been identified that PhDi as a new term within pedagogical science, and more specifically as an integrated conceptual framework that connects philosophical orientation with concrete instructional decisions. Extending this research gap, the existing literature does not sufficiently explore how educators explicitly articulated philosophical positions influence measurable aspects of lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment practices. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by empirically examining the relationship between educators’ philosophical orientations and their instructional practices within a large sample. Its novelty lies in operationalizing PhDi as a measurable construct and statistically exploring its association with specific teaching behaviors, thus contributing to the bridging of theory and practice in contemporary educational research.

2. THE COMPREHENSIVE THEORETICAL BASIS

From the beginning, this research attempted a literature evaluation of similar terms of PhDi, such as “didactic of philosophy”, “philosophy of didactics”, “philosophy of teaching” or “teaching philosophy”. The literature evaluation was conducted in the following databases: Scopus, ERIC, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. Through this, the related term “philosophy of teaching” was identified, in relation with teaching in higher education [7]–[12], [15], [16]. For reference, recent research [10], which explored the views of higher education professors regarding their ability to anticipate the important parameters concerning their teaching effectiveness. Specifically, in this study, novice teachers suggested that upon entering the teaching profession, in terms of making teaching/educational decisions, they were guided by their views and attitudes formed by their teaching experiences related to their previous exposure to different teaching philosophies, such as traditional and liberal teaching styles. In other words, this research aims to develop a philosophical framework in education that will serve as a foundation for understanding whether the experiences and philosophical beliefs of teachers influence how they perceive the role of students and in what ways they can implement learning activities to achieve desired educational results/learning outcomes.

In other related researches [11], [12] “philosophy of teaching” is associated with systematic and critical reasoning, focusing on the important elements that determining effective teaching and learning in a predefined framework. The concept of the “philosophy of teaching” is influenced by the framework in which it takes place, such as the specific scientific field in which teaching and learning takes place. For example, teaching sociology in an undergraduate curriculum at a college will be presented differently compared to teaching sociology in a postgraduate curriculum since the framework in which the teaching takes place sets different parameters for the teacher. These parameters include the goals and values of the higher education organization, the methodology of teaching based on the curriculum guide, and the expectations of the students.

However, as mentioned above, there are not enough researches on “philosophy of teaching” that focus on undergraduate/pre-service students (in the field of education) or active primary and secondary school teachers [13], [17], [18]. To illustrate that, some of these studies [18]–[20] have explored the potential for activating the philosophical thinking “about” teaching that educator develop as a means for professional development.

According to previous studies [18], [19], [21], the “philosophy of teaching” is considered a perception of teaching and learning, which encompasses the roles of educators and students, the teachers’ integrated understanding regarding the purpose and process of teaching, the educational results and learning outcomes, as well as the significance of assessment in the teaching and learning process. At this point, it is worth noting that in this research the term PhDi is used instead of the term “philosophy of teaching”, because with the term PhDi we emphasize both the theory and the practice of teaching, while the use of the term “philosophy of teaching” seems to emphasize mainly the practice, the method of teaching.

The PhDi is able to function as a background for the validation of teaching practices, because in the framework of teaching it is not enough to know the methodologies and some generalized learning theories. It is also necessary for the educators to possess the didactic self-knowledge on the teaching practices, in order to reflect creatively, so as to create the conditions of adaptations and functional transformations in the scientific knowledge into actionable knowledge [16]. At the same time, PhDi evolves the broadening of the teacher's perspective on the data of teaching, making it an active rather than static status quo [19], [22].

PhDi constitutes the dynamic interweaving of the theoretical knowledge and beliefs of the teacher, as well as the design choices and organization of teaching. This interweaving can be achieved through the systematic and critical justification of the structural choices of teaching, which make teaching effective [12]. In particular, the PhDi integrates multiple interconnected aspects of teaching and learning. It encompasses the complex process of collecting, analyzing, evaluating, and adapting the educator's reflections on effective teaching and learning methodology [8], [11], [12], addresses challenges related to the values of the educator [15], [16] and the interaction between students and educator [15], [16], and involves the adaptation of teaching methods, techniques, and resources to meet educational goals. Furthermore, it considers the alignment of learning and teaching theories with the specific needs, interests, and characteristics of students [11], [12], supports informed decision-making regarding lesson planning and didactic choices [15], [23], [24], and fosters the activation of students' self-learning ability in accordance with their learning profiles, readiness, and potential [11], [12]. Additionally, it emphasizes the teacher's proactive efforts to detect conditions before and during instruction to ensure a positive learning environment [11], [12], [25], the capacity to inspire and motivate students, reflective practice after teaching [8], [11], [12], [17], [26], identification of "weak" points for subsequent improvement [27], and the enhancement of the teacher's confidence and professional skills [11], [12], [16].

Through PhDi the teacher attempts to identify the building elements of the multidimensional phenomenon of teaching by asking the following questions [11], [12], [16], [28], [29]. For the teacher, such questions may include the following: i) what are the basic principles of learning and teaching theories that influence my teaching approach? ii) what teaching methods and techniques do I base my teaching on? iii) what teaching and also assessment strategies do I consider most effective? iv) what are the goals of my professional development as a teacher? and v) how has my concept about teaching changed over time?

For the student, such questions may include the following: i) what skills do I expect students to develop? ii) in what circumstances ("ways") do students learn most effectively? iii) how do I link the content of the lesson to their experiences in everyday life? iv) in what ways do I build trusting relationships with my students? and v) how do I promote a culture of respect and solidarity in the teaching and learning environment? These questions are not only reflective but also inherently critical, prompting educators to examine the validity of their assumptions, contrast competing pedagogical perspectives, and explore potential contradictions in their teaching practices. This approach transforms routine instructional choices into deliberate, philosophically-informed decision.

In continuance to the above, the adaptation of PhDi is influenced by a variety of interrelated factors. These include the individual and personal experiences and beliefs of the educators [10], [15], [16], [23], as well as the values upon which their pedagogical approaches are grounded [15], [16], [23], [25]. It is also affected by the "didactic consistency" between the predefined teaching plan and the methods ultimately implemented in practice; for instance, when a teacher promotes a learner-centered approach in theory but applies a teacher-centered approach in practice, a discrepancy emerges between planning and implementation [13]. Furthermore, the learning and didactic theories that influenced educators during their studies [10], the prevailing conditions within the learning environment and the interaction between educators [10], and the conclusions derived both from learning outcomes and from the educator's reflection on the teaching process [8], [13] all contribute to shaping the adaptation of PhDi. Overall, PhDi supports the educator to reflect [11]–[13], [16], [26] on all the didactic decisions made in class, on empowering their understanding of different approaches in order to better support their students, and on attempting to optimize the parameters that, for any reason, were not effectively utilized during the teaching process.

With PhDi as a background for documenting teaching practice, teachers' philosophical views on teaching constitute a key parameter for the teaching practices they will utilize [10], [30]. Characteristic of research data [31] shows that teachers with PhDi have an in-depth understanding of teaching and classroom management issues, and as a result, they are able to anticipate events related to classroom management. PhDi influences the teaching and learning environment [10], and in particular, faculty members' philosophical views are related to how they evaluate the teaching and learning environment, and may also help to establish the bridge between theory/philosophy and practice [16], [32]–[34]. Moreover, by engaging with PhDi, educators are prompted to scrutinize their implicit assumptions about teaching and learning, to compare alternative viewpoints critically, and to articulate the philosophical reasoning behind their teaching/didactical decisions. This reflective engagement deepens their professional understanding and enhances the capacity to innovate and adapt teaching strategies.

3. METHOD

3.1. Research question

The main question of the research, presented in this paper, investigates “to what” extent do Greek teachers in primary and secondary education consider that PhDi can contribute to the way of “didactic thinking” and the reflective evaluation of teaching in the whole framework of parameters concerning their teaching practices.

3.2. Research population and sample

The research was conducted in March 2024. The target population of the research were all the Greek teachers in primary education and secondary education teachers with the major of philology. The research sample was selected by “cluster” randomly sampling from the list of all Greek primary and secondary education schools [35]. More specifically, 1,000 schools were randomly selected from the total list of school. From these school, a sample of Greek teachers in primary education and secondary education teachers with the major of philology was then selected, who were invited to complete the survey questionnaire and constituted the subjects of the survey. The final sample consisted of 610 teachers, of which 320 were primary education teachers and 290 were secondary education teachers with the major of philology.

3.3. Collection of data

In order to conduct the research, a structured questionnaire with 17 “closed” type five-point Likert-type questions (with the following on agreement options from 1-5: 1=not at all, 2=slightly, 3=moderately, 4=very, 5=extremely) were used, as well as one open-ended question that explored the views of the participants on the conceptual definition of the term PhDi. The questionnaire was created using the Google Forms online platform because this allows the questionnaire to be shared in a short period of time with the survey subjects and allows for large samples of responses with relatively little additional effort [36]. In addition, this ensures the anonymity of the survey subjects, which is a key element of the reliability of the survey. Prior to moving ahead, the questionnaire was distributed to 30 teachers for a pilot to ensure that the content was appropriate and the questions were clearly worded.

Ethical clearance for the present study, involving such a large sample, was initially obtained from the administration of each school from which specific teachers participated in the research. More specifically, the administration of each school reviewed the research design, the sampling procedure, and the data collection tools. In addition, ethical clearance was further ensured by the fact that teachers’ participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, while written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to completing the questionnaire. Finally, given the relatively large sample size, additional care was taken to ensure confidentiality and compliance with data protection standards.

In order to ensure the completion of the questionnaire by the final sample of teachers, the researcher took several parameters into consideration. The questionnaire, which was sent electronically to the sample teachers, was accompanied by a detailed explanatory letter. Following the online distribution, the researcher personally telephoned each teacher included in the sample to encourage participation. During the telephone communication, the researcher informed the teachers that the completion of the questionnaire required approximately 5-10 minutes and clarified that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Furthermore, 15 days after the initial distribution of the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a second telephone contact with those teachers who had not yet completed the online questionnaire.

Although the sample consisted of 610 participants, which is statistically adequate for quantitative analysis, limitations relate primarily to the sampling method and representativeness rather than to sample size per se. Specifically, the use of convenience sampling may restrict the generalizability of the findings beyond the studied population. A major drawback of the study is the limited sample size, less than 10% of the total available population, hence the findings derived are not generalized.

Statistical analysis and interpretation of the data was processed using the SPSS 29 statistical package. More specifically, the analysis of the questions was conducted in three stages. First, the reliability of the questionnaire was examined using Cronbach’s alpha index. Subsequently, a frequency analysis was performed based on the recorded responses. Finally, the means and standard deviations of the variables were calculated and presented.

3.4. Reliability of the research tool

The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach’s alpha reliability index and received $0.946 > 0.7$ for all 17 question variables. Consequently, the questionnaire is considered reliable due to the sufficient and high index value, as shown in Tables 1 and 2. This result demonstrates that the questionnaire items consistently measure the same underlying construct, as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Case processing summary

	Sample	N	%
Cases	Valid	610	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	610	100.0

Note: listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.

Table 2. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's alpha	N of items
.946	17

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the total of 17 questionnaire items, seven were selected for detailed inferential analysis. These items were chosen based on their direct conceptual relevance to the core dimensions of PhDi examined in this study (philosophical orientation, instructional coherence, and classroom management beliefs). The selection was further supported by reliability testing and factor structure considerations, ensuring that the analyzed items formed a coherent subscale aligned with the study's research questions. The remaining items were utilized primarily for descriptive and contextual purposes. Represented is the data analysis in terms of frequency (percentage), for seven research variables-questions by presenting Table 3. In Table 4 the means and standard deviation of the variables-questions are presented.

In order to examine potential differences in teachers' attitudes toward PhDi based on demographic variables (gender and age), a one-way anova test was conducted. The level of statistical significance was set at $\alpha=0.05$. Prior to analysis, assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were examined and met. For the above seven questions, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) means test found that there is no statistically significant difference between the attitudes and opinions of the sample respondents in terms of their gender and age.

From the processing and analysis of the responses by the participants, in combination with the "control" of the research question, it is clear that their views and attitudes are positive at a high percentage as in Tables 3 and 4. This clearly shows that the possibility for contribution of PhDi to function as background for the documentation of the teaching practices and its contribution to the redefinition/reprogramming of the educator's teaching role is assured. More specifically, the mean average of the responses to all seven questions of this survey ranges from 4 (from 3.80 to 4.12), corresponding to the answer "very", according to the choices of the responses of the five-point Likert-type scale as in Table 4.

Table 3. The frequencies with respect to the 7 questions-variables

Variable-question	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
1. To what extent does the PhDi include questions regarding the teacher's way of "thinking" about basic structures of teaching?	0.2%	3.1%	13.9%	60.7%	22.1%
2. To what extent does PhDi contribute's to making informed decisions in didactics planning?	0.7%	2.8%	18.5%	59.0%	19.0%
3. To what extent, in your opinion, does PhDi contribute to documenting teaching on the basis of analogous learning theory	0.5%	4.3%	25.4%	55.1%	14.8%
4. To what extent, in your opinion, can PhDi influence the teacher's personal views on teaching?	0.7%	3.0%	22.6%	50.3%	23.4%
5. To what extent does PhDi contribute to the teacher making optimal decisions in regards to the individual characteristics of the students?	0.7%	4.8%	22.0%	55.2%	17.4%
6. In your opinion, does PhDi contribute to informed decision-making by the teacher to effectively address "teaching/didactic dilemmas?"	0.5%	3.6%	21.3%	59.0%	15.6%
7. To what extent does PhDi contribute to the teacher's own reflection on his/her teaching work?	0.2%	2.5%	13.4%	53.3%	30.7%

Table 4. Means and standard deviation of the seven variable-questions

Variable-question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Variable-question (1)	610	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.70
Variable-question (2)	610	1.00	5.00	3.92	0.74
Variable-question (3)	610	1.00	5.00	3.80	0.76
Variable-question (4)	610	1.00	5.00	3.92	0.79
Variable-question (5)	610	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.79
Variable-question (6)	610	1.00	5.00	3.90	0.74
Variable-question (7)	610	1.00	5.00	4.12	0.74

Teachers' positive responses to the first question are consistent with other relative studies [12], [16], [26], [28] which identify that with the "philosophy of teaching" the teacher ponders, reflects, asks questions about structural elements of teaching, such as "why, what and how do I teach" and most importantly "how can I facilitate students' learning". On the second until fourth question, teachers also responded positively, which also relates to similar studies [10], [11], [13]. In these the educators' philosophical views on teaching constitute a means to systematically and critically justify the structural elements of teaching. The teacher then can use these as a set of principles, and beliefs to support the way they teach, and in particular to be able to make effective didactical decisions about the design and conduct of teaching.

The same situation also exists in the fifth and sixth question [16], [17], [28] where PhDi enables the teacher to make structured decisions about lesson planning and effectively addressing "teaching/didactic dilemmas" that arise during the teaching process. These of course always takes into account the needs and interests of the student. On the seventh question, with relevant studies [12], [15], [16], [26], we find consistencies with the teachers' positive statements where PhDi contributes to the analysis and deepening of the teaching process, as well as highlighting the "strengths" and "weaknesses" regarding the teacher's teaching/didactic skills. We can derive that PhDi is a reflective and systematic process in which the teacher takes into account basic principles, theoretical assumptions and scientific data of teaching and learning before planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating teaching [12], [13]. In other words, PhDi is an internal 'thinking process' that pushes the educator to deepen the reasoning in the construct and operation of the multidimensional phenomenon that is teaching.

In combination with the above, it is observed that, beyond the abstract conceptualization of PhDi as a reflective epistemological paradigm, the findings also reveal its concrete instructional applications. For example, teachers reported that PhDi can enable them to make specific classroom decisions, such as adapting lesson plans to students' diverse needs and interests, selecting assessment strategies aligned with learning goals, and addressing didactic dilemmas in real time. In this way, PhDi functions not only as a theoretical analytical tool but also as a practical guide for improving everyday instructional practices.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the emerging research data presented here, it is clear that PhDi directly relates to the teacher's general philosophy of teaching and learning. PhDi in reality seeks not only to fuse the theory of teaching with its practical application, but also the educator's way of thinking in how they approach their teaching process and the reflective evaluation of teaching. This fusion reduces the risks associated with the development of uncertain and undocumented "person-centered" theories in teaching and learning, as it adopts a multifactorial approach that incorporates intrinsic motivation, emotion, reflection, and contemplation. In the context of the 21st-century school, PhDi functions as a powerful tool for processing and examining teachers' assumptions about their teaching profiles and values, thereby enhancing their instructional practices. It provides a structured framework that supports creative reflection on teaching elements and enables educators to plan and implement instruction effectively by setting clear learning objectives, selecting appropriate teaching methods and techniques, and assessing student learning outcomes.

However, PhDi requires time, effort and a lifelong commitment. At the same time, it is a dynamic process that evolves over time and requires constant reflection. Therefore, PhDi is necessary to be adapted throughout the teacher's teaching practice. As an extension of this issue, PhDi enriches the personal and professional development of the teacher since it is a dynamic process that amplifies teaching over time. Through PhDi, the teacher transcends their predefined methodology of teaching and gain a deeper awareness and confidence in the phenomenon of teaching, while focusing on exploring the impacts of teaching on the students. In this way, the reflective teacher is formed.

This dynamic and reflective process developed through PhDi supports the teacher in discovering, learning, revising elements of teaching and then creating new teaching approaches through the learning and teaching process. PhDi thus achieves the reprogramming of the educator's role, since through it the educator gains a deeper understanding of the multidimensional phenomenon of teaching and the ability to make optimal decisions for effective teaching. Within this framework, the present study concludes that adopting PhDi requires educators to critically challenge their own assumptions and the established teaching models they have inherited. The very process of adopting PhDi generates tension between established instructional practices and the philosophical questioning of their validity. Such tensions should not be seen as weaknesses, but as opportunities to problematize the teaching process, contrast alternative perspectives, and encourage educators to adopt a more dialogical and self-critical stance toward their practices.

PhDi as a new epistemological paradigm is proposed on the one hand to be included in the curricula of the pedagogical departments in higher education for the training of future/ pre-service teachers and on the other hand to be a basis for the training of both newly appointed teachers and active Primary and Secondary Primary and Secondary level educators. In conclusion, as further research, it is proposed to implement the above structural

elements of PhDi by primary school teachers in their daily teaching practice in the classroom and then to evaluate this implementation.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing-Original Draft

E : Writing-Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

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Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

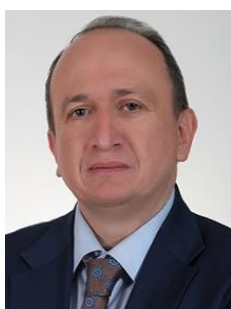
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