

# Teachers' perceptions of Health Education Programs: A Greek Qualitative study

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**Abstract:** The school system plays a crucial role in students' health and wellbeing. Schools are the fundamental institutions in preparing young people for their roles as healthy productive adults. Teachers play an important role since they interact with young people on a daily basis and have to identify and address issues concerning students' lives. Health education programs (HEPs) are being implemented in Greece in secondary education aiming to facilitate these needs. HEPs are based on students' actual needs with the use of experiential teaching techniques. However, their effectiveness can be doubted as to whether their purpose is being achieved. This qualitative research study was conducted with the use of 31 semi-structured teacher interviews who implemented such programs in secondary education in the province of Western Greece. The questions guiding this study were in relation to the reason teachers choose to implement HEP, their perceptions of HEP and their recommendations for future improvements. Based on the results of this study, teachers claim to participate for reasons revolving around their own personal needs and not those of the students, as expected in accordance to Greek legislation and the principles of experiential learning, which are the fundamental bases for the effectiveness of such programs. Teachers involved with HEP mentioned they gain personal development, effective communication with their students as well as observe students improved behavior and communication. Lastly, they suggested additional teachers' training in experiential learning as well as health issues as to feel confident and competent in their role.

**Keywords:** Health education programs, teacher's perception of HEP, health promotion in schools, qualitative research.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Greek Ministry of Education, the purpose of Health Education is to protect, improve and promote mental and physical health as well as the students' social well-being through the development of their social skills and critical thinking, on the one hand, and upgrading their natural and social environment, on the other. In Greece, health education was introduced in the school setting for the first time in 1991, where health education issues were included in elective school courses. A year later, health education programs (HEPs) were incorporated in schools' according to government circulars. These programs were designed to aid Greece in meeting the challenges arising internationally due to the development of innovative technologies and are implemented under the framework of the Operational Program "Education and Initial Vocational Training". These programs are co-financed by European and national resources under the supervision of both the Ministry of Education and the National Youth Foundation [1], [2].

## II. THE GREEK CONTEXT

### A. Principles of implementation of school programs in Greece

According to Greek legislation HEPs are undertaken in vocational high schools by teaching staff. Teachers choose to implement such programs or they are allocated to them in order to complete their weekly working hour quota. It is important to mention that in cases where teachers do not fulfill their weekly hour quota in a school, they are allocated to complete the remaining hours in another nearby school. Financial incentives are offered to teachers who participate, such as expenses paid for a trip abroad for the purpose of these programs while chaperoning students as to get the opportunity

to become acquainted with a different culture in relation to the program theme. Student participation is on a voluntary basis and the programs are implemented after school; thus, students and teachers remain in the school setting once the daily school schedule is completed.

According to Tountas, before designing a HEP, the analysis and identification of community needs are necessary [3]. Additionally, according to the suggestions by the Pedagogical department of Primary Education of the University of Crete, health education at school should be implemented by Educators who try to create authentic learning situations in order to gain students' participation by taking into account students' concerns or trying to incorporate current reality (a dispute that took place in the school environment or a matter of concern on TV/news or the local community). Thus, the topic of the HEP must be selected in relation to the students' needs and interests. Another important factor, according to the Pedagogical department of Primary Education of the University of Crete, is that of the initial student evaluation that must be performed by the teacher. The teacher must take into account, prior to commencing the program, factors such as the student group cultural, sociometric factors, students' interests - attitudes - predispositions, previous knowledge-experiences and sensitive personal data. These factors are in accordance with the principles of experiential learning (EL) and will facilitate in the learning process since HEP abide by this teaching approach within the Greek context [4].

### ***B. Principles of implementation of school HEPs according to Greek legislation***

According to Greek legislation, HEP carried out in secondary education should adhere to the general principles as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO). If there is a deviation from the principles of WHO and the applicable laws, the particular program is terminated by the Minister of Health, Welfare and Social Security as well as the Health Education Planning Committee [5]. Below, the key elements regarding the implementation of HEPs in Greek schools are presented.

Shortly after the formation of the student body that chooses to participate in the program, the process of developing a HEP begins as follows:

a. Teachers choose the subject of the program in collaboration with their students. With regard to the choice of the subject, the latter should meet most of the following conditions:

- The topic should be of interest to the students. This parameter is important in order to ensure the active participation and cohesion of the group up to the completion of the program.
- The topic should be derived from the students' immediate environment in order to be able to extract primary data during its process.
- The topic should cover many aspects that will be analyzed at each stage of the program.
- A specific time frame needs to be defined by the pedagogical group.
- A multidimensional approach should be carried out.

b) These programs are implemented with the use of an EL approach meaning that the teachers have a limited role in the learning process, which is rarely used in Greece [2]. Students are used to being taught in a more traditional manner thus, these programs offer freedom to both participants in terms of exploring new topics.

After selecting the subject, the program including title, thematic axes, methodology, timetable, possible collaborations, connection with curriculum, activity calendar, as well as concluding project or report with the relevant information that the students gather in the form of a poster, video, information flyer etc. is designed comprising the final evaluation project. In accordance with the basic principles of EL, students are requested to keep a weekly log of their experiences, thoughts and feelings as to reflect on the knowledge gained. Then, the project is approved by the Director and Teachers' Association of the school and submitted to the respective Head of the Local Education Directorate for its final approval and funding. A committee composed by the Head of Health Education and School Director monitors the implementation of the approved program.

HEPs in secondary education are being implemented after school hours and last for 5 to 6 months, according to official legislative recommendations [5]. However, taking into account the delays in the process of approving HEP or the duration of school holidays or examination periods, in reality the aforementioned programs do not actually last that long. Therefore, the question arises whether these particular programs contribute to the achievement of health educational goals, namely to change students' behaviours views and attitudes.

### C. *Experiential Learning*

Experiential learning (EL) is a learning process that involves personal experience, directly from real situations. Students have a protagonist role in their learning experience. They encounter knowledge and explore topics firsthand instead of listening or reading from others' experiences. The teacher's role in EL is to facilitate this learning process by encouraging, occasionally posing questions that enlighten and highlight the topic, without answering directly. During this process, students reflect on the topic and the information offered while maintaining a journal. They cognitively engage in the topic through personal reflection and discussion with peers, in order to draw conclusions in relation to the issue [6]. This process may present new questions and topics which can be addressed in the future. This step, based on the EL process, is described in the literature as the "planning" phase since the student is now in the position to use that knowledge/experience in the future in relation to the specific topic or similar situations. Teachers' participation in HEPs is in line with the principles of EL [6], namely the 'Personal Investment' according to which there is a voluntary desire of both teachers and students to be involved in the implementation of such programs [5]. Based on this initial observation, one may wonder why teachers undertake these tasks and how they implement HEPs.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the reasons teachers choose to be involved in HEPs and whether they are fulfilling their role in offering health promotion advice and to identify potential limitations in the implementation of these programs based on teacher's perceptions. From the existing literature the importance emphasized on HEPs in secondary education is evident [1,2,3]. However, there is a lack of evidence within Greece in relation to such programs and specifically from the teachers' point of view. Such research is limited to date in Greece and thus, gives an opportunity to focus on teachers' perceptions in relation to these programs as well as their possible limitations.

## III. METHOD

### A. *Design, participants and data collection*

This was a qualitative case study aiming to investigate teachers' perceptions in relation to the reasons they choose to participate in HEPs. A grounded theory methodology was used since this type of explorative approach is suitable when investigating a topic where limited studies have been conducted. Data collection was conducted with semi-structured, face-to-face interviews consisting of open-ended questions (Table 1). Specifically, the following questions were used to guide the interviews (Table 1).

**TABLE 1: QUESTIONS THAT GUIDED THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

<b>Questions used to guide the interviews</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your reasons for participating in a health education program?</li> <li>• What are the steps in choosing the topic of the health education program?</li> <li>• How would you describe your experience of implementing a health education program?</li> <li>• Would you be willing to participate in a HEP in the future?</li> <li>• What are your suggestions for the future in relation to HEP?</li> </ul>

Purposeful sampling was used in the present study [7]. Participants included were secondary education teachers who had implemented a HEP, from three regions of Western Greece (Achaia, Ilia, Etoloakarnania). The study sample consisted of thirty-one interviewees (twelve male and nineteen female participants). Finding participants for this study was a relatively easy task since one of the researchers was also a teacher in secondary education. Teachers were approached within their school settings and asked to participate. An appointment was made for the interview, with the teachers who agreed to participate. The interview lasted 30-60 minutes depending on how talkative the interviewees were and what they had to say. Interviews were conducted in a vacant classroom in each teacher's school.

### B. *Ethical considerations*

Participants signed a consent form prior to their participation and permission to record the interviews was given. All participants were free to withdraw their participation prior or during the interview process. Participants were assured that all data would be kept confidential.

### C. *Limitations*

This study was conducted among teachers from three region of the country (Achaia, Ilia, Etoloakarnania) so caution should be taken in generalizing these findings to other regions. The results and conclusions of the present study may not be generalized but may contribute to a better understanding of the above situation.

#### D. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted using a grounded theory approach as to classify codes and categories. Data collection and data analysis was conducted simultaneously. Coding began gradually during the data collection process. Verbatim transcripts of audiotapes were the primary data used in the content analysis as described by Stamelos and Dakopoulou [8]. Firstly, the transcription of each interview was read through several times to become familiar with the content and the important messages, features or findings were highlighted, thus common quotes and defined codes emerged from the data. As the interviews proceeded new generated codes were compared with previous ones aiming to sustain trustworthiness. Then, labeling and coding of the data were made in order to recognize and sort into categories according to similarities and differences. Categories emerged based on succession of similar codes that focused on analogous reasons why teachers choose to participate in HEPs. Following that, each category was compared with other categories as to establish credibility within each final category. Lastly, participants' answers were categorized into themes and categories.

### IV. RESULTS

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with each informant. Personal interviews were a method used to try to gain an understanding of the participants' point of view, perspective, and meaning, utilizing a case study approach [9] since the number of teachers participating in such programs was limited. Teachers participating in the study were asked questions regarding demographic information (age, gender, education, teaching experience, experience of implementation of HEP, Table 2) and their perceptions about being involved in HEPs.

**TABLE 2: PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Age		Gender		Teachers Education		Teaching experience		Years of implementing HEP	
30-39	4	Male	12	Science	8	6-9 years	5	1-5 years	18
40-49	15	Female	19	Physiotherapy	1	10-19 years	10	6-10 years	7
50-59	11			Theologist	4	20-31 years	16	>10 years	6
60+	1			Food technology	1				
				Agriculture	1				
				Computer Science	1				
				Home economics	2				
				Philology	8				
				Physical Education	5				

Based on the analysis of the interviews the following themes and categories emerged (Figure 1). Analysis of interviews showed that teachers' reasons for being involved in these programs may vary significantly. The findings focus on the analysis of the qualitative data. The following themes were developed from participants' answers regarding the reasons why they choose to be involved in the implementation of HEPs, their perceptions of HEPs as well as their suggestions for future improvement of HEP (Table 3).

**TABLE 3: DATA ANALYSIS, THEMES AND CATEGORIES**

Themes	Categories		
<b>1. Teachers' reasons for choosing to implement HEP</b>	a. Professional satisfaction	b. Teachers choose the topic due to Personal limitations / experiences	c. Teachers completion of working hours
<b>2. Teachers' perceptions of HEP</b>	a. Personal development	b. Teachers effective communication with students	c. Students Improved behaviour and Communication
<b>3. Teachers' suggestions for future improvement of HEP</b>	a. Appropriate training in experiential learning in relation to HEP	b. Faster initiation of HEP so students can get the most out of the learning process	

**Theme 1: Teachers' reasons for choosing to implement HEP**

Teachers' interviews revealed the following emerging categories in relation to the reason they choose to implement HEP:

**A. Professional satisfaction**

Sample participants claimed to be drained by the current school system and expressed the need for a challenge within their daily teaching routine thus, the theme of *'personal satisfaction'* was a main reason why teachers mentioned they choose to participate in such programs. According to their responses, teachers felt that they were looking to find ways to help them *'escape'* the school routine, to make their work more enjoyable, be professionally upgraded and gain satisfaction through the way they teach and communicate with their students. since they are free in terms of topic and curriculum. Some characteristic responses are listed below:

*"When I was a student, I hated the teacher-centered teaching approach, I am happy I can offer my students a different learning experience."*

*"These programs help me escape from the daily teaching routine."*

*"I was bored ..... I wanted something different".*

*"By participating in these programs, I managed to escape the dull routine of teaching the exact same lessons every day."*

*"I am seeking to find new ways of gaining professional integrity and these programs help me do that..."*

*"It makes the school day more enjoyable, because the teaching day is long and tiring at times, this is more enjoyable."*

*"They (HEP) give us (the teacher) a break from the everyday stress felt in the classroom."*

*"Because it gives me pleasure...I am free to make up my own curriculum and that gives me a sense of freedom in the classroom".*

*"..... students enjoyed HEPs.....and I am free within the topic to incorporate new issues related to it."*

*"It is not considered a lesson and I am free to follow my own curriculum, just to choose a topic with the student and I enjoy that."*

*"It's a process that helps me become a more integrated part of the school system."*

**B. Teachers choose the topic due to Personal limitations / experiences**

Another emerging theme was that of *'personal limitations/ experiences'* in relation to HEP. Teachers claimed that they choose to complete HEP for personal reasons in order to meet their own needs, personal aspirations or shortcomings regarding health issues that have concerned them in the past. Interestingly, they mentioned how they choose the topic of study without giving the students the opportunity of choosing the topic themselves. They explained that this was done in order to facilitate the initiation of the process. They mentioned feeling how they wanted to fulfill their personal goals, to gain knowledge on a topic that concerns them and through these programs they had the opportunity to do so. Many also stated that because of personal experiences with health-related issues, they saw these programs as an opportunity to help student overcome or avoid health problems that they themselves once faced.

*"Sexual education was a taboo when I was a student...nowadays we cannot afford that... we need to encourage open and honest discussion to promote safe sex and protect the young."*

*"As an obese child a HEP on nutrition would have helped me...to educate me on how to eat properly ...these programs give me the opportunity to help students in a similar situation or to prevent obesity by promoting healthy eating habits."*

*"I believe that by being involved in these programs, we also gain valuable knowledge.... we also help ourselves..."*

*"A student cut his hands and I realized I could not offer first aid, I felt ashamed and helpless...this was the reason I started a HEP on first aid."*

*"It was my personal need...and of course, along with the students, I also acquired knowledge."*

*"I continued the effort to protect students."*

In terms of their personal experiences they mention that because they went through difficulties during their adolescence, they needed to offer students what they thought would have helped them when they were students. Also, they mentioned their sense of responsibility as teachers, to protect their students. Thus, they were the ones who suggested the topics of the HEP.

*“Personal need, yes. The knowledge/experience that I did not have as a young person, neither from my family nor from school, I try to give to the students. And of course, along with them, I also learn.”*

*“My family and I faced many difficulties, perhaps if I was better informed on these issues from school (HEP) I could have faced the situation differently, it is my responsibly to guide and protect these young people.”*

*“As many students are driving motorcycles, it would be good for them to learn some things...”*

*“I found out that many students were smoking. When they had parties, they drank a lot. These issues need to be addresses.”*

### **C. Teachers' completion of working hours**

Teachers have the opportunity to complete their working hours in their school by participating in the implementation of HEP. At first, they claim choosing to participate for the above mentioned reason. However, they revealed enjoying the process and choosing to participate again in the future since they had a positive experience, regardless of whether they complete their working hours or not.

*“Some do it (HEP) because they enjoy it...others to complete their working hours. Personally, I enjoy HEP.”*

*“The first year I got involved with HEP was because I could not complete my working hours in my school and I would be sent to another school for those hours. I really enjoyed it and since then I implement a HEP every year in my school.”*

*“...I need to participate, since it would be difficult for me to commute to another school since I do not drive. So, I do it to complete my working hours...”*

### **Theme 2: Teachers' perceptions of HEP**

Teachers' perceptions in relation to HEP created the following categories:

#### **A. Personal development**

An important finding of the research seems to be the impact of these programs on the teachers themselves, not only professionally but also personally. The teachers often reported: *“I became ‘richer’ as a human being”, “I became a better man”, “I became a better educator”, “a better parent”, “a better husband”, “I found myself”, “I found self-confidence”.*

*“These programs helped me become a better mother, I gained experience to talk to my own children in relation to these topics...”*

*“...the process taught me how to communicate better with my students ...I feel it has made me into a better teacher...”*

#### **B. Teachers effective communication with students**

An additional important finding emerged in relation to teachers' perceptions of their relationship with their students. The teachers seem to argue that through these programs they feel they have enhanced communication with their students. In particular, they believe that better interpersonal relationships are built, warm, friendly, humane, relationships of trust and respect. They regard their role as the students *‘social parent’* who through communication comes closer to the students. Thus, they are able to assess students' abilities and limitations. This relationship helps students feel accepted, confident, and comfortable in expressing thoughts and feelings.

*“... team building, communicating with students, the knowledge you acquire, the fact that students often surprise you ...This, I think is positive because it means there is positive interaction.”*

*“..... communication, approach and contact with the students. They look to us (teachers) for advice we become their social parent.”*

*“It has helped me build stronger relationships with my students, and have students respect and appreciate the advice I give them.”*

### C. Students improved behaviour and communication

Teachers claimed their students' behaviours changed in a positive way. Teacher-student communication developed significantly during these programs which in turn improved class behaviour. Students, as the teachers mentioned, appear to have changed their attitudes towards them thus, facilitating the learning process. Shy students become more extroverts. Students that usually disturb the classroom become an asset to the learning experience.

*"...now I have a strong bond with these students, I walk into the classroom and start the lesson, I don't have to reprimand them at all, not like I used to before these programs"*

*"...one student who was always causing problems in the class, ended up being one of the students that guided the whole project...turns out he is very smart and it's a shame that his behaviour gets in the way..."*

*"...shy students participate in HEPs, they meet new teachers, they experiment in taking an active role and this encourages them for other lesson..."*

### Theme 3: Teachers' suggestions for future improvement of HEP

During the interviews teachers were asked to offer suggestions for future improvement of HEP. Their answers formed the following categories:

#### A. Appropriate training in experiential learning in relation to HEP

Many teachers claimed *"We improvise, we don't know exactly what to do!"* when asked to suggest future improvement in relation to HEP. This statement shows that they are concerned with the fact that they feel they have not been adequately trained in teaching HEP and specifically how to implement EL techniques. Many interviewees suggested seminars in HEP with an experiential teaching approach. They feel that in this way they will become more confident when involved in these programs. They continue to suggest that these seminars should be mandatory. Other teachers suggested additional support from a colleague with expertise in the field that could offer guidelines to teachers implementing HEP.

*"I felt alone while trying to implement the best possible program for my students.... why should this have happened, if I had support and guidance, it would have been much easier..."*

*"...there is no information to base the program on...we all do our best...but there are no guidelines, no education on how to teach these programs..."*

*"...seminars should be mandatory for all teachers. That way we all know what to do..."*

*"we all improvise...some are good at it and the results are fine...but for others who have no experience and don't know how to implement experiential learning techniques, it's very difficult at the expense of the students. I believe this is unfair for both the teacher and the students..."*

#### B. Faster initiation of HEP so students can get the most out of the learning process

Another aspect that was mentioned by the interviewees was lack of sufficient infrastructure in order to assist in the implementation of HEP. They specifically emphasized the lack of basic stationary such as paper and markers, space and equipment such as overhead projectors and computers as well as internet connections. They suggested that if these problems were addressed the programs would have been better implemented. They consider them as tools in order to do their job.

*"We needed space in order to organize an activity.... when it got dark there were no lights where we were allocated to do so...this was a problem for the group..."*

*"...we needed the internet so the students could look up different things ...the connection was down.... this made us lose valuable time during the program..."*

*"...the worst thing was not knowing what to expect...I needed a specific room and it was not available. And this is something you find out last minute...you improvise and solve the problem, but it takes up valuable time...the same happened with the internet connection..."*

*"...it's frustrating not to have the tools you need to do your job..."*

## V. DISCUSSION

Health education is a multi-dimensional teaching process which aims to prevent students' psychological and physical problems and encourage responsibility and self-confidence. Health education facilitates the development of students' abilities by implementing healthy attitudes towards dealing with interpersonal relationships and personal life difficulties as well as making right choices. HEPs influence the extent to which someone will adopt positive health habits [10] and contribute to students' personal empowerment leading to increased autonomy and control of their lives, improved quality of life as well as personal and family well-being [11], [12].

There are differences in receptivity and thinking mode among young students of different ages. So, the goal, content, teaching style and materials of the health education curriculum should be in accordance with age characteristics [13]. It is also important to build upon young people's existing knowledge, positive attitudes and skills [14] based on EL principles. While paying attention to the aforementioned points, it is worth mentioning that the effectiveness of a HEP depends on the assessment of students' educational needs [15]. Consequently, it is obvious that exploring students' needs and selecting a program topic according to their interests are important steps in the implementation of HEPs and in accordance with the principles of EL.

However, participants of this study claimed that they were the ones that chose the topic of the program based on their personal limitations/experiences, and not in accordance to "*the student's needs*" as would have been expected. The teachers' motive for participation almost always centered around the teachers and what they thought would be useful to the students, regardless of the student's needs. This is not in accordance with the Greek legislation and the principles of EL in relation to the implementation of HEP. The students should choose the topic of study based on their needs and interests and not what the teacher believes is of importance to them. Interestingly, they mentioned choosing the topic of study, without giving the students the opportunity to choose for themselves. They explained this was done as to facilitate the initiation of the process since students are not used to having such an active role. Thus, they provided the students with different topics of interest to them as for the student group to choose.

This issue causes concern whether the students accepted the suggested topic since their teacher recommended it as they would have in any other class or this topic was one the students were genuinely interested in. Experiential learning is a very unfamiliar teaching strategy for students at the moment in Greece. The limited time and infrastructure within the Greek educational system as well as the lack in teachers' training in EL within secondary education contribute to this fact. Thus, the teacher's suggestion of topics to implement during these programs arise questions in terms of the student's willingness to please the teacher or their genuine interest in the topic. A future study from the students' point of view would be interesting as to understand the students' perceptions regarding this issue.

Greek educational administration, following the WHO recommendations, provides increased autonomy to teachers in developing these programs. Autonomy means that the teacher should be able to explore students' needs taking into account the cultural context of student groups, as well as their interests, views, previous knowledge and experiences. The ultimate goal is to familiarize students with various life situations, to help them acquire self-knowledge and skills in order to have a more positive attitude and behaviour towards life [1]. HEPs help students in adolescence deal with conflicts as well as with difficulties adjusting. They aim to develop additional personal life skills related to interpersonal communication, critical thinking, evaluating information and knowing one's self in regard to the recognition of one's abilities, desires and limitations as well as career management. Consequently, HEPs provide guidance to students in order to develop skills and acquire knowledge which will help them take responsibility, adopt social roles as mature adults in the future and become psychologically and physically healthy as well as professionally adequate and efficient in their adult life [16], [17], [18]. Teachers should also take into account that it is an interesting challenge to use EL techniques as this utilizes students' experiences thus connecting experiences with knowledge. HEPs promote active and EL methods. Students may have the opportunity to discuss their experiences by participating in these programs [19].

Adolescents face difficulties regarding mental and physical health, emotional balance, autonomy and relationships with family and peers. Given the fact that the Greek family's protective nature of its members' physical and mental health has declined, school plays a crucial role in students' social and personal development and influences their socialization process [20]. In other words, teachers should help students empower themselves by improving their health, by solving existing problems and guiding them in order to avoid future problems [21]. Our study concluded that teachers take advantage of their extended autonomy in order to project their own needs, violating the psychological principles of



students who do not listen to things that do not interest them. That is why HEP should relate to the students' interests [22]. Specifically, according to the participants of this study, teachers highlight the issues they consider important, without frequently taking into account the basic principles and theories of existing models regarding behaviour modification. The learning techniques such as feedback, positive or negative reinforcement promote modification in knowledge, attitudes, motivation, self-confidence, and social skills which assist in the alteration of behavioural patterns. All the aforementioned elements are necessary in order to have a successful outcome regarding changing people's behaviour and maintaining the desirable modification [23], [24]. Although, teachers seem to comprehend that health educators must identify students' health needs however, their interviews reveal that their personal choices prevail.

Interviewees suggested faster initiation of HEP within the Greek secondary school as well as substantial training of teachers who are interested in being involved in HEP. The focus should be on improving teacher knowledge on health education subjects in general. Topics related to adolescence, adopting new teaching methods, understanding students' personal beliefs and attitudes on health issues, exploring students' needs, providing psychological support and empowering their students in order to implement health programs successfully should be considered [25]. This notion is also adopted by the International Technical Guidance on Sexual Education stating that there is no effective school-based sexual education because teachers lack the confidence and skills to provide sexual education or that there are no guidelines on what to teach and how to teach it. International Technical Guidance on Sexual Education programs typically include pre-service training at teacher training institutions, in-service as well as refresher training for classroom teachers in order to build their confidence and to develop their skills in participatory and active learning [14].

In conclusion, linking these research findings to the findings of the international literature, it is important to implement one of the Steps in the development of Health Promoting Schools Initiative (HPSI) which is Capacity Building for teachers. They need to acquire the skills, information, orientations and resources required for implementing HPSI activities [26]. However, separate teaching licenses for health education and different licenses for different levels (e.g., preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school) should perhaps be established in order to ensure that students are taught by well-prepared and well-qualified teachers [12].

The findings of this study are similar as those of the survey conducted by the Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare and Ministry of Education. The training of teachers in health education is a central component, taking into consideration that each profession requires their members to receive specialized training [27-28]. Inappropriately trained and not adequately prepared teachers are a fundamental barrier as far as the implementation of effective HEPs is concerned [29], [30], [31]. Only when a school has health promotion policies in place to encourage teachers to increase their professional pedagogical competence through training programs and to spend more time on skills-based health education for students, students' health behaviours will be enhanced [32].

Although many teachers' initial motivation seems to be the completion of their working hours, however, a number of those educators seem to gradually become deeply concerned about these programs. This demonstrates that perhaps teachers are not aware of the process involved with HEP and therefore this needs to be addressed in order for teachers to make an informed decision as to whether they want to be involved with such programs or not, regardless of their working hours. A number of teachers understand that the implementation of HEPs could make the school environment interesting and promote a different teaching approach since they consider these programs as their way out of the school routine. A number of teachers consider these programs as the opportunity of improving their communication skills and relationships with students, by facilitating the students in expressing their thoughts and feelings. These programs are seen as innovative and dynamic, since they could change the established unsatisfactory and boring daily school environment and modify the relationship between teachers and students in order to make school more interesting and effective. Most importantly, many teachers, through their involvement in these programs, seem to find solutions and answers to their own questions or shortcomings.

A possible explanation for the students' positive behaviour is that teachers use a different teaching technique, that of EL, a very different technique to what students are used to in the Greek setting. This approach offers the students a protagonist role giving them the ability to 'guide' the lesson. Since this is a new technique for students, teachers are often surprised by the students' positive interaction and participation, even for those that are known troublemakers. Both the students and the teachers view each other's change, since their dynamic relationship evolves from teacher to facilitator and from passive student to active student. This teaching strategy offers both parties the opportunity to evolve in their roles. The teachers'

view of the students changes since they have the opportunity to see and appreciate their input in class, teachers accept the students and students gain positive attention which encourages them to demonstrate their skills. Thus, students appreciate the learning process and commit to reforming their behaviour within the class. During this process the students' views of the teacher also changes since they feel the teacher accepts and appreciates their input, further encouraging their participation without feeling rejected.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The findings offer a framework for further analyses of the teachers' reasons of perception in HEPs taking place in secondary schools in Greece. The findings of this study offer an insight into the teachers' perception of HEP. However, future research is needed in order to gain the students' perception of HEP. Based on the above conclusions, it is obvious that the field of health education in Greece is new, comprising a dynamic body of knowledge that requires more specialized research in the future in order to determine the necessary characteristics and conditions that make health education programs most effective.

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