



## STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SWOT ANALYSIS IN KINDERGARTEN, GREECE: A CASE STUDY

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### **Abstract:**

This study explores the significance of strategic planning and SWOT analysis at the school unit level, focusing on a public kindergarten in Greece. Its aim is to examine how identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the school, combined with leveraging opportunities and addressing external threats, can enhance effectiveness and support the achievement of its vision and mission. The methodological approach was based on a case study and semi-structured interviews with ten educators, aiming to collect information regarding the strategic planning process, the school's strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats, and strategic goals related to both the student body and educational staff. Findings indicate that educators view strategic planning as a crucial tool for improving the school, despite challenges posed by bureaucracy and limited resources. Key strengths include teaching innovation, continuous professional development, collaboration with local stakeholders, and active participation of the Parents' Association. Weaknesses were identified as the lack of sports facilities and outdated technological equipment. Opportunities include participation in European programs, while threats are related to resource limitations and external factors. The study demonstrates that strategic thinking, participatory leadership, and engagement with the local community contribute to enhancing educational effectiveness and provide directions for future research and development.

**Keywords:** strategic planning, SWOT analysis, school unit, educational leadership

### **1. Introduction**

School leadership constitutes a fundamental process for the effective operation, sustainability, and continuous development of schools, particularly within a modern educational environment characterized by complexity, increasing social demands, and constant change. Planning, as a core function of school administration, enables schools to systematically organize their human and material resources, set clear and measurable

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strategic goals, and respond flexibly to both internal and external challenges (Sigalas & Koutouzis, 1999; Tzortzakis & Tzortzaki, 2002). Contemporary approaches to school management highlight strategic planning as a critical mechanism for school improvement and enhancement of educational effectiveness, especially when linked with participatory processes and collective decision-making (Davies, 2014; Saiti & Saitis, 2022). Within this context, the use of strategic analysis tools, such as SWOT analysis, significantly strengthens both the administrative and pedagogical functions of the school. It provides a structured and systematic approach to mapping internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats (Pashiardis, 1996; Dobson & Starkey, 1994). Recent international literature confirms that SWOT analysis is not merely an inventory tool but can function as a dynamic framework for strategic thinking and decision-making within schools, supporting the planning of targeted interventions and developmental actions (Karam & Cassar, 2022; Aggarwal & Singh, 2025).

Specifically in education, SWOT analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of a school's "identity," encompassing its values, beliefs, pedagogical practices, regulations, and organizational structures that distinguish it from other educational institutions (Davoulou, 2017). Through this process, schools gain the ability to align their organizational identity with strategic planning, ensuring that set goals are realistic, achievable, and consistent with their vision and mission (Hansen, 2011; Tsiakkios & Pashiardis, 2002). Moreover, contemporary studies emphasize that a clearly articulated vision and mission, combined with strategic analysis tools, strengthen teacher commitment and collective responsibility for achieving strategic objectives (Boonla & Treputtharat, 2020; Villanueva & Perez, 2025).

This study focuses on the 2nd Kindergarten of Messini and aims to investigate how implementing strategic planning and SWOT analysis at the school unit level can support more effective organization and operation, enhance the quality of educational services provided, and contribute meaningfully to the realization of the school's vision and mission. Furthermore, the study seeks to provide empirical data linking school leadership theory with educational practice, highlighting strategic thinking as a catalyst for school development.

## **2. Vision and Mission of the 2nd Kindergarten of Messini**

The 2nd Kindergarten of Messini, a four-class public preschool institution, operates with a central focus on providing high-quality educational services aimed at the holistic development of its students. A primary goal of the school is to encourage children to recognize and utilize their individual potential within a safe, supportive, and pedagogically enriched learning environment. The educational process emphasizes inquiry-based and discovery learning, which is considered particularly effective in early childhood, as it fosters active participation, autonomy, and critical thinking (Davies, 2014; Boonla & Treputtharat, 2020).

In this context, the school aims to cultivate 21st-century skills such as collaboration, creativity, communication, and adaptability, preparing students for future challenges in a multicultural and constantly changing society. Contemporary literature highlights that schools systematically integrating these skills into their strategic planning enhance both educational effectiveness and social cohesion (Saiti & Saitis, 2022; Villanueva & Perez, 2025).

A key feature of the 2nd Kindergarten of Messini's identity is its relative autonomy in designing and implementing innovative initiatives, both within the mandatory curriculum and in extracurricular activities. For example, the operation of creativity and innovation clubs after school provides students with additional opportunities for experiential learning and skill development, while also strengthening the school's engagement with the local community. International research indicates that such practices reinforce the school's role as a learning and innovation organization (Karam & Cassar, 2022).

The school's vision, collectively developed in October 2025, is to evolve into a comprehensive learning center that provides high-quality knowledge and cultivates the essential competencies for a creative and socially responsible career. This vision serves as a reference point for the school's strategic planning, defining its desired future state and guiding administrative and pedagogical decisions (Olsen & Eadie, 1982; Davies, 2014).

The mission of the school focuses on adopting innovative pedagogical practices, inspiring social responsibility, and supporting students in discovering and developing their unique talents both within and beyond the school environment. Additionally, the continuous improvement of educational services through reflective practice, professional development of teachers, and the use of contemporary learning strategies is emphasized, which, according to the literature, is directly linked to effective school management and sustainable development of educational institutions (Tsiakkiros, 2015; Aggarwal & Singh, 2025).

### **3. Purpose and Objectives of the Study – Research Questions**

The purpose of the present study is to examine how the implementation of strategic planning, in combination with the analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the utilization of opportunities and management of threats, can enhance the effectiveness of the 2nd Kindergarten of Messini and promote its vision and mission. The research focuses on understanding teachers' perceptions of strategic planning and its significance in the daily operation and development of the school.

Specifically, the study investigates teachers' views regarding the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, as well as the strategic objectives related to both the student body and the educational staff, with a focus on the learning process.

Based on the above, the research questions are as follows:

- 1) What are teachers' perceptions of the strategic planning process within the school?

- 2) What are their perceptions of the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats?
- 3) What are their perceptions regarding the school's strategic objectives in relation to students, staff, and the learning process?

The school's strategic objectives include the establishment of a support/inclusion class, the development of a children's library, the integration of mobile devices to facilitate mobile learning, and the enhancement of collaboration with the local community, parents, and local stakeholders. These initiatives aim to provide meaningful support for students while promoting innovative educational practices.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study employed a case study methodology, which allows for an in-depth analysis of a specific subject or organization, focusing on the interaction between factors and events and on understanding the dynamics that influence its functioning (Adelman, Jenkins & Kemmis, 1976; Nisbet & Watt, 1980).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the teachers of the 2nd Kindergarten of Messini. The interview questions were organized into thematic sections, focusing on the strategic planning process, the identification of strengths and weaknesses, the utilization of opportunities, and the management of threats, as well as the formulation of strategic objectives for both students and staff. This approach enabled participants to express themselves freely and spontaneously, allowing for in-depth insights, while the questions could be adapted according to the flow of the dialogue, ensuring the quality and validity of the data.

The combination of the case study method with semi-structured interviews proved to be an appropriate tool for understanding teachers' perceptions of strategic planning, the school's capacities and challenges, and for exploring ways to improve educational practices and the overall functioning of the school.

##### **4.1 Sampling Strategy and Sample Selection**

The study was conducted in December 2025, involving ten teachers. Nine of them were women: five aged 31–40, married, with 5 years of administrative experience and a total of 16 years of professional experience. The next four were aged 41–50, married, with 2 years of administrative experience and a total of 20 years of professional experience. The last participant was a man aged 21–30, single, with minimal professional experience and no prior administrative experience. All participants held postgraduate degrees and had participated in several professional development programs.

The sampling approach was determined after establishing the location and time for the interviews. A convenience sampling method was used, with the aim of conducting an in-depth exploration of teachers' perceptions and experiences.

In the presentation of results, participants' responses are referenced using a code indicating the chronological order of the interview (e.g., code S:1 refers to the first interview conducted).

## 5. Analysis and Presentation of Findings

This section presents the research findings based on the study's research questions.

### 5.1 Teachers' Perceptions of the Strategic Planning Process

Teachers perceive strategic planning as a key tool for enhancing the effectiveness and autonomy of the school. They highlight that it allows for the evaluation of existing structures, the setting of new goals, and the adjustment of the school's trajectory according to students' needs and the school's mission. At the same time, they acknowledge challenges associated with the centralized structure of the Greek educational system and the difficulty of implementing innovative practices.

Participants emphasize the critical role of selecting administrative staff based on prior experience and evaluation, which directly influences the success of strategic planning.

*"Selecting administrative personnel based on evaluation and prior leadership experience contributes significantly to the effectiveness of school management." (S3)*

Teachers also stress the importance of strategies that connect the school to the local community, enhancing parental and stakeholder involvement.

*"Greater autonomy allows kindergartens to develop personalized programs and approaches that better meet children's needs." (S6)*

*"The relationship between school and family is vital for school effectiveness. Parental collaboration can positively impact children's learning." (S7)*

*"Parents can support children's learning at home and enhance their active participation in school activities." (S9)*

*"Involvement of local authorities can motivate management and teachers to develop initiatives linking the school with the community." (S10)*

These findings suggest that teachers view strategic planning as a multidimensional process requiring collaboration, participatory decision-making, and resource utilization, while also being constrained by external policy and administrative centralization.

## 5.2 Perceptions of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

Participants identify several strengths of the 2nd Messini Kindergarten that enhance innovation and learning quality. These include well-equipped facilities, opportunities for curriculum experimentation, the operation of creativity clubs, and ongoing teacher professional development in collaboration with universities and educational institutes.

*"The abundance of creativity and innovation clubs encourages active student participation." (S5)*

*"Experimenting with curricula, teaching methods, and educational tools enhances the learning process." (S8)*

*"Continuous collaboration with universities and the Pedagogical Institute allows the implementation of new programs and good teaching practices." (S4)*

*"An active parents' association contributes to organizing events and strengthening school-family communication." (S9)*

Conversely, limitations are noted regarding internal organization and infrastructure.

*"The lack of sports facilities restricts opportunities for physical activity." (S2)*

*"Old technological equipment requires constant upgrades at high costs." (S7)*

Opportunities identified include access to European programs, teacher mobility, and parents' demand for quality education.

*"Participation in European Erasmus programs and collaborations with European schools enriches learning experiences." (S4)*

Threats primarily involve financial pressures, bureaucracy, and an increasing number of students with special needs, which can affect school operations and development.

## 5.3 Perceptions of Strategic Goals Regarding Student and Educational Resources

Teachers emphasize that clarity and measurability of goals are essential for skill development and student motivation. They also highlight the importance of using technological tools and engaging the local community to achieve the school's vision and mission.

*“When goals are clear and personal, students better understand what they need to achieve and which skills to develop.” (S1)*

*“Using mobile devices such as iPads provides opportunities for mobile learning and active student engagement.” (S8)*

*“Collaboration between the school community and local stakeholders strengthens the educational process and advances the school’s vision.” (S6)*

Strategic goals also include developing an inclusion class, a children’s library, and promoting innovative learning approaches. The findings indicate that achieving these goals depends on coordination, collaboration, and continuous professional development of staff.

## **6. Conclusions**

The analysis of the findings of the present study reveals that strategic planning at the school level constitutes a critical factor for enhancing school effectiveness, innovation, and social recognition. Teachers’ perceptions indicate that the formulation of a clear vision and mission, the identification of strengths and weaknesses, and the exploitation of environmental opportunities form the foundation for the strategic development of a school (Olsen & Eadie, 1982; Davies, 2014). Similarly, Tsiakkiros (2015) emphasizes that participatory vision formation and the involvement of all stakeholders enhance both effectiveness and acceptance of changes within the school environment.

The findings highlight that a key advantage of the 2nd Messini Kindergarten is the autonomy afforded by the structure of multi-class kindergartens within the Greek educational system. This autonomy allows experimentation with innovative learning practices, the adoption of participatory management models, and the development of creative clubs and activities. Continuous professional development of teachers through collaboration with universities and the Pedagogical Institute, as well as the utilization of parents and the local community as school resources, further strengthens the school’s capacity (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2005). This combination supports participatory leadership theory, which posits that active involvement of all stakeholders enhances the acceptance of strategic choices and the commitment of organizational members (Bush, 2011; Pashiardis, 2020).

Conversely, the research revealed limitations associated with the centralized nature of the Greek educational system, high bureaucracy, insufficient infrastructure, and outdated technological equipment, which constrain the full utilization of the school’s potential. These findings align with previous studies identifying organizational and administrative difficulties as key obstacles to implementing strategic changes in schools (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Hallinger, 2011). Despite these challenges, engagement with local stakeholders and the utilization of internal resources, such as highly qualified

human capital, create opportunities for sustainable development and continuous improvement.

Regarding student-related outcomes, the findings indicate that establishing clear, measurable, and personalized goals is a critical factor in increasing students' perceived competence and enhancing their self-confidence, directly linked to theories of intrinsic motivation and engagement in learning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The use of technological tools, such as iPads, and their integration into the learning process provide opportunities for interactive and personalized learning, in line with contemporary digital pedagogical approaches (Hattie, 2009; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Huda et al., 2022).

The study confirms that opening the school to the local community through partnerships with organizations, scientists, and universities strengthens the sustainability of the vision and the implementation of innovative programs (Fullan, 2007). Furthermore, parental involvement in decision-making and school activities increases commitment and support for the educational process, consistent with theories highlighting the importance of school community and social capital (Epstein, 2011; Pashiardis, 2023).

Based on the above, the main conclusions of the study are as follows:

- 1) Strategic planning is a fundamental factor for improving school effectiveness and innovation, with particular emphasis on autonomy and stakeholder participation.
- 2) Internal strengths of the school, such as teachers' high educational level, infrastructure, and creative clubs, enable the implementation of innovative learning practices.
- 3) Environmental constraints and the centralized structure can reduce effectiveness, but the utilization of local resources and collaboration with parents and community stakeholders mitigates these challenges.
- 4) Clear goal setting and the integration of technology in the learning process enhance student engagement, self-confidence, and skills development.
- 5) Opening the school to the community and involving parents and local stakeholders creates a dynamic framework for implementing innovations and achieving the school's vision and mission.

### **6.1 Future Research Directions**

For future research, it is recommended to explore the implementation of strategic planning across a larger number of schools, including both kindergartens and primary schools, in order to draw comparative conclusions regarding the advantages, weaknesses, and opportunities offered by participatory school management. Furthermore, it is suggested to investigate in depth the impact of technological tools on the learning process and the development of 21st-century skills, as well as to assess the long-term effects of school-community collaboration on student performance and social cohesion. Finally, the use of mixed-methods research (qualitative + quantitative) is proposed to obtain more comprehensive data on the effectiveness of strategic planning and the implementation of innovations in schools.

This study reinforces the view that strategic planning in a school is not a linear process, but a multidimensional and dynamic one, closely connected to the characteristics of the school community, the available resources, and the broader social and educational environment, as highlighted by Hallinger & Heck (1996), Leithwood et al. (2006), and Pashiardis (2020). The connection between theory and practice demonstrates that continuous school improvement requires not only the formulation of strategic objectives but also the active participation of all stakeholders in both the development and implementation of these strategies.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. This research was conducted independently, and no financial, professional, or personal affiliations have influenced the objectivity of the work or the reported results.

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Georgia Tzilou has been a public preschool teacher since 2006. She holds a degree in Early Childhood Education and Educational Planning from the University of the Aegean, as well as two Master's degrees: in the Organization and Administration of Education (DIPAE) and Studies in Education (EAP), with a specialization in Counseling and Career Guidance (ASPETE).

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