

REFLECTING UPON OPENNESS WITHIN GREEK SCHOOL EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS IN THE (POST) PANDEMIC ERA

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Abstract: The Covid-19 pandemic outburst combined with the 21st-century globalized society conditions has triggered a wide demand for radical educational changes with an emphasis on the philosophy of openness in order for human rights, equity and democracy to be enhanced. Even though traditional school education seems to be resisting to those changes and maintains its closed character, it was forced to partially modify and readapt its outdated educational practices and policy, due to the imposed lockdowns and the obligatory implementation of distance education. Therefore, this paper adopts a qualitative approach and – by analyzing the textual content of 15 school Minute Books – aims to examine the features of openness and the factors that have influenced it in Greek secondary educational settings during and after the end of the 2021 imposed lockdowns. Findings show that openness in school education is highly affected by several socio-economic and educational factors, such as the existence of vulnerable student groups, educational leadership's attitude and economic inequalities within the student population. Furthermore, certain openness features have derived in terms of accessibility and flexibility, which are in relation to both distance and face-to-face education. This paper adds up to the existing literature and offers a new insight, as it shows how the worldwide pandemic affected openness in schools, not only during the lockdowns, but also in the aftermath.

Keywords: openness in education, school education, covid-19 pandemic, openness factors, openness features, qualitative content analysis

Introduction

The 21st century has been a period of rapid change at all levels. The 4th Industrial Revolution, as a result of globalization, is accompanied by new opportunities and demands and is changing the way people live, work, communicate and learn (Ossiannilsson, 2018). In this context, education is seen as a panacea to the aforementioned demands, as well as the problems that arise and its role is diversifying. Nowadays, education is not only an agent of information and skill cultivation, but it also "teaches people how to learn" (Lionarakis, 2006), and how to create knowledge themselves, which in turn will lead to progress and economic development (Ossiannilsson, 2018).

According to UNESCO (2015, as cited in Ossiannilsson, 2018), education should be accessible to all, anytime, anywhere and through any device. This UNESCO statement was a precursor to the pandemic period, which ushered in a new era and highlighted the need of opening education to all. More specifically, the pandemic forced educational systems to shift towards openness and partially adopt distance education as an alternative form of education, particularly in conventional (primary and

secondary) schools that are considered a priori closed (Mohammed & Mishra, 2012; Maphosa & Bhebhe, 2020).

Therefore, when we talk about openness in education, we refer to a restructured educational system that promotes democracy, human rights and equity in all its forms and under all circumstances (Lionarakis, 2008). Although the existence of openness has the potential to reshape the educational landscape, this task becomes difficult due to openness' fluid nature and the influences it receives from other fields (Bayne, Knox, & Ross, 2015; Baker, 2016). Thus, considering the changes brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for modernization of the educational systems, the purpose of this paper is to explore whether and how openness was applied in Greek Secondary Education during and after the 2021 lockdown, considering its features as well as the factors influencing it at the socio-economic and educational levels. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: the second section refers to related work and attempts a theoretical approach to openness in relation to the sociology of education, its educational criteria, as well as the factors that shape it. The third section presents the methodology followed. In the fourth section, the main findings are presented, while in the fifth section, these findings are discussed and further research is proposed.

Related Work

Openness in the light of the Sociology of Education

According to Bourdieu (1986), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Olakulehin and Singh (2013), education is a reflection of the relationships between society, culture, economy and the individual's personality. These relationships are based on the existence of cultural, social and economic capital, which are in constant interaction and are always changing with the ultimate goal of domination and profit of the dominant social group, that is to say, the middle class (Bourdieu, 1974, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Olakulehin & Singh, 2013). Similarly, Bernstein (1975) links education to power and control relations within social and school contexts. These relationships develop between students, as well as between students and teachers and are, clearly, representative of differences between social classes (Bernstein, 1975).

Bourdieu and Bernstein's common denominator is the working-lower class deficit at the cultural and linguistic levels, respectively (Bernstein, 1975; Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Schooling is characterized by a specific and entrenched culture, which does not take into account the differentiations between social classes, imposes its code of acceptance and learning readiness and, consequently, excludes the lower social classes from integration and academic success (Bourdieu, 1974; Nash, 1990; Bernstein, 1996). The result is the reproduction of the cultural capital of the dominant group and the reinforcement of homogeneity within the student body (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Harker, 1990; Naidoo, 2004). Indeed, the more pronounced the categorization of students and the narrower the boundaries in relationships and roles, the more closed the school environment ends up being.

Although over 50 years have passed since Bourdieu's and Bernstein's first approaches, their theories remain timeless and relevant. In the age of globalization and the context of the pandemic, as already mentioned, education is seen as the answer to the challenges of modern societies, driven by equity and democracy. However, in its current form, school remains a conservative and closed institution that classifies students, according to their deficits and treats them as problematic at their core (Nash, 1990;

Mohammed & Mishra, 2012). Therefore, the questions that arise are whether openness as a policy and as an ideology exists in such a context and whether such a possibility can be realistic.

Openness, as a term, made its formal appearance in the 20th century (Peter & Deimann, 2013). At the same time, its concept was already inherent in theories of the Sociology of Education. Bourdieu (1974) comments on the fact that schools are dominated by a universal culture, without differentiation, which is not appropriate for an educational institution, and based on this culture, students are asked to adapt, disregarding their own needs and particularities. Furthermore, he highlights the existence of the academic capital, especially in the field of higher education, which is based on prior school performance and distinctions, as well as on practices, such as placement tests for the admission of future students (Bourdieu, 1974, 1986; Naidoo, 2004; Rawolle & Lingard, 2008). In this case, school is not only closed but is a bulwark for the continuation of segregation at higher levels of education with additional implications at the social level. In other words, school evaluates and reproduces the dominant habitus and ends up being an instrument for maintaining the vicious cycle of inequalities that exist in society (Bourdieu, 1974; Harker, 1990; Gunter, 2002).

Similarly, Bernstein talks about indicators of openness and closedness in his theory of classification and framing (Bernstein, 1966; Morais, 2002). According to him, the stronger the classification and framing (closedness), the narrower the margins of all students' learning. Instead, he argues that effective learning is based on weak classification and framing (openness), allowing students to have control over the time, place, and pace of learning (Bernstein, 1966, 1975; Morais, 2002). Furthermore, Bernstein (1961) considers the curriculum and its design to be particularly important. According to him, an educational program should have clear objectives and take into account all factors related to the student target group, such as age, maturity, interests, and social/cultural background. It must, also, be readjusted should these factors change (Bernstein, 1960, 1961; Donnelly, 2016).

Overall, the two important theorists in the Sociology of Education, Bourdieu and Bernstein, in approaching the character of education, set out – perhaps without being deliberate at that time – the first criteria for the existence of openness, which will be further analyzed and can be summarized as follows: free access to education without prerequisites and discrimination; recognition of social and cultural differences in the creation of educational programs; flexibility and adaptability in the curricula; granting students control over the space, time and pace of learning; adopting student-centered learning.

Conceptualizing and defining openness criteria

As already mentioned, openness is a vague and fluid term, as it both receives and exerts influences in many fields and, as a result, there is no clear definition (Baker, 2016). There is a two-way relationship, between society and openness, making any universal and absolute definition incomplete (Wiley, 2006). However, it can be approached interpretatively and defined in part, based on specific criteria that emerge in the context. An initial approach is based on Lord Crowther's statement (1969, as cited in Villanejr - Mendoza, (2013), at the founding of the Open University, regarding the openness of the institution in terms of people, ideas, places, and methods, laying the foundations of the theoretical background of Open Education, which is constantly evolving and adapting. Hence, some parameters that frame Open Education emerge and relate to open admission, open curricula,

innovation in terms of teaching methods and educational materials, as well as the use of OERs, technology and distance education (Villanejor - Mendoza, 2013).

An evolution of the above interpretative approach to openness in education is the broader definition of openness given by the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), which specifies that it is related to learner autonomy, the supportive role of the teacher, vertical grouping, cross-age teaching, flexibility in time, curriculum and pace of learning and always focuses on students' right of choice, regarding their education (Jones, 2015). These parameters and their extensions are selectively adopted and applied by Open Universities worldwide with a focus on specific aspects, depending on the social, economic and political needs the institutions serve (Wiley, 2006; Jones, 2015).

Therefore, if we were to concretize and place the aforementioned criteria and parameters of openness in education in a theoretical framework, one could assume that openness is a synonym for freedom. Thus, the criteria that make an educational environment open are related to freedom of: 1. admission in terms of cost, academic prerequisites, cultural and financial background; 2. access to the premises of educational institutions; 3. choice in terms of space, time, pace and methods of learning; 4. management of available educational materials; 5. configuration of curricula according to personal preferences and learning needs; and 6. development of interactions and collaborations with or without the use of technology (Wiley, 2006; Mohammed & Mishra, 2012; Villanejor - Mendoza, 2013; Jones, 2015; Baker, 2016; Cronin, 2017; Mishra, 2017). The expected outcome of adopting and applying an openness policy is the creation of an educational environment characterized by democracy, where students are autonomous, they are given equal educational opportunities and there is transparency between all those directly involved in the educational process, that is to say, students, teachers and educational institutions (Wiley, 2006; Villanejor - Mendoza, 2013; Baker, 2016; Cronin, 2017).

Factors of Openness

The term openness and more specifically openness in education dates back to the 20th century, but it was mainly popularized thanks to the establishment of the Open University in the 1960s (Peter & Deimann, 2013). This was followed by the establishment of many Open Universities worldwide, which serve and largely represent the policies of the respective governments (Tait, 2008). They are a response to the inadequacies of conventional education and aim at social change, always by the political direction they advocate and therefore, they set different boundaries to the term of openness (Tait, 2008, 2018). As already mentioned, a potentially broader interpretation of openness refers to free access to education in terms of cost, academic background, space, time and the free movement of educational material in the form of Open Educational Resources (Cronin, 2017; Smith & Seward, 2017). However, despite any attempts of interpretation, openness remains unclarified and only partially achievable in most cases (Peter & Deimann, 2013).

The lack of clear interpretation and the vague nature of openness lead to it being considered a priori a value of high value inclined to optimism (Bayne et al., 2015). This approach to openness stems from the unfounded assumption that openness is independent of social, political and economic conditions, whereas the reality is quite different (Bayne et al., 2015; Knox, 2013). Actually, openness is at the core of many factors related to society, politics, economy and education, interacting with them, shaping them and being shaped by them (Darling, 2007; Peter & Deimann, 2013).

As Peter and Deimann (2013) state, the 20th century created the need and ultimately, the conditions for openness in all fields. Economic and industrial development brought the thirst for learning and self-education to the foreground so that education could adapt to the new demands of a more flexible labor market, as well as gradually becoming itself a product of that market (Edwards, 2015; Jones, 2015). Therefore, unlike traditional forms of education that conform to institutional and academic boundaries and settle for the mere transfer of knowledge, education governed by openness takes into account and adapts to the prevailing political, economic and social context.

A typical example of the adaptability of openness is the economic crisis that began in 2008 – 2009. The economic pressures that hit modern societies worldwide set the stage for a debate about progress and development within the already shrinking markets (Jones, 2015). Thus, the issues of opening up education systems to marginalized populations, such as refugees and migrants and increasing tuition fees in higher education were raised (Jones, 2015). These choices and debates at the political and economic levels set the foundations for the further development and exploitation of openness policy (Hall, 2015; Jones, 2015). A significant outcome based on economic pressures and neo-liberalism is the creation of Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs), which are at the same time an educational and low-cost approachable product, while promoting openness in education (Hall, 2015; Jones, 2015).

This shift in education towards openness has taken place under the pretext of the liberal leftist parties for social equality and access of the lower social strata to higher education which has hitherto been mainly targeted at a social elite and with the ultimate aim of highlighting the symbolic power of the right-wing parties (Olakulehin & Singh, 2013; Das, 2016; Facer, 2016). Openness is presented as a panacea and agent of democracy, even in countries with different regimes, but without the root causes of closedness in education being addressed (Das, 2016). Issues such as differences between cities and provinces, quality of life, availability and access to technological equipment, civic culture and social stereotypes, or even the availability of electricity are not sufficiently addressed and, so, openness is superficial and constrained by political agendas (Ma & Chen, 2020; Olakulehin & Singh, 2013; Tynan & James, 2013). Therefore, openness in education is sometimes a tool in the hands of politicians and ends up failing, intensifying inequalities and creating an academic apartheid, confirming Bourdieu's and Bernstein's aforementioned theories of inequalities in both society and education.

Research Methodology

Research purpose and research questions

Openness in education is a constant point of reference, especially in the context of globalization. However, as already mentioned, openness is difficult to define and, of course, to achieve, as the factors that influence/shape it are constantly changing, depending on the social, political and economic context (Knox, 2013; Peter & Deimann, 2013; Bayne et al., 2015). At the same time, the unprecedented conditions of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic changed the already existing conditions in both education and the aforementioned fields (Sakkoula, 2021).

Therefore, in this context, this paper aims to investigate whether and how openness is applied in Greek secondary educational settings, by examining its indicators and the factors which have influenced it in the (post) pandemic world, through analyzing the texts of fifteen school Minute Books. While previous research focuses on the criteria and factors of openness in a broader and more general context and mostly, in Tertiary Education, this paper offers a targeted perspective, delving

into the contemporary school reality during and after the imposed lockdowns in relation to the changes Covid-19 pandemic brought to education, focusing not only on the lockdown period, but also, on the period that follows. Thus, 2 research questions were posed to serve this purpose:

1. Which social, educational and economic factors have influenced openness in Secondary Education in the (post) pandemic world?

2. What are the features/indicators of openness (if any) in Secondary Education in the (post) pandemic world?

Research sample, data and techniques

For this research, a qualitative method, and more specifically, the qualitative content analysis was applied, as the author aimed to deepen, connect and interpret the results about the environment and context in which they were produced, that is to say, school education in the post-pandemic age (Creswell, 2011; Bengtsson, 2016). In particular, the manifest analysis is utilized, with an emphasis on a close connection to the text and the use of the documents' exact words (Bengtsson, 2016). To ensure the confidentiality of the research, Lincoln and Guba's steps (1985) were followed. The author made sure not to omit any relevant elements of her topic (credibility), as well as to remain consistent by identifying changes in the texts and adapting her text to them (dependability), with the ultimate aim to ensure transferability of the results to similar settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Bengtsson, 2016). Moreover, it needs to be noted that there are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report, which could potentially influence the research process.

The research was conducted in 2022 (from March to June and from September to December), when schools were in normal operation after the imposed lockdowns of the previous years and utilized distance education only in case of emergent situations, such as bad weather conditions and natural disasters. The schools which participated in the research were located in west Athens. At the time of study ninety-four typical schools (fifty-five secondary schools and thirty-nine high schools) were operating in the area. An email was sent to each school, explaining the research purpose and the exact procedure, as well as guaranteeing the discretion, anonymity and security of the data given.

Thirty-three out of the ninety-four schools replied positively and were willing to provide access to their Minute Books, so a purposive sampling technique was adopted, by choosing nine secondary schools and six high schools, which had fully participated in the optional online lessons during the first lockdown in Greece in spring, 2020 and were still utilizing Distance Education when necessary. The western part of Athens is considered to be of low financial capacity. In general, all schools chosen suffered from financial difficulties. The secondary schools had a higher number of students (250-300 on average), while high schools hosted fewer students (100-150 on average). Moreover, most school buildings date back to the 1960s – 1970s, except for two high schools, which were constructed in the 2000s. However, despite the difficulties, all schools had some technological equipment and internet access.

The Minute Books were in handwritten and digital form and the period of the documents examined was 2021, from January to May when schools had only online lessons due to lockdowns and from September to December when schools were open and had online lessons only when necessary. The

researcher was permitted to study the files and photocopy or print what she needed. She wasn't allowed to take the Minute Books outside the school setting.

Results

In this research, deductive content analysis was utilized. The author read the texts thoroughly and identified nine repeated codes, which were: 1. bad building conditions, 2. lack of technological equipment, 3. lack of money, 4. alternative teaching methods, 5. asynchronous online learning, 6. establishing partnerships, 7. ensuring donations and grants, 8. providing students with access to equipment, 9. accepting students' different cultural perceptions and 10. social inequalities. She, then, formulated the categories related to the research questions and extracted the textual passages that answer each category (Mayring, 2014). Thus, considering the aforementioned criteria and factors of openness (Wiley, 2006; Jones, 2015; Baker, 2016; Cronin, 2017; Smith & Seward, 2017) and the codes identified, the following corresponding categories were defined: 1. Financial Inequalities (codes 1, 2, 3), 2. Flexibility (codes 4, 5), 3. School Leadership (codes 6, 7) and 4. Vulnerable Groups (codes 8, 9, 10), which are related to face-to-face, as well as distance education.

As far as the first category concerns, financial inequalities are of paramount importance in every form of education. School education is free in Greece, so there is no entrance limitation, related to cost. However, in this research, most Minute Books refer to such inequalities in terms of building settings, technological equipment and internet access at a school and individual level. More specifically, in two Minute Books (October and December, 2021) it is mentioned that

“regarding the bad building condition, all the damages must be recorded and addressed by the community officials, as they are hazardous for the students and some classrooms cannot be used anymore” and

“the mold in the IT room has damaged the computers. The Board has decided to vote for a subcommittee and ask for repairs, as soon as possible, as our educational programs cannot be carried out and online learning is impossible within school settings.”

These records are indicative of the problems schools face, which end up deteriorating educational quality both in the pandemic and the post-pandemic period.

On the other hand, the problems seemed to be quite different during the lockdowns, as it is mentioned in a high school Minute Book in February, 2021:

“The Board discussed the problem of students not having the essential equipment to attend online lessons. A group was formed to seek grants and other alternatives. Priority must be given to the students sitting the PanHellenic exams.”

Additionally, another high school records in their Minute Book in January 2021 that

“almost 40% percent of our students cannot attend online lessons, either due to not having internet access or not having sufficient equipment. The Board has decided to grant school equipment to those who need it. As the equipment is limited, we must ask for help.”

On the contrary, the Minute Book of a secondary school states at the same period that

“despite the students’ lack of equipment, we are obliged to report their absences in all cases. Plus, students’ participation in asynchronous distance learning platforms is also evaluated.”

Hence, the records during the lockdown show that most decisions made were related to the inequalities in terms of technological equipment on both of the schools’ and the student’s behalf.

The second category relates to flexibility in school education as a criterion of openness. At this point, it could be assumed that the pandemic outburst contributed to opening school education, as in February 2021, a secondary school’s Minute Book states that

“the Board has decided to exploit – apart from synchronous learning – asynchronous learning methods and provide students with all educational material in a digital form.”

Moreover, at the same period, another secondary school in their Minute Book reports that

“teachers should assess students via alternative forms, such as assignments and projects. Students can use the resources given by teachers or other resources they consider as appropriate. Teachers should evaluate their overall performance and participation.”

After the imposed lockdowns, schools decided to keep utilizing asynchronous learning methods. More specifically, as stated in a high school Minute Book in autumn 2021,

“all materials that are given in the printed form, should be uploaded on the online platforms and remain accessible throughout the school year to facilitate studying” and

“teachers can and should also upload alternative resources, whose exploitation by students will be taken into consideration upon grading.”

The third category concerns school leadership, a role that is quite questionable and debated. It seems that the school principal is a key person for the existence (or not) of openness in schools. During the 2021 lockdown, in two high school Minute Books, it is mentioned that

“upon the principal’s recommendation, students and teachers will be provided with tablets and the school’s equipment can be used, as well” and

“upon the principal’s initiative, partnerships will be formed with local organizations, in order for the school to raise funds and purchase the essential equipment for distance learning.”

On the contrary, only in one secondary Minute Book is recorded that

“the principal suggests that school should in no way be held responsible for obtaining the technological equipment for distance learning”,

while the rest of the Board disagrees and clearly states that “the aforementioned opinion does not represent the whole Board.” In the second half of 2021, when the lockdown was over, as has already been mentioned, some schools tried to establish partnerships with the local community, to maintain school facilities, as well as the equipment:

“An official email will be sent to the Municipality, as well as to the parents’ association by the principal to ensure collaboration and grants for the school maintenance.”

Overall, according to the Minute Book records, most principals tried to enhance openness, during and after the 2021 lockdown, deliberately or not, except for one or two cases, where principals were negative or remained passive.

The fourth category concerns vulnerable groups, such as pupils coming from a lower social class, as well as refugee and/or migrant pupils. In the case of these pupils, the issues are numerous and represent many forms of social inequalities and acceptance, as well. According to a secondary school Minute Book regarding these children’s online school attendance during the lockdown,

“there are students with a different cultural or religious background whose parents/guardians disagree with their using technology for educational purposes, including distance learning. The Board has decided that they are obliged to attend all their lessons as the rest of the students and their absences in terms of these facts will not be justified”,

a decision which isn’t in accordance with openness, as it totally disregards these children’s beliefs and cultural differences.

However, there is more consideration in terms of these groups’ access to online lessons and material. According to two high school Minute Books, during the lockdown in March 2021,

“priority should be given to migrant and students in financial need, regarding the access to technological equipment and the internet”, so

“the Board has decided to donate 10% of the school money to buy tablets and mobile phones for students who can’t afford them. After the lockdown has ended, these devices must be returned to school for future use.”

Concerning internet access, according to the majority of secondary school Minute Books,

“students with no internet access at home or students who live in refugee camps will be able to use the school’s facilities and network.”

These amenities weren’t maintained after the lockdown, since most of the devices had to be returned. Hence, there are no records in the Minute Books regarding this matter in the autumn and winter of 2021.

Discussion & Conclusions

In this paper, openness in secondary school education is examined during the pandemic and the post-pandemic era. The research findings show that there are some features of openness in the otherwise closed traditional schools.

With respect to the first research question, the social, economic and educational factors that influence openness in school education during the (post) Covid-19 era were investigated. Thus, from the content analysis conducted on the Minute Book texts, it appears that openness is influenced by issues related

to vulnerable groups, the overall attitude of the principal and the economic status of both the children's families and the school.

Initially, concerning the factors at the social level, the focus is on vulnerable groups. In most cases, it was reported that there was some provision for students from a financially lower class, as well as for refugees, but the schools struggled to meet their needs, especially during the lockdowns. These students had difficulty attending their lessons, due to a lack of equipment and internet access. So, most schools tried to find the funds needed through donations or by giving an amount of the school money. However, there were a few cases where students were excluded, due to the school's passive attitude and indifference towards their financial needs and different culture. It should, also, be mentioned that all the devices bought by schools had to be returned to them after the end of the quarantine. So, in the post-pandemic time, when online lessons were conducted in case of emergency or when asynchronous distance learning was utilized, students belonging to the aforementioned vulnerable groups were partially excluded and the existing gap between them and their classmates probably widened. In other words, schools seemed to have made some effort to provide some openness, but it was either inadequate or superficial and, as a result, there was no actual equity among students of the same school and within the student body in general. These findings are in line with the findings of Ma and Chen (2020), Olakulehin and Singh (2013) and Tynan and James (2013), who highlight the existence of social inequities and problems that are ultimately reproduced in the school environment, dividing students into categories, regarding their financial class and cultural background.

Additionally, at the educational level, it appears that the most important factor is school leadership. Data show that there are two types of principals, those who take the initiative and those who remain passive and allocate the responsibility to teachers and students. This issue was highlighted during the pandemic and afterward, with the implementation of distance education in both cases. In particular, the majority of principals made some effort to provide equipment, so that distance education could be satisfactorily applied, through donations and by forming partnerships with the community. On the other hand, there were Minute Book records demonstrating that some principals supported that the provision of the equipment is an individual responsibility of teachers and students and, hence, they excluded a share of students from the learning process. This was also true in the 2021 post-pandemic period, as distance learning continued to be used. Thus, these students experienced an ongoing exclusion, deriving from the educational leadership. These findings are in line with the conclusions of Sakkoula (2021), who highlights the importance of the school principal in shaping the school culture, particularly about the successful (or not) implementation of distance education.

To conclude, economic inequalities extending from society to school deeply affect openness. As mentioned earlier, school is the mirror of society and this is true in the economic sphere, as well. According to the Minute Books, school buildings faced serious problems, which couldn't be solved without external help and deprived students of quality education. These conditions create a gap between schools in every area and of course, the pandemic helped these difficulties surface faster, as the building and the equipment problems made schools unable to provide students with the technology they needed for their (online) lessons. In any case, openness takes on a negative connotation, since there is no equity in educational opportunities and either all or part of the pupils do not have access to basic educational goods. These data complement the findings of Hall (2015) and

Jones (2015) regarding the importance of the economic situation and the conditions that affect it in shaping openness.

Regarding the second research question, the indicators/features of openness in the (post) Covid-19 were investigated and it was found that they are related to accessibility and flexibility, but under specific circumstances. As far as accessibility concerns, it is important to mention that it is related to the data deriving from the fourth category again, that is to say, the schools' attitude towards vulnerable students. For a start, school education in Greece is free for everyone, so access in terms of cost is taken for granted and isn't further analysed in this paper. Most of the data that have emerged are related to access to technology and, in particular, to distance education. The use of technological equipment such as laptops and tablets was imperative for the lessons to be conducted, which means that students deprived of them would be excluded from the learning process. Even though most schools had financial difficulties, they tried to ensure partial or full access for their vulnerable students by covering the extra cost and providing them with the equipment for a short period.

The schools' efforts to ensure accessibility have contributed to enhancing or maintaining equity in these unprecedented conditions of the worldwide pandemic. Nonetheless, this was applied mostly during the lockdowns. The post-pandemic educational conditions weren't taken into consideration and, as students had to return the equipment, they lost access to the online materials, as well as the ability to attend emergent online lessons. Hence, accessibility, as an indicator of openness seems to be valid for vulnerable student groups only during the imposed lockdowns and not in the following period, while their fellow students who could afford or had the equipment enjoyed this privilege during and after the lockdown. These findings agree with those of Mohammed and Mishra (2012), Baker (2016), Cronin (2017) and Mishra (2017) about accessibility being an openness criterion, as well as with Maphosa and Bhebhe (2020) findings and the Sociology of Education theories (Bernstein, 1974, 1996; Bourdieu, 1974, 1990), which indicate that school is closed, reproducing inequities, with some occasional hints of openness.

Flexibility, as an indicator of openness, mostly refers to students' autonomy and freedom of choice, regarding time, place and mode of studying, as well as the educational materials. The adoption of distance education gave students the chance to become more autonomous and make their study routine. Teachers had to act as facilitators and give students multiple sources to study, as well as implement alternative ways of assessment. Furthermore, students were able to choose what to study from the material given and/or add their resources to it. Thus, they could partially adapt and shape the current curriculum. Once more, these changes from traditional to more open methods mostly relate to distance education. Yet, they had an important impact on face-to-face education, as well. The asynchronous learning platforms continue to exist and are still being utilized in face-to-face education, enabling students to make some choices themselves, but not as much as they could, during the lockdowns. These conclusions are in line with the criteria set – even unintentionally – by Bernstein (1960, 1961) and the openness broader definition by ERIC (Jones, 2015), regarding flexibility being a parameter of more open school education.

Openness is usually examined in terms of Tertiary Education (Peter & Deimann, 2013). As school education is considered closed (Mohammed & Mishra, 2012), there isn't much research in this field. Therefore, in this paper, an attempt was made to approach openness in secondary school education in the context of the (post) pandemic time, examining the social, economic and educational factors that

shape it, as well as its features. The results add up to the existing literature, as they examine openness not only during the lockdowns imposed, but also during the post-covid19 period, which there aren't much data about. There is no intention to generalize the results, as the sample was small, the data were related to specific schools in the west side of Athens and no personal teachers' and students' perceptions were investigated. Despite its limitations, this paper adds up to the existing literature, demonstrating the role of the pandemic in shaping and partly opening school education regardless of the particular and difficult circumstances that prevailed. The accelerated implementation of ICT, the adoption of alternative teaching methods and the creation of partnerships between schools and the community have disrupted traditional schooling. However, the school continues to reflect the society it belongs to and it is highly influenced by the financial conditions, which seem to be hard to overcome. All things considered, it could be concluded that there is some openness even in school education, but there is a long way until we can talk about Open School Education. For the latter, major upheavals have to be imposed on existing educational systems worldwide, which could be a basis for future research on a wider scale.

Author Declaration

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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