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Article

Exploring Principals' Perceptions of Market Orientation in Modern Schools

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Abstract: *Background/Purpose:* In an increasingly competitive educational landscape, the school principal's role has expanded beyond instructional leadership to include strategic marketing responsibilities. Yet the role of marketing in school leadership remains underexplored. Our objective was to investigate how Greek secondary school principals perceive marketing's key dimensions (Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, and Inter-Functional Coordination) within schools, in comparison to other school staff members. *Design/Methodology:* A cross-sectional survey design was employed, collecting data using a structured questionnaire adapted from Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown. The sample comprised 350 respondents, including school principals and teaching staff. One-way ANOVA, supplemented by Games–Howell and Kruskal–Wallis tests, was employed to examine group differences across the three dimensions of market orientation. *Results:* Our findings indicate that principals demonstrate a higher level of Customer Orientation than other staff. However, no significant differences were found in Competitor Orientation or Inter-Functional Coordination across roles. *Conclusions/Novelty:* The findings suggest that while principals play a key role in aligning school functions and engaging with internal stakeholders, their sensitivity to external competition remains limited. The study highlights the evolving nature of school leadership while showing that marketing strategies in Greek schools are insufficiently implemented, calling for research into how leadership training can enhance market responsiveness.



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Keywords: marketing services; educational marketing; educational process; secondary schools; school principals

1. Introduction

Despite growing recognition of the role of marketing in education, empirical research on how school leaders engage with marketing concepts, particularly Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, and Inter-Functional Coordination, remains limited. While marketing's definition, objectives, and strategies continue to be debated (Maringe, 2012), existing studies predominantly focus on higher education institutions or market-driven school systems.

Prior research highlights both the significance of implementing marketing techniques in schools and of school leadership in shaping institutional image and promoting parental engagement. Brauckmann and Pashiardis (2011), along with Foskett (2002), identify marketing as a comprehensive management process that enhances a school's effectiveness by meeting the needs of its clients (parents and students). Harvey (1996) also notes that marketing plays a crucial role in advancing schools' visions for their students. Oplatka (2007)

states that principals are responsible for managing their schools' operations, fostering a positive environment and setting the direction for school improvement. As marketing becomes more competitive, principals must align their leadership practices with internal marketing efforts and innovation. Additionally, Oplatka (2007) mentions that certain Israeli schools need to enroll new students and secure funding to remain financially viable. The decisions made by parents regarding secondary schools and private institutions create significant competition. Heck and Hallinger (2009) assert that educational leaders are essential in implementing school reforms and play a significant role in marketing their institutions. Robinson and Gray's (2019) study on the debate between transformational and instructional leadership underscores the need for an integrated approach, where leaders balance motivating followers with ensuring students' educational progress. Maringe (2012) observes that leadership involves persuading others to achieve specific objectives, and effective school leaders must foster relationships strategically to navigate the challenges of an increasingly market-driven education system. Hirschfeld (2000) believes that a primary goal of marketing in schools is to inform parents about the educational opportunities available to their children, while students are informed about the methodology and content of the lessons they receive. School principals play a key role in developing marketing strategies, ensuring teacher collaboration, and striving to improve the quality of education provided.

However, these studies do not investigate how principals conceptualize and operationalize marketing strategies within systems that lack strong market competition or autonomy. As a result, little is known about how marketing principles apply to secondary education systems embedded in centralized, state-regulated frameworks, such as Greece, where educational marketing is still emerging. In Greece, where educational governance is highly centralized and school choice mechanisms are limited, marketing practices are not structurally embedded but are increasingly informally adopted by individual schools. This context presents a critical empirical and theoretical gap: it challenges assumptions about the drivers of marketing behavior in education and raises important questions about the adaptability of marketing frameworks in less marketized systems.

This study contributes to filling this gap by empirically examining how secondary school principals in Greece perceive and enact marketing-related behaviors and whether these differ significantly from those of other educational staff. Specifically, it explores principals' strategic roles in managing Customer and Competitor Orientation and coordinating internal functions, a triad central to the market orientation framework. Unlike previous studies that focus on environments where market logic is explicit, this research analyzes marketing behaviors in a system where such logic is implicitly emerging, offering a novel lens on the diffusion of managerial practices in education.

By anchoring its analysis in a centralized and non-competitive schooling system, this study not only deepens our understanding of school leadership's evolving scope but also complicates prevailing narratives that link marketing strictly with neoliberal, market-driven reforms. The findings have practical implications for leadership training, suggesting the need to develop strategic competencies even in educational systems that have yet to fully embrace market principles. In doing so, this research broadens the conceptual and geographic boundaries of educational marketing and redefines what strategic leadership can look like in public schooling systems facing slow but significant cultural and managerial shifts.

2. Theoretical Framework

The success of an educational institution is intrinsically linked to the capabilities of its principal. In contemporary educational environments increasingly shaped by market

dynamics, effective school leadership necessitates not only pedagogical and managerial proficiency but also a robust set of marketing competencies. These competencies enable principals to engage meaningfully with stakeholders, respond to competitive pressures, and coordinate internal functions efficiently.

Market orientation offers a valuable theoretical lens through which to examine these marketing-related leadership attributes. Drawing on the foundational conceptual framework developed by [Narver and Slater \(1990\)](#) and its adaptation to educational contexts by [Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown \(2007\)](#), market orientation in schools can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: Customer Orientation, Competitor Orientation, and Inter-Functional Coordination.

Each of these dimensions contributes to a composite understanding of the principal as a multifaceted leader:

- Customer Orientation, discussed further in Section 2.1, captures the principal's responsiveness to the needs and expectations of key stakeholders, including students, parents, and the broader community.
- Competitor Orientation, explored in more detail in Section 2.2, reflects the principal's awareness of external educational trends and institutions and their capacity to position the school strategically within a competitive landscape.
- Inter-Functional Coordination, elaborated upon in Section 2.3, denotes the principal's ability to foster collaboration and alignment across internal teams and departments.

Principals who demonstrate higher levels of these dimensions relative to other school staff may be regarded as more strategically oriented leaders. Such differentiation not only signifies the principal's leadership effectiveness but also serves as an indicator of the degree to which marketing principles are embedded within the school's organizational practices. In this respect, the assessment of market orientation provides a meaningful framework for evaluating and enhancing school leadership in market-influenced educational systems.

2.1. Principals as Key Representatives of Customer Orientation

Customer Orientation in educational settings reflects the extent to which schools proactively respond to the needs and expectations of students and parents. As key decision-makers, principals play a central role in shaping school policies, fostering strong relationships with families, and ensuring a positive school experience. Research implies that school principals exhibit a higher degree of Customer Orientation compared to teachers, as they are directly responsible for maintaining parental satisfaction, enhancing the school's public image, and securing student enrollment ([Lubienski, 2007](#)). Unlike teachers, whose primary focus is on delivering instruction, principals engage in broader strategic decision-making that includes assessing parental preferences, addressing concerns, and implementing policies that enhance stakeholder satisfaction ([Fullan, 2020](#)). Customer Orientation aligns with transformational leadership principles ([Yammarino, 1994](#)), as principals inspire and engage parents and students, fostering a culture of trust and satisfaction, creating a more engaged and satisfied school community, ultimately contributing to student success and institutional growth ([Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005](#)). A systematic review of studies from 2012 to 2022 indicates that transformational school leadership positively impacts school staff and culture, leading to increased motivation and a more positive school environment ([Wilson Heenan et al., 2023](#)).

Hypothesis 1 (H1: Customer Orientation—CuO). *Principals demonstrate a higher degree of sensitivity regarding Customer Orientation compared to other school staff, due to their greater involvement in strategic decision-making and parental engagement.*

2.2. Competitor Orientation in Marketized Education

Competitor Orientation in education refers to how schools perceive, assess, and respond to competitive dynamics within the educational landscape. In increasingly marketized education systems, school leaders are tasked with not only managing internal operations but also acting as strategic leaders, assessing competition, and positioning their schools effectively (Ball, 2003), framed within strategic leadership theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). This involves continuously monitoring rival schools, analyzing market trends, and making informed strategic decisions to enhance their school's appeal. Research suggests that principals and deputy principals are actively engaged in tracking competing schools and adapting their strategies accordingly, whereas teachers often have limited exposure to these competitive dynamics (Bosetti, 2004). To strengthen their institution's market position, principals employ various public relations and branding strategies, aiming to enhance the school's reputation and attract prospective students (Wilkins, 2012). According to Ball et al. (2012), leadership roles in education now demand a heightened awareness of how schools compete for student enrollment, government funding, and public perception. More recent research indicates that transformational leaders significantly improve school performance by motivating teachers, fostering a collaborative culture, and increasing staff commitment (Sianipar, 2024). In this evolving landscape, the ability of school leaders to navigate competition effectively has become a critical factor in sustaining institutional success and growth.

Hypothesis 2 (H2: Competitor Orientation—CoO). *Principals perceive their school's competitive position more favorably than teachers, as they have a broader view of school competition and external positioning.*

2.3. The Role of Principals in Aligning Inter-Functional Coordination of Schools

Inter-Functional Coordination (IFC) in educational settings refers to the effectiveness of collaboration among different departments and personnel to achieve a school's overarching objectives, reflecting the principles of distributed leadership, which emphasizes collaboration and shared decision-making (Spillane, 2005) (Figure 1). Research in educational management emphasizes that principals serve as pivotal leaders in aligning school operations across various functions, ensuring cohesion between administrative, academic, and extracurricular domains. By fostering strong interdepartmental communication and collaboration, principals play a crucial role in streamlining school processes and enhancing institutional efficiency. Studies indicate that school principals actively facilitate cooperation among staff, ensuring that key functions such as marketing, curriculum planning, student support services, and parental engagement are strategically aligned to support the school's mission and vision (Hallinger & Heck, 1999). While deputy principals often focus on disciplinary matters and administrative tasks, principals take on a broader role in cross-functional integration, guiding efforts that bridge different operational areas (Bush, 2020). In increasingly competitive education markets, principals must not only oversee internal coordination but also ensure that their institution operates as a cohesive entity capable of adapting to external demands. From student recruitment to curriculum development, effective Inter-Functional Coordination enables schools to optimize resources, enhance institutional effectiveness, and maintain a strong, unified presence in the educational landscape. Recent studies underscore the significance of distributed leadership. A systematic review highlights that distributed leadership, characterized by shared responsibility and collaboration, is vital for fostering innovative practices and enhancing school performance (Phillips et al., 2023).

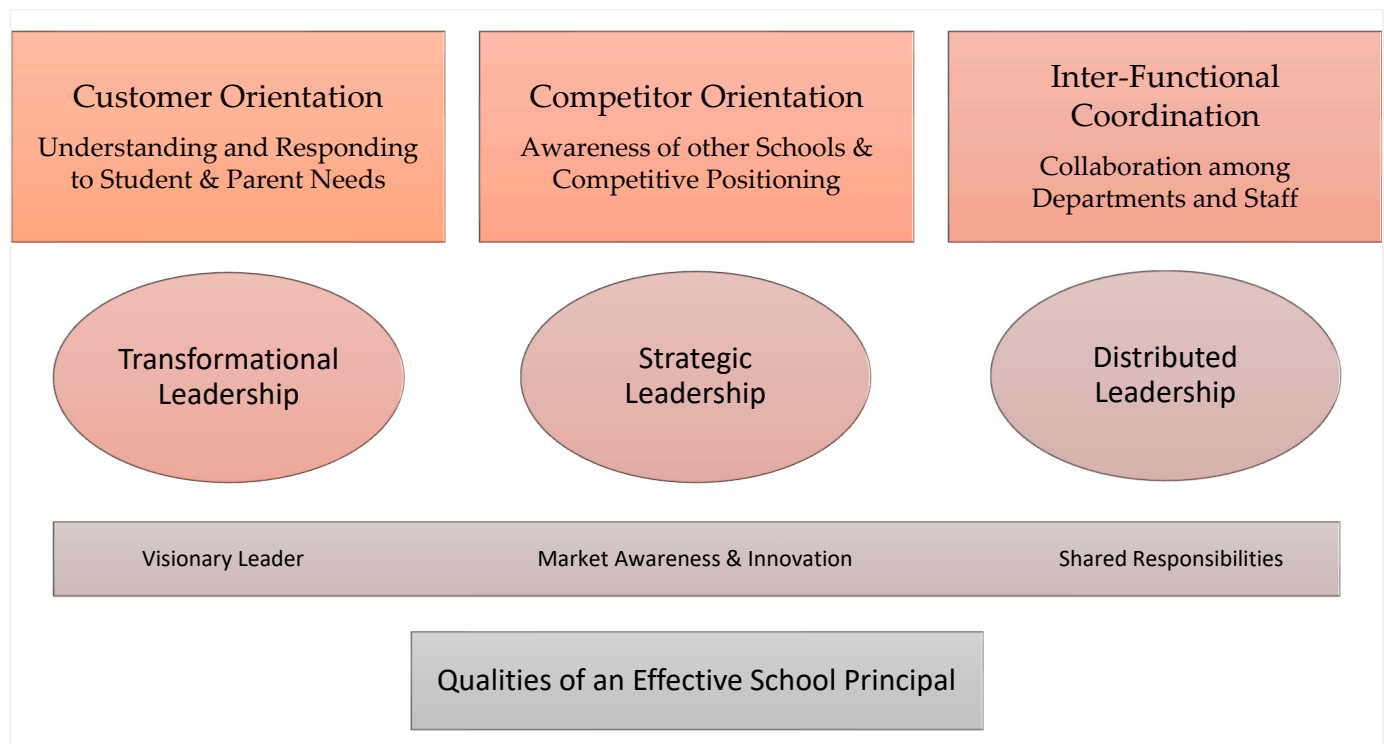


Figure 1. Integration of Cuo, CoO, and IFC into leadership typologies. Authors' work.

Hypothesis 3 (H3: Inter-Functional Coordination—IFC). *Principals exhibit higher Inter-Functional Coordination than deputy principals and teachers, as they are responsible for aligning school operations and responding to external expectations.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a questionnaire, adapted from the version created by Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2007). The questionnaire was first translated into Greek with an emphasis on ensuring linguistic accuracy and equivalence. The adapted version was subsequently independently translated back into English to ensure consistency. The pilot test showed no issues with clarity, culture, or comprehension. The digital version of the revised questionnaire, including a brief explanatory text containing study information and a consent statement, was developed using Google Forms. To gather the data, the developed questionnaire was sent to secondary school teachers in Greece via email, employing a cross-sectional random sampling approach, since participants were selected from the population of secondary school teachers in Greece without systematic bias, and each member of the population had an equal chance of being invited to participate. The list of potential participants was drawn from available school staff directories across various regions of Greece, ensuring a geographically diverse and representative pool. Emails inviting participation were sent out to individuals on these lists, independent of their school, subject area, or experience level, ensuring randomness. The inclusion criterion was straightforward: participants had to be currently employed in a secondary school in Greece at the time of data collection. There were no restrictions related to subject specialization, contract type, or years of teaching experience. The exclusion criteria involved incomplete responses or submissions that lacked sufficient numerical input to be used in the statistical analysis. Responses with missing data on key constructs or with

patterns suggesting inattentive responding (e.g., identical answers across all items) were also excluded to maintain data quality.

In terms of demographic balancing, while the sampling was random, efforts were made to ensure a diverse and representative sample across gender, teaching experience, subject area, and geographical region. Descriptive statistics of the final sample (Section 3.2) were checked to assess representativeness. The resulting sample of 350 responses that were collected between May and July 2024 reflected a reasonable balance of these characteristics, providing a solid foundation for generalizing the findings to the broader population of secondary school educators in Greece.

3.2. Participants

The majority of participants in this study were employed as teachers (78.7%, 247 individuals), which aligned with the central role educators play in the school system. A significant portion also held leadership positions: 6.7% (21 individuals) were school principals, and 5.7% (18 individuals) served as deputy principals. Additionally, 8.0% (25 individuals) were Special Educational Personnel, including roles like special education teachers and counselors. The gender distribution shows a predominance of women (69.1%), which reflects common trends in the educational workforce, particularly in teaching roles. The age distribution reveals a more experienced workforce, with 33.0% (103 individuals) being 55+ years old and significant numbers of participants being in their 40s and early 50s. In terms of education, 84.7% (266 individuals) held a university degree, with 56.4% (177 individuals) having completed postgraduate studies, highlighting a well-educated sample. Most participants resided in urban areas, with the largest group living in capital cities and regional capitals. Regarding professional experience, 46.5% (146 individuals) had over 20 years of teaching experience, suggesting a highly experienced cohort. Most respondents worked in Gymnasiums (41.1%) or General Lyceums (28.3%), indicating that most participants were involved in general secondary education. In terms of employment status, 76.8% (241 individuals) were permanent staff.

3.3. Measures

A 19-item scale was used to assess Customer Orientation, while Competitor Orientation and Inter-Functional Coordination were each measured using 7-item scales. All scales were developed by Oplatka and Hemsley-Brown (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2007). Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability analysis demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.910 for Customer Orientation, 0.848 for Competitor Orientation, and 0.821 for Inter-Functional Coordination, indicating excellent reliability for the Customer Orientation scale and good reliability for the other two constructs, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement model results (reliability and validity).

Item	Statement	Loadings	Reliability
Customer Orientation			0.910
cuo1	My school understands the needs of children	0.698	
cuo2	My school cares about children's well being	0.676	
cuo3	My school responds to parents' requests effectively	0.668	
cuo4	My school meets, or goes beyond the promises it makes to parents	0.723	
cuo5	My school understands what kind of schooling parents value most	0.678	
cuo6	Parents are given information that helps them in understanding the kind of schooling we have here	0.685	

Table 1. Cont.

Item	Statement	Loadings	Reliability
Customer Orientation			0.910
cuo7	Teachers in this school are eager to help children and go beyond their role definition	0.608	
cuo8	Complaints by parents and students are dealt with quickly	0.727	
cuo9	The complaints procedure is easy for parents and students to understand	0.677	
cuo10	Teachers are regularly provided with information about parents' desires and views of schooling	0.698	
cuo11	Teachers are attentive to students' concerns	0.688	
cuo12	We encourage parents to offer constructive positive comments	0.629	
cuo13	We encourage parents to offer constructive negative feedback	0.481	
cuo14	I feel committed to the school community	0.660	
cuo15	My school measures parents' satisfaction every school year	0.681	
cuo16	My school measures children's satisfaction every school year	0.675	
cuo17	A good teacher is the one whose students are happy and satisfied	0.320	
cuo18	In my school parents' views of education influence the schooling process	0.304	
cuo19	Responding to parents' and children's needs is my major task	0.436	
Competitor Orientation			0.848
coo1	Teachers always look at what's going on in the other schools in the area	0.696	
coo2	The principal often discusses the actions of other schools in our area	0.705	
coo3	Information about what my colleagues in other schools are doing does help me improve my teaching	0.628	
coo4	My school usually responds to other schools' new initiatives/developments	0.803	
coo5	My school understands the needs of students better than other local schools	0.750	
coo6	Our schools understand the needs of parents and students better than other schools in the area	0.785	
coo7	My school compares favorably with other schools in the area	0.692	
Inter-Functional Coordination			0.821
ifc1	All departments contribute to school marketing	0.802	
ifc2	Teachers cooperate to promote the school image	0.724	
ifc3	Marketing should not be the sole responsibility of school management	0.658	
ifc4	In department meetings we discuss information about parents' demands and concerns in order to make improvements	0.809	
ifc5	Marketing information is discussed and shared with teachers	0.875	
ifc6	Teachers are not just paid to teach; they need to also help to attract prospective students	0.888	
ifc7	The guiding light in curriculum development or new initiatives is the demands of the parents and students	0.822	

Notes: Reliability is based on Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient. All factor loadings reported are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

3.4. Data Analysis Procedures

Initially, the validity and reliability of the measures were confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha (Hair et al., 2019) to assess internal consistency and factor loadings to evaluate construct validity (Hulland, 1999). Means and standard deviations were calculated to evaluate the level of agreement with the statements being examined. To test the hypotheses regarding the CuO, CoO, and IFC constructs, one-way ANOVA (Field, 2017) was employed, as all method assumptions were satisfied. The Games–Howell test, appropriate for unequal group sizes (Games & Howell, 1976), was used to identify which groups differed from each other. One-way ANOVA assessed the influence of job positions on each item. However, unequal sample sizes and non-homogeneity of variances across roles diminish the statistical power of one-way ANOVA (Rusticus & Lovato, 2014). Consequently, to further substantiate the findings, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952) test was also employed. All tests were performed with a significance level of 0.05. All analyses were

conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0, a software package commonly used in social research (Field, 2017).

4. Results

4.1. Reliability and Validity

The measurement model exhibited acceptable levels of reliability and validity across the evaluated constructs. The composite reliability (CR) scores for each construct surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency: Customer Orientation (0.910), Competitor Orientation (0.848), and Inter-Functional Coordination (0.821) (Hair et al., 2019).

Most items demonstrated loadings above the widely accepted 0.50 threshold, reinforcing indicator reliability and construct validity (Hulland, 1999). However, a few items under Customer Orientation (cuo13, cuo17, cuo18, and cuo19) exhibited loadings below 0.50. Despite falling short of the conventional threshold, these items capture essential dimensions of the construct, particularly in areas such as parental involvement in schooling and the school's responsiveness to stakeholder satisfaction. Their theoretical significance justifies their inclusion, as they contribute to the content validity of the construct by reflecting broader conceptual aspects. The lower loadings may be sample-specific, influenced by the unique characteristics of the dataset. Given the diverse experiences and varying levels of engagement within the sample, retaining these items ensures that critical nuances are preserved, offering a more comprehensive representation of perspectives.

Despite the presence of a few low-loading items, the overall composite reliability of Customer Orientation remained high (CR = 0.910). The remaining items with strong loadings maintained internal consistency, and the inclusion of lower-loading items had only a minimal effect on overall reliability (Hair et al., 2019).

The strong reliability scores, along with sufficient indicator loadings for most items, confirm that the constructs were measured effectively, providing meaningful insights into the respondents' perceptions (Churchill, 1979). This consistency underscores the robustness of the measurement model and reinforces the alignment between theoretical constructs and empirical data, enhancing the credibility and applicability of the study's findings.

4.2. Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the variables across job position categories. According to these results, principals consistently reported the highest mean scores across CuO items, highlighting their strong focus on addressing the needs of students, parents, and the broader school community. Their leadership role likely requires them to engage more deeply with stakeholders, implement student-centered policies, and ensure overall satisfaction. Special education teachers tended to have the lowest CuO scores, which may reflect differences in their responsibilities. Their work is often more specialized, focusing on individual student needs rather than broader customer engagement. Additionally, they may have less direct interaction with external stakeholders compared to school leadership roles. cuo15, cuo16, and cuo18 exhibited lower means across all groups, indicating potential challenges in these specific aspects of Customer Orientation.

Across all roles, Competitor Orientation was relatively weaker, suggesting that schools and educators prioritize internal service quality over benchmarking against competitors. This aligns with the education sector's traditional focus on student outcomes rather than external market positioning. Deputy principals and principals reported relatively higher CoO scores than teachers, likely due to their involvement in school improvement strategies, policy decisions, and external comparisons with other institutions. Their strategic roles may require greater awareness of competing schools' offerings and innovations. coo5 and

coo6 were consistently lower across all groups, suggesting that educators may not actively track competitive trends or compare their institution's performance against others.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of the items.

Item	Secondary Education Teacher	Deputy Principal	Principal	Special Education Teacher
Customer Orientation	5.15 (0.89)	5.41 (0.59)	5.72 (0.54)	4.97 (0.85)
cuo1	5.13 (1.35)	5.44 (0.78)	6.19 (0.87)	4.92 (1.15)
cuo2	5.62 (1.31)	6.22 (0.647)	6.38 (1.18)	5.56 (1.12)
cuo3	5.28 (1.19)	5.94 (0.416)	5.85 (0.99)	5.16 (1.07)
cuo4	5.57 (1.17)	6.18 (0.39)	6.48 (0.60)	5.00 (1.08)
cuo5	5.08 (1.28)	5.35 (0.86)	5.86 (0.91)	4.64 (1.04)
cuo6	5.10 (1.39)	5.82 (0.88)	5.86 (1.19)	5.04 (1.31)
cuo7	5.68 (1.31)	5.72 (0.89)	6.10 (0.83)	4.92 (1.47)
cuo8	5.65 (1.22)	6.28 (0.75)	6.62 (0.59)	5.12 (1.33)
cuo9	5.41 (1.30)	5.89 (1.41)	6.00 (0.77)	4.64 (1.41)
cuo10	4.73 (1.59)	5.44 (1.1)	5.86 (1.01)	4.32 (1.57)
cuo11	5.74 (1.15)	5.89 (0.90)	6.19 (0.75)	5.28 (1.21)
cuo12	5.15 (1.27)	5.11 (1.49)	5.33 (1.46)	4.76 (1.23)
cuo13	4.54 (1.42)	4.39 (1.46)	5.00 (1.58)	4.68 (1.07)
cuo14	5.91 (1.17)	6.59 (0.62)	6.57 (0.68)	5.56 (0.96)
cuo15	4.43 (1.7)	4.47 (1.62)	4.90 (1.73)	4.32 (1.65)
cuo16	4.86 (1.62)	4.94 (1.62)	5.48 (1.63)	4.64 (1.58)
cuo17	5.43 (1.50)	5.35 (1.37)	5.14 (1.59)	5.72 (1.17)
cuo18	4.29 (1.51)	4.44 (1.85)	3.81 (1.96)	4.92 (1.29)
cuo19	4.94 (1.45)	5.11 (1.23)	5.33 (1.56)	5.54 (0.93)
Competitor Orientation	4.91 (0.96)	5.12 (0.78)	5.14 (0.85)	4.85 (0.79)
coo1	4.63 (1.35)	5.11 (1.13)	4.95 (1.56)	5.00 (1.12)
coo2	4.97 (1.36)	5.28 (1.07)	4.90 (1.37)	5.28 (1.14)
coo3	5.08 (1.32)	5.28 (1.07)	4.86 (1.42)	5.00 (0.96)
coo4	5.16 (1.28)	5.44 (1.04)	5.24 (1.37)	4.96 (1.16)
coo5	4.69 (1.31)	4.65 (1.32)	5.43 (1.16)	4.44 (1.16)
coo6	4.60 (1.28)	4.56 (1.42)	4.76 (0.99)	4.56 (1.23)
coo7	5.22 (1.33)	5.50 (0.99)	5.86 (1.06)	4.72 (1.10)
Inter-Functional Coordination	4.57 (1.11)	3.81 (1.34)	4.87 (1.01)	4.86 (1.33)
ifc1	4.79 (1.56)	3.72 (1.78)	4.90 (1.70)	5.44 (1.39)
ifc2	5.31 (1.47)	4.50 (1.89)	5.48 (1.75)	5.48 (1.42)
ifc3	4.54 (1.6)	4.00 (1.53)	4.86 (1.49)	4.84 (1.34)
ifc4	5.16 (1.35)	4.94 (1.06)	5.50 (1.10)	5.08 (1.35)
ifc5	5.27 (1.48)	4.67 (2.00)	5.50 (1.67)	5.52 (1.26)
ifc6	4.00 (1.65)	3.18 (1.51)	4.65 (1.78)	4.12 (1.45)
ifc7	4.18 (1.63)	3.33 (1.71)	4.70 (1.75)	4.52 (1.33)

Notes: Mean (standard deviation).

Principals scored 4.87 in IFC, compared to deputy principals at 3.81 and secondary education teachers at 4.57, indicating a higher level of involvement in fostering coordination. Their scores were similar to those of special education teachers, who scored 4.86, likely due to educators' collaboration with various teams, such as therapists, general educators, and support staff. However, the scores for principals still suggest there is potential for improvement.

4.3. Hypothesis Tests

The results of Section 4.2 indicated several differences in the perspectives of principals compared to other staff members. To determine whether these variations were statistically

significant, the following tests were performed. A one-way ANOVA using the average scores of valid items for CuO, CoO, and IFC was conducted to assess the impact of job position on the constructs. The Games–Howell test identified differentiations between groups. A one-way ANOVA assessed the influence of job positions on each item. To further substantiate the findings, the non-parametric Kruskal–Wallis test was also employed.

4.3.1. Customer Orientation

Figure 2 shows CuO mean scores across job position groups. The ANOVA results (Table 3) revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean CuO score between at least two groups: $F(3, 310) = 3.754$, $p = 0.011$, $\eta^2 = 0.035$. The eta-squared value indicated a medium effect size, suggesting that 3.5% variability in the CuO can be explained in terms of job position.

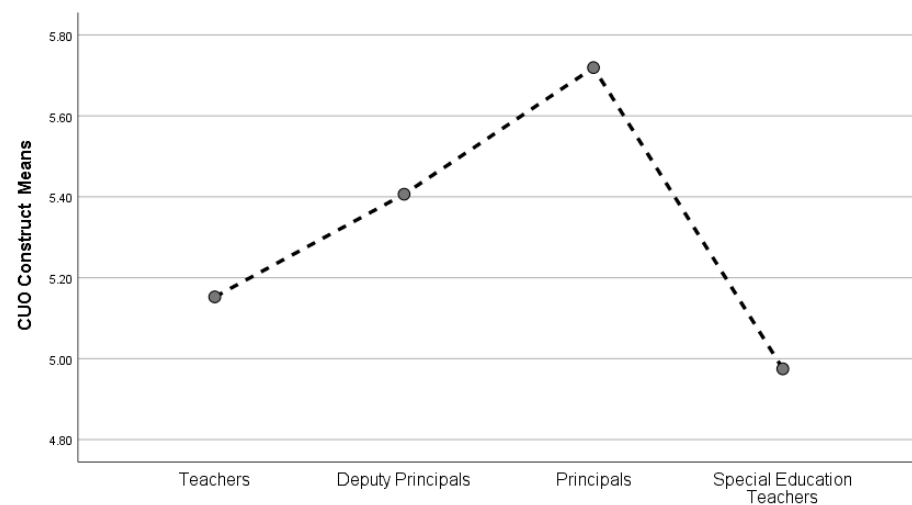


Figure 2. Means of CUO construct across job positions. Authors' work.

Table 3. ANOVA and Kruskal–Wallis test results.

Item	Statement	A-F	KW-H
		p-Value	
Construct: Customer Orientation $F(3, 310) = 3.754, p = 0.011, \eta^2 = 0.035$			
cuo1	My school understands the needs of children	0.002	0.001
cuo2	My school cares about children's well being	0.015	0.002
cuo3	My school responds to parents' requests effectively	0.017	0.008
cuo4	My school meets, or goes beyond the promises it makes to parents	<0.001	<0.001
cuo5	My school understands what kind of schooling parents value most	0.007	0.004
cuo6	Parents are given information that helps them in understanding the kind of schooling we have here	0.017	0.017
cuo7	Teachers in this school are eager to help children and go beyond their role definition	0.013	0.012
cuo8	Complaints by parents and students are dealt with quickly	<0.001	<0.001
cuo9	The complaints procedure is easy for parents and students to understand	0.001	0.001
cuo10	Teachers are regularly provided with information about parents' desires and views of schooling	0.001	0.001
cuo11	Teachers are attentive to students' concerns	0.051	0.043
cuo12	We encourage parents to offer constructive positive comments	0.453	0.336
cuo13	We encourage parents to offer constructive negative feedback	0.471	0.487
cuo14	I feel committed to the school community	0.001	0.001
cuo15	My school measures parents' satisfaction every school year	0.635	0.564
cuo16	My school measures children's satisfaction every school year	0.326	0.159
cuo17	A good teacher is the one whose students are happy and satisfied	0.616	0.655
cuo18	In my school parents' views of education influence the schooling process	0.104	0.122
cuo19	Responding to parents' and children's needs is my major task	0.168	0.207

Table 3. Cont.

Item	Statement	A-F	KW-H
		<i>p</i> -Value	
Construct: Competitor Orientation $F(3, 309) = 0.642, p = 0.533, \eta^2 = 0.007$			
coo1	Teachers always look at what’s going on in the other schools in the area	0.228	0.265
coo2	The principal often discusses the actions of other schools in our area	0.555	0.695
coo3	Information about what my colleagues in other schools are doing does help me improve my teaching	0.768	0.698
coo4	My school usually responds to other schools’ new initiatives/developments	0.662	0.511
coo5	My school understands the needs of students better than other local schools	0.055	0.074
coo6	Our schools understand the needs of parents and students better than other schools in the area	0.943	0.961
coo7	My school compares favorably with other schools in the area	0.022	0.010
Construct: Inter-Functional Coordination $F(3, 309) = 4.782, p = 0.012, \eta^2 = 0.035$			
ifc1	All departments contribute to school marketing	0.275	0.241
ifc2	Teachers cooperate to promote the school image	0.594	0.569
ifc3	Marketing should not be the sole responsibility of school management	0.257	0.458
ifc4	In department meetings we discuss information about parents’ demands and concerns in order to make improvements	0.058	0.058
ifc5	Marketing information is discussed and shared with teachers	0.047	0.065
ifc6	Teachers are not just paid to teach; they need to also help to attract prospective students	0.051	0.063
ifc7	The guiding light in curriculum development or new initiatives is the demands of the parents and students	0.036	0.058

Notes: A-F stands for ANOVA F; KW-H stands for Kruskal–Wallis H.

Post hoc comparisons using the Games–Howell test indicated that [Principals] ($M = 5.72, SD = 0.54$) was significantly different from [Teachers] ($M = 5.15, SD = 0.89$), $p = 0.001$, and [Special Education Teachers] ($M = 4.97, SD = 0.88$), $p = 0.005$, but not significantly differ from [Deputy Principals] ($M = 5.41, SD = 0.59$), $p = 0.336$.

Table 2 shows that principals consistently had the highest mean scores across most CuO items, indicating that they are highly attuned to customer (student/parent) needs compared to other roles. The ANOVA results, consistent with the Kruskal–Wallis test findings, indicate significant differences in responses for key aspects of Customer Orientation, including meeting promises to parents ($p < 0.001$), complaint handling ($p < 0.001$), and understanding parents' needs ($p = 0.007$), which are areas typically led by principals. However, parental feedback mechanisms (cuo12, cuo13, cuo15, cuo16, cuo17, cuo18, and cuo19) had non-significant p -values, indicating less differentiation between roles in these aspects. Principals' higher CuO scores suggest that they see Customer Orientation as central to their role, but the lack of differentiation in satisfaction measurement may imply room for improvement in how schools systematically track parental and student feedback.

Theoretically, these findings support the view that school leadership plays a pivotal role in translating abstract marketing concepts into concrete educational practices. Principals' elevated CuO scores suggest a leadership model aligned with strategic responsiveness to stakeholder needs, reinforcing the idea that effective educational leadership increasingly demands not just pedagogical oversight but also client-centered thinking. This aligns with Maringe's (2012) notion of leadership as a persuasive and relational activity situated within increasingly market-sensitive educational environments.

From a practical standpoint, these differences point to asymmetries in how Customer Orientation is understood and enacted across school roles. Principals' stronger orientation toward meeting promises, handling complaints, and understanding parental needs implies a more strategic and outward-facing role, where responsiveness to community expectations is central. In contrast, the lower scores among teachers and special education staff suggest

a potential gap between leadership vision and broader staff engagement with marketing-oriented behaviors. This disjunction may limit the extent to which customer-focused practices are embedded throughout the school culture.

Organizationally, this indicates a need for greater internal alignment. If Customer Orientation is to be a shared value, leadership must not only model it but also cultivate it at all levels of the school. Professional development initiatives could help bridge this gap by making concepts like service quality, parental engagement, and stakeholder feedback more relevant to non-leadership roles. Moreover, the absence of role-based differentiation in feedback mechanisms suggests that even leadership may lack access to systematic tools for tracking stakeholder satisfaction, pointing to an opportunity for schools to adopt more data-informed, feedback-driven decision-making processes.

In summary, the results highlight both the leadership-driven nature of CuO and the organizational challenges of diffusing this orientation throughout the school workforce. Embedding Customer Orientation more deeply into everyday educational practice may require a more distributed model of leadership combined with institutional support for capacity-building and feedback infrastructure.

4.3.2. Competitor Orientation

Figure 3 shows CoO mean scores across job position groups. The ANOVA results showed that job position did not affect CoO scores: $F(3, 309) = 0.642$, $p = 0.533$, $\eta^2 = 0.007$.

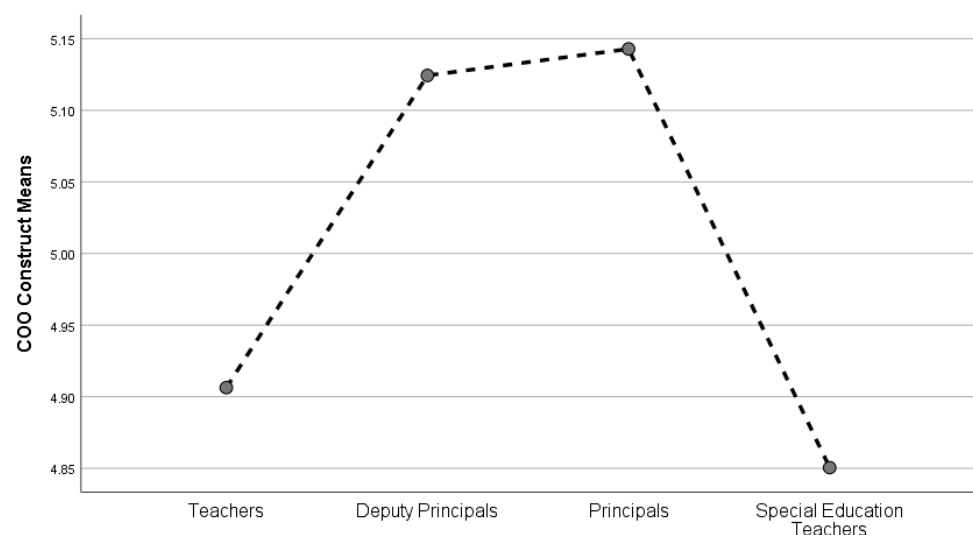


Figure 3. Means of CoO construct across job positions. Authors' work.

The finding that Greek principals rate their schools moderately high in competitive orientation, particularly on the item “My school compares favorably with other schools” ($p = 0.022$), suggests that they are aware of and to some degree embrace comparative positioning. However, the lack of strong differentiation on coo5 and coo6 (related to perceived superiority in understanding student needs) hints at ambivalence or cultural resistance toward framing education in competitive, market-like terms.

This tension may reflect deep-rooted cultural values in Greek education, where collaboration, collective well-being, and egalitarian ideals often outweigh market-based logic. Historically, the Greek education system has emphasized centralized control, teacher autonomy, and public accountability, rather than institutional branding or competitive benchmarking. Thus, competition in education may be seen not as a driver of quality, but as a potential threat to equity or inclusivity.

Additionally, in Mediterranean cultures like that of Greece, there is often a strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships, trust, and informal networks within school commu-

nities. These values can be at odds with competitive practices that encourage comparison, ranking, or differentiation based on performance metrics.

Thus, while principals acknowledge favorable positioning of their schools (perhaps relative to reputation or resources), the lack of confidence in asserting superiority in more sensitive domains, such as understanding student needs, may reflect a discomfort with “marketing” education and reluctance to claim individual advantage over peers.

This nuanced resistance underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity when implementing or interpreting leadership frameworks that emphasize competition. Policymakers and school reform advocates should recognize that translating competitive educational models across cultures is not neutral; it can conflict with local values, perceptions of professionalism, and ethical norms in education.

4.3.3. Inter-Functional Coordination

Figure 4 shows IFC mean scores across job position groups. The ANOVA results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in mean IFC scores between at least two groups: $F(3, 309) = 4.782$, $p = 0.012$, $\eta^2 = 0.035$. The eta-squared value indicated a medium effect size, suggesting that 3.5% variability in the IFC can be explained in terms of job position.

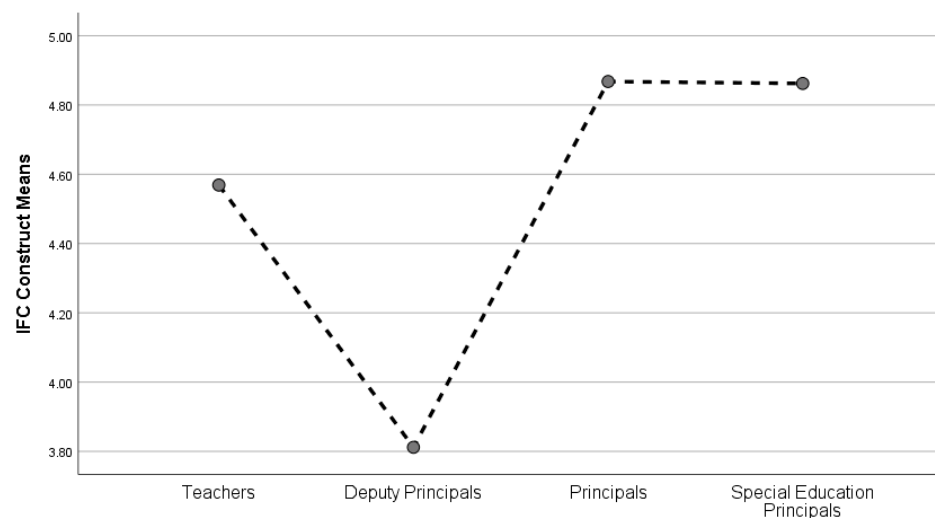


Figure 4. Means of IFC construct across job positions. Authors’ work.

Post hoc comparisons using the Games–Howell test indicated that [Principals] ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.01$) was significantly different from [Deputy Principals] ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.34$), $p = 0.042$, but not significantly differ from [Teachers] ($M = 4.57$, $SD = 1.11$), $p = 0.753$, and [Special Education Teachers] ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.33$), $p = 1.000$.

Principals had the highest IFC mean (4.87) compared to teachers and deputy principals, showing their stronger involvement in cross-functional collaboration. The ANOVA results, consistent with the Kruskal–Wallis test findings, indicated close-to-significant differences in IFC, particularly in marketing information sharing ($ifc5$, $p = 0.047$) and aligning curricula with parental/student demands ($ifc7$, $p = 0.036$), but also in $ifc6$ ($p = 0.051$) and $ifc4$ ($p = 0.058$), hinting that principals may be more aware of the need for teachers to engage in student recruitment and to integrate parent concerns into decision-making. However, deputy principals scored much lower in IFC, indicating a possible gap in leadership-driven collaboration that principals might need to address.

Theoretically, the findings underscore the relevance of viewing schools not just as instructional units but as complex, multi-role organizations, where coordinated effort among staff is critical for strategic responsiveness. IFC, in this context, reflects the school’s

internal capacity to integrate knowledge, align priorities, and collaboratively respond to evolving student and parent needs, a dimension often underexamined in centralized education systems like Greece's.

The elevated IFC scores among principals suggest that strategic coordination and internal communication are more strongly associated with top-level leadership roles, supporting models of leadership that emphasize integration across departments and stakeholder engagement. This resonates with the strategic management literature, which views Inter-Functional Coordination as essential for market-oriented responsiveness and service quality (Narver & Slater, 1990). However, the comparatively lower scores among deputy principals are particularly striking. As figures often responsible for operational leadership, their weaker IFC engagement may point to unclear role delineation or insufficient delegation of strategic coordination responsibilities, a potential organizational blind spot.

Practically, this discrepancy calls attention to the need for better distribution of collaborative leadership practices. Principals appear to be central hubs of coordination, particularly in areas like marketing information sharing and aligning curricula with stakeholder expectations. But unless this awareness and action are shared with other leadership tiers, such as deputy principals, the implementation of strategic, market-oriented practices may remain inconsistent. Strengthening IFC among deputies could enhance leadership coherence and support more unified, whole-school approaches to student recruitment, parental engagement, and cross-departmental integration.

Additionally, the absence of significant differences between principals and teachers in IFC may suggest that some teachers, perhaps those more engaged with parental feedback or community outreach, already perceive themselves as collaborators in shaping school strategies. This raises the possibility of nurturing teacher leadership models, where strategic insights are distributed more broadly across the staff.

In sum, the data indicate that while principals are key drivers of Inter-Functional Coordination, their leadership impact may be diluted if not reinforced by a more deliberate structure of collaborative engagement across roles. Investing in shared leadership development, joint planning forums, and clearer coordination protocols could help bridge existing gaps and foster a more integrated organizational culture aligned with the demands of modern, stakeholder-sensitive education.

5. Discussion

5.1. Policy and Cultural Barriers to Strategic Market Orientation

The present study provides a nuanced portrait of how Greek school leaders perceive and enact three core dimensions of market orientation: Customer Orientation (CuO), Competitive Orientation (CoO), and Inter-Functional Coordination (IFC). The results reveal statistically significant differences among job roles, particularly in CuO ($F(3, 310) = 3.754, p = 0.011, \eta^2 = 0.035$) and IFC ($F(3, 309) = 4.782, p = 0.012, \eta^2 = 0.035$). CoO appears to be consistently undervalued across roles ($F(3, 309) = 0.642, p = 0.533, \eta^2 = 0.007$). These findings merit critical reflection within the broader educational policy and cultural context of Greece.

At a policy level, Greece's centralized educational governance presents significant barriers to the adoption of proactive market strategies. Decision-making authority is concentrated in the Ministry of Education, leaving school leaders with limited autonomy over key functions such as staffing, budgeting, curriculum differentiation, and school promotion. In this context, market-like behaviors, such as competitive positioning or customer responsiveness, are institutionally discouraged or operationally unfeasible.

This aligns with findings from Eurydice reports, which show that highly centralized systems often correlate with diminished institutional innovation and responsiveness (European Commission, 2022). This institutional environment constrains the operational-

ization of market-oriented behaviors, such as competitive positioning or customer responsiveness, features more commonly found in decentralized systems. Studies in England (Woods et al., 2007) and Sweden (Lundahl et al., 2013) have demonstrated that school leaders operating under quasi-market conditions adopt more entrepreneurial practices, driven by competitive funding models and parental choice. In contrast, Greek school leadership appears more constrained, functioning within a logic of compliance rather than strategy (Saiti & Fassoulis, 2012).

The Customer Orientation findings reflect this structural tension. Principals consistently reported the highest mean scores across CuO items, emphasizing their strong focus on addressing the needs of students, parents, and the broader school community. This is to be expected, as leadership roles inherently involve stakeholder engagement, policy implementation, and ensuring overall school satisfaction (Kotter, 1995), but it also aligns with prior research that positions school leaders as boundary-spanners who interpret and mediate external demands (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2020). Special education teachers typically exhibited the lowest CuO scores. This may not be attributed to a lack of concern for customers, but rather due to the specialized nature of their positions, which emphasizes individualized support for students over extensive customer engagement (Friend & Bursuck, 2011).

Certain CuO aspects, such as cuo15 (measuring parental satisfaction), cuo16 (measuring student satisfaction), and cuo18 (parental influence on schooling), exhibited lower means across all groups, suggesting that schools may not systematically track or integrate customer feedback into their decision-making processes.

The ANOVA results highlight significant differences in areas like meeting parental expectations ($p < 0.001$), handling complaints ($p < 0.001$), and understanding parents' needs ($p = 0.007$), where principals take the lead. Cross-role differences in these items echo findings by Bush and Glover (2014), who argue that leadership engagement with parents is strongly mediated by role expectations and institutional positioning. Non-significant p -values in feedback mechanisms suggest a need for improvement in structured feedback collection (Sahlberg, 2016).

While respondents generally affirmed the importance of understanding student needs (cuo5 and cuo6), the variation between roles may indicate that this orientation is interpreted more as an ethical commitment than as a strategic tool, reflecting what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) term the “moral imperative” of teaching. This ethical framing, while admirable, may limit the use of data and feedback for continuous service improvement, which is central to market-oriented thinking in education systems like those of New Zealand (Wylie, 2012) and the US (Berends et al., 2009). In other words, principals and teachers may share a common understanding of serving students but lack the structural means to systematically act on differentiated needs, a cornerstone of Customer Orientation in the private sector.

Competitor Orientation scores were generally lower and uniform across roles, indicating a cultural ambivalence, if not resistance, to market-based comparisons. This is consistent with prior international findings that show that public educators often view competition as antithetical to collaboration and equity (Ball, 2003; Gewirtz et al., 1995). CoO characteristics also suggest that Greek public schools prioritize internal service quality over benchmarking against competitors. This aligns with traditional educational values, which focus more on student outcomes than on market-based comparisons (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Principals had moderately high CoO scores, yet the ANOVA results ($p = 0.533$) indicated no significant differences between roles. The only significant item, “My school compares favorably with other schools” ($p = 0.022$), suggests that principals are more aware of their school's market positioning than teachers. However, lower scores in coo5 ($p = 0.055$)

and *coo6* ($p = 0.943$) suggest that even school leaders may not strongly differentiate their institutions based on a superior understanding of student needs. This finding may reflect the broader education sector's traditional emphasis on pedagogical quality over competitive market positioning (Lubienski, 2006).

The results for Inter-Functional Coordination, the lowest-rated dimension overall, are even more telling. Across job roles, IFC was rated lower, suggesting that collaboration across departments, teams, or external stakeholders is underdeveloped. IFC requires a level of strategic alignment and shared data systems that are rarely present in centralized bureaucracies. Research from Finland and Canada has shown that effective IFC practices are often underpinned by digital infrastructures, distributed leadership models, and participatory decision-making, all currently underdeveloped in the Greek context (Stoll & Temperley, 2010). The fact that deputy principals reported the lowest IFC scores may indicate a leadership distribution gap, suggesting that school leadership teams are not always operating as cohesive strategic units.

Principals reported the highest IFC mean (4.87), highlighting their stronger involvement in cross-functional collaboration, yet these scores still indicate room for improvement. ANOVA results ($p = 0.012$) suggest significant differences, particularly in marketing information sharing (*ifc5*, $p = 0.047$) and aligning curricula with parental/student demands (*ifc7*, $p = 0.036$). Close-to-significant results for *ifc6* ($p = 0.051$) and *ifc4* ($p = 0.058$) further suggest that principals recognize the need for teachers to contribute to school marketing and integrate parental concerns into decision-making (Bryk et al., 2002).

Special education teachers scored similarly to principals (4.86), likely due to their need to collaborate with various teams, including therapists, general educators, and support staff (Friend & Cook, 2009).

Overall, compared to systems where school autonomy and competition are embedded (e.g., the UK, Sweden, and New Zealand), the Greek context shows a more reluctant and constrained engagement with market orientation. Oplatka's (2007) work on educational marketing underscores how policy environments shape leadership behaviors; whereas greater autonomy breeds entrepreneurial leadership, constrained systems tend to produce more reactive or compliance-based behaviors. Similarly, Lubienski (2007) contends that market logics are filtered through existing professional norms and institutional arrangements. On the other side, Saiti and Fassoulis (2012) argue that Greek principals often view managerial practices through a lens of necessity rather than innovation.

Our findings suggest an emphasis on relational leadership and professional ethics over strategic market thinking. The moderately high CuO scores reflect a genuine concern for student welfare, but not necessarily through a lens of responsiveness to stakeholder competition or market demand. Principals do prioritize student and parent welfare, but this is not accompanied by a strategic framework for stakeholder engagement, feedback analysis, or service innovation. This is consistent with Tsiakkiros and Pashiardis (2002), who found that Greek principals often act more as "policy enforcers" than as "strategic leaders".

National education policy could evolve to support greater school-level autonomy, especially in areas such as internal budgeting, external communication, and curriculum adaptation. Policies encouraging participatory governance and feedback integration, as seen in systems like Finland (Sahlberg, 2016), could foster a culture of strategic responsiveness.

Ultimately, if school leaders are to act as agents of innovation rather than compliance, they need both the authority and the capacity to interpret and act on stakeholder needs, differentiate their school's offerings, and foster collaborative cultures within and across school boundaries.

5.2. Implications for Leadership Training and Development

The practical implications for educational leadership development are substantial. Current leadership development programs in Greece tend to emphasize administrative competence over strategic vision. To move toward a more strategically market-oriented educational leadership model, leadership training programs in Greece need to move beyond bureaucratic compliance and foster adaptive, strategic, and collaborative capacities. Drawing on models from Ontario (Leithwood et al., 2020) and Singapore (Ng, 2013), leadership preparation should include the following:

- Methods for stakeholder analysis and engagement promoting customer-focused leadership: Using data to understand and respond to student, parent, and community needs (training in data-driven decision-making).
- Strategic communication and school branding: This is especially important in contexts with declining enrollment or increased parental choice.
- Inter-functional collaboration: Developing internal systems for teamwork across departments and external partnerships with local communities and authorities (training in techniques for collaborative school improvement planning).
- Critical policy literacy: Leaders should be able to navigate centralized constraints while identifying windows of opportunity for localized innovation.
- Marketing and communication skills tailored for educational contexts.

However, such training must be context-sensitive, avoiding the wholesale adoption of managerial models from other systems. The goal is not to turn schools into businesses, but to equip school leaders with strategic tools that enhance equity, responsiveness, and resilience.

5.3. Limitations of the Study/Future Research Directions

Several limitations must be acknowledged, which also point to important directions for future research.

- The research design was cross-sectional, capturing educators' attitudes and perceptions at a single point in time. This restricts the ability to infer causal relationships or observe how orientations toward marketing concepts, such as customer focus, competitor awareness, and Inter-Functional Coordination, may shift over time, especially in response to policy changes, leadership development programs, or broader educational reforms. Longitudinal research would be valuable in capturing the dynamic and potentially evolving nature of these orientations.
- The sample included only public secondary schools in Greece, omitting private institutions, where greater autonomy and exposure to competitive pressures may foster different marketing behaviors. The findings, therefore, cannot be generalized across all educational sectors.
- The unequal group sizes in the sample, particularly between principals and other school staff, may have introduced statistical imbalances that heightened the risk of Type II errors in the ANOVA analyses. Although the use of Games–Howell post hoc tests and non-parametric triangulation with Kruskal–Wallis tests helped to mitigate these issues, the potential for reduced statistical power should be acknowledged.
- The reliance on self-reported quantitative data limits the depth of insight into how educators interpret or enact marketing concepts in their daily practices. In a professional culture that often emphasizes administrative compliance and collective harmony, participants may underreport competitive or strategic behaviors due to social desirability bias. The absence of qualitative data, such as interviews or ethnographic observations,

also means that the study could not capture the contextual, nuanced, or emotionally embedded dimensions of leadership and marketing behavior.

Given these limitations, future research should consider mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative assessments with in-depth qualitative investigations. Such designs would allow for a richer understanding of how school leaders interpret, negotiate, and apply marketing principles in practice. Comparative studies across centralized versus decentralized education systems could also provide valuable insights into how structural and policy environments shape the uptake of strategic orientations. Moreover, incorporating longitudinal designs would enable researchers to trace how orientations change over time, particularly in response to leadership training, policy reforms, or broader societal shifts.

Ultimately, a more holistic research agenda that integrates organizational, cultural, and policy-level analyses is needed to fully understand the role of marketing in educational leadership, especially in contexts like Greece, where market logic is only gradually being introduced into public education.

5.4. Contributions to Educational Leadership Theory and Practice

This study contributes meaningfully to educational leadership theory by reinforcing the importance of contextualized leadership models. It challenges assumptions that market orientation is universally applicable or beneficial, showing instead how cultural values and policy structures shape the enactment of leadership orientations. It supports [Bush and Glover's \(2014\)](#) call for leadership frameworks that are flexible, culturally embedded, and ethically grounded.

In terms of school management practice, the study provides diagnostic insight: Greek schools may prioritize student welfare (CuO) but lack the strategic and collaborative systems (CoO and IFC) needed to thrive in increasingly complex environments. Addressing these gaps requires not only leadership training but also policy reforms that grant greater school autonomy, incentivize innovation, and support distributed leadership practices.

6. Conclusions

This study investigated the perceptions of Customer Orientation (CuO), Competitive Orientation (CoO), and Inter-Functional Coordination (IFC) across different job roles in Greek schools, with a focus on identifying differences shaped by leadership position. The findings highlight the strong Customer Orientation of principals, their moderate Competitor Orientation, and the relatively low Inter-Functional Coordination across roles. The significant differences observed in Customer Orientation suggest that principals are highly engaged in stakeholder interactions, but feedback collection mechanisms require improvement. Similarly, Inter-Functional Coordination remains an area for development, particularly in leadership-driven collaboration efforts.

Interestingly, while CoO did not differ significantly across roles, principals did rate their schools favorably compared to others, particularly on the item reflecting comparative perception. However, the absence of strong distinctions on CoO items related to student needs suggests an underlying cultural resistance to market-based competition within the Greek educational landscape. This aligns with broader policy dynamics in Greece, where centralized governance, egalitarian norms, and limited institutional autonomy continue to shape leadership behavior and strategic positioning.

The results indicate that school leaders in Greece may value customer responsiveness and collaboration, but remain cautious or constrained in embracing competitive, market-oriented practices. This tension underscores the importance of designing leadership development programs that address not only administrative skills but also strategic thinking, marketing acumen, and cultural sensitivity. Future principals should be trained

to navigate the delicate balance between responsiveness to educational stakeholders and the ethical dilemmas of competition within public education systems.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including its reliance on self-reported perceptions and small sample sizes among groups. Future research could explore these dynamics through qualitative approaches that probe how cultural values, policy environments, and school contexts interact to shape leadership orientations.

Furthermore, comparative studies across different educational systems, especially those undergoing decentralization or market reforms, could deepen our understanding of how competitive and customer-driven models are interpreted globally. Finally, future research should explore how CuO, CoO, and IFC correlate with actual school outcomes, such as student satisfaction, enrollment trends, or staff collaboration metrics, to better assess their practical implications for educational effectiveness.

Overall, this study advances the theoretical discourse on educational leadership by contextualizing strategic orientations within a specific cultural and policy framework, offering valuable insights into the practical challenges and opportunities that school leaders face in navigating 21st-century educational demands.

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