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Assessing students' and parents' satisfaction and expectations from secondary education services in Greece

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research was to investigate the degree of satisfaction of the educational system users, the services offered by the educational institutions and which criteria they use to attend one of them.

Methods: The investigation was carried out between 10 March 2019 and 11 June 2019, a representative sample of 357 individuals from the Greek population was selected. We investigated the degree of satisfaction of the education system users: students and parents, the services offered by the educational institutions: curricula, coaching- career guidance, teaching methods, recommendations, and which criteria they use to attend to one of them. Descriptive data analysis, Spearman's correlation coefficient, nonparametric tests, were used to determine statistically significant differences and correlations between the variables.

Results: The results of the survey revealed that the most important criteria were, the educational material provided to students, the curricula, career guidance and counseling services, innovations in teaching methods and the less important were, wages of educational staff and advertising campaign.

Implications: These elements can be used in implementation of a strategic marketing plan. A more detailed analysis in relation to gender, occupation and educational level as well as a comparison with previous and future research is suggested.

Keywords: Secondary education in Greece, recession, selection criteria for educational services, educational organizations, needs of students.

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1 THE CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EDUCATION IN GREECE

The economic crisis that started in Greece in 2009, its prolonged duration and slow recovery, coupled with fiscal adjustment, a marked decline in employment levels and a drastic cut in household incomes had a significant impact on the educational system operation. The onset of the crisis led to the repatriation of many foreigners who had settled in

Greece for the past two decades along with their children who had been attending Greek schools, but also to the migration of approximately half a million Greeks to other countries. The decline in household incomes apparently resulted in a decline in private consumption and impaired students' ability to attend private high schools, secondary tutorial schools and private courses (IOBE, 2018).

Private expenditure on secondary education before the crisis (in 2008) amounted to 1,772.3 million euros, 15% of the total



expenditure. The bulk of this amount, 651 million euros, was channeled to secondary tutorial schools, 356.6 million euros were invested in private courses and 469 million euros in foreign language courses. In 2016, private spending on secondary education reached 1,048.5 million euros, 12% of the total spending, registering an overall decrease of nearly 730 million euros.

More specifically, spending on a private gymnasium has been steadily declining since 2010, with the exception of 2014, when it rose marginally by 1%. In 2015 and 2016 this expenditure dropped by 20% and 11% respectively, reaching €66.8 million in 2016. Expenditure on private high schools also declined from 2008 to 2016, falling by 21%, 15%, 25% and 9% in the years 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 respectively, while in 2016 it rose by 17% to 64 million. The category of the largest household spending on secondary education is secondary tutorial schools, suggesting that the demand for the services they provide is less elastic than the demand for private gymnasium and high school. Expenditure on secondary schools decreased from 651 million euros in 2008 to 389.7 million euros in 2016, reduced by 6% in 2015 and 2016. The decline that was recorded from private expenditure on foreign language courses was stronger in 2013 and 2014 (12% and 14% respectively). In 2016, this expenditure was further reduced by 4% (€310 million), increasing its share of spending on secondary education from 26% in 2008 to 30% in 2016 (IOBE, 2019).

But the most serious impacts of the crisis on education, stemming from a surge in postnatal births after 2010, have already occurred in the early grades and as the decline in pupils progresses to the rest of the education system, the problem will become more acute. According to current data, high school graduates participating in the Pan-Hellenic examinations were reduced from 71.8 thousand in 2008 to 54.2 thousand in 2035 (-24.5%). Moreover, these changes pose significant challenges to the future administration of the examinations. What is even more significant is the effectiveness and efficiency of public and private spending on education and linking the educational system with the labor market. Reducing the need for teachers in coming years will also have an impact on the labor market and employment in the educational field (public and private schools, language schools, private tutorial schools, etc.). As a result, in the private sector, the supply of training services will increase much more than the current needs and competition will become more intense.

Considering all the above-mentioned studies and the criticality of the situation, the struggle for the survival and smooth functioning of educational units becomes even more intense and imperative. The realisation that educational organizations will have to satisfy the needs and the aspirations of parents, pupils and society in general, coupled with the self-evaluation that they will have to go through in order to improve and become more competitive will be important tools in directors' hands with the target being the design and implementation of educational work and public or private spending (Apostolou 2018).

Research on school marketing has received increased attention over the last few years as more and more professional consultants and researchers have incorporated marketing mechanisms into educational institutions, including private schools, tutorials, colleges and universities (James C., Philips P., 1995; Bagley, C., Woods, P., Glatter R., 1996; Bunnell T., 2006; Foskett N, 2002; Hemsley-Brown J, Oplatka I, 2006, Oplatka, I., Hemsley-Brown, J. 2007; Apostolou G., Papatsimpas A., Gounas A., 2018).

A common finding in many surveys worldwide is the important role of relationship marketing (RM) in devising and implementing a project and shaping a strategy in schools and other educational organizations. A relationship marketing (RM) approach emphasizes the development of relationships, especially regarding existing customers, and the development and support of market networks (Brown, S.W., Fisk, R.P., Bitner, M.J., 1994). The assumption that attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships is an important factor in determining the overall customer's satisfaction with a service, especially as RM models have been observed in schools around the world (Bell L, 1999, Oplatka I., et al., 2002).

Many managers today recognize that the ability to succeed in the market requires more than mere sales techniques customers want to be recognized for their position and receive services that meet their needs. Successful marketing is now much more targeted and customer satisfaction is a priority. Therefore, businesses and service organizations seek to achieve a competitive advantage in their potential environment or, at least in part, by being driven by the market by anticipating, understanding and responding to customer preferences and behaviors (Jaworski B., Kohli AK, Sahay A., 2000).

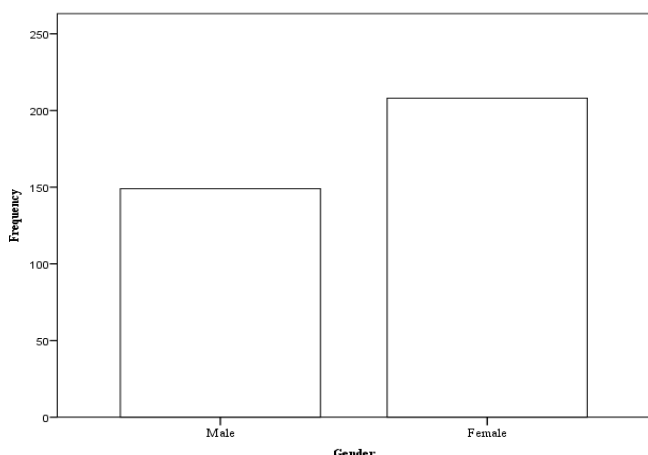
The marketing literature defines the prospects of Marketing Orientation and there is an agreement on the basic concepts (Kohli, A., Jaworski, B.J., Kumar, A., 1993.; Slater, S. F., Narver, J. C. 2000; Harris LC., 2002; Helfert, G., Ritter, T., Walter, A., 2002). The importance of customer orientation comes from this very idea. As a result, customer needs, desires and specific circumstances, e.g. lifestyle, must be the focus of the market-oriented organization. In this sense, Marketing Orientation is the extent to which an organization creates and uses information about current and future customer needs. It develops a strategy to meet these needs and applies it for that purpose. Marketing Orientation considers the influence of competitors and integrates it into interoperable co-ordination. It encourages knowledge creation, use of data on competitors and integrated interoperable processes to implement a strategic organizational response to marketing opportunities. All these activities are geared towards creating and satisfying customers through a continuous need's assessment. Regarding school context, we believe that the focus on current and future clients (Parents, students) should prevail over the other two Marketing Orientation functions. In our opinion, Marketing Orientation is a set of beliefs that prioritizes customer interests but also increases the willingness of the educational organization to obtain information about its competitors and create cross-sectoral activities in order to gain a distinct advantage in a hectic and competitive environment.

3 RESEARCH

The purpose of this research was to investigate the degree of satisfaction of the educational system users, the services offered by the educational institutions and which criteria they use to attend one of them. Self-completion questionnaires were distributed via e-mail and social media (Messenger, Facebook, Instagram), in order to achieve, low-cost answers from all over Greece in a short period of time. The population was approximately 7,000,000 i.e. Greek nationals, aged 18 to 65. The survey was conducted between 10 March and 11 June 2019. Stratified sampling was used, where the population's features are divided into distinct groups, or strata, where, within each stratum, the features are similar to each other with respect to select characteristics of importance to the survey (Parsons, 2017). A highly structured questionnaire was developed, making extensive use of 5-point Likert scales to measure attitudes and beliefs towards educational organizations. The demographic profile of the respondents was also one of the decision-influencing factors among others.

Descriptive data analysis includes descriptive statistics, graphs (pie charts, bar graphs), frequency tables and demographic characteristics of the respondents. Spearman's correlation coefficient was used (Mukaka, 2012) since Likert scale questions were included in the questionnaire. Nonparametric tests were used to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable. The Mann – Whitney U test was used in the case of two independent groups and the Kruskal – Wallis H test in the case of more than two groups. Additionally, correlations between the criteria for selecting a private educational organization were investigated. The differentiation between different occupations and genders is also presented in our research.

Figure 1. Gender



The 357 questionnaire responses comprised: 149 males (41.7%), 208 females (58.3%) (figure 1). The absolute (relative) frequencies of the occupation of the respondents are: 7 (2%) gymnasium students, 25 (7.1%) high school students, 87 (24.6%) graduates, 101 (28.6%) university students and 133 (37.7%) parents (figure, 2). The

corresponding absolute (relative) frequencies of the educational organizations that the respondents attended are: 31 (4.75%) for private school, 52 (7.96%) for e-learning, 121 (18.53%) for private lessons, 187 (28.64%) for secondary tutorial schools and 262 (40.12%) for public schools. As for the educational level of the respondents, 9 (2.5 %) are Gymnasium graduates, 60 (16.8%) are High school graduates, 181 (50.7 %) have a bachelor's degree, 96 (26.9 %) have a master's degree and 11 (3.1 %) are PhD holders (figure 3).

Figure 2. Educational organization

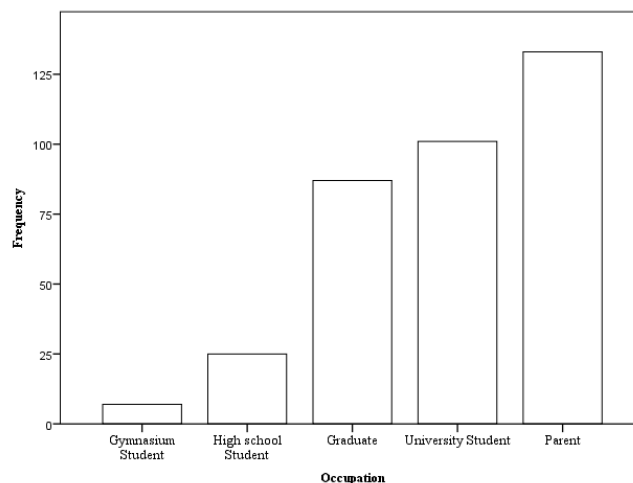
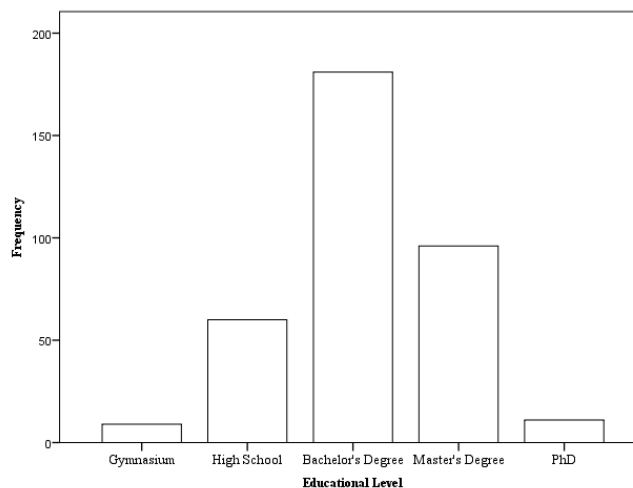


Figure 3. Educational Level



4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The overall reliability coefficient of the questionnaire is 0.91. Table 1 shows the reliability coefficients of major variables. Overall most of the constructs showed Cronbach's α readings above 0.60 and these items were within the acceptable range of coefficient, as suggested by Nunnally (1978). Cronbach's alpha was also used to determine the extent to which the Likert scales employed produced consistent results if measures were taken repeatedly. Coefficients over 0.7 are considered acceptable, with coefficients greater than 0.8

considered good (Malhotra and Birks, 2006). All 51 items measured in this survey had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.91.

Table 1: Reliability coefficients for the questionnaire components

Variable name	No. of items remaining	Cronbach's α
Scientific proficiency of staff and assessment of pupils' academic progress	10	0.745
Provision of Career Configuration Skills	5	0.769
Covering learning deficit gaps	5	0.681
In-school examinations	5	0.767
Pan-Hellenic examinations	5	0.609
Criteria for selecting a private educational organization	21	0.889

Table 2 shows that students were generally satisfied with the in-school examinations ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.755$), the scientific proficiency of staff and the assessment of pupils' academic progress ($M=3.37$, $SD=0.765$). Conversely, students were less satisfied with the provision of career configuration skills ($M=3.08$, $SD=0.965$) and covering learning deficit gaps ($M=3.15$, $SD=0.754$).

Table 2: Means, standard deviation

Variable name	Mean	SD
Scientific proficiency of staff and assessment of pupils' academic progress	3.37	0.765
Provision of Career Configuration Skills	3.08	0.965
Covering learning deficit gaps	3.15	0.754
In-school examinations	3.68	0.755
Pan-Hellenic examinations	3.33	0.763
Criteria for selecting a private educational organization	3.27	1.043

5 CORRELATIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (r_s) is a nonparametric (distribution-free) rank statistic proposed by Charles Spearman as a measure of the strength of an association between two variables. It is a measure of a monotone association that is used when the distribution of data makes Pearson's correlation coefficient undesirable or misleading (Hauke et al, 2011). Its interpretation is similar to that of Pearson's, e.g. the closer r_s is to +1 or -1 the stronger the monotonic relationship.

There is an increasing monotonic trend of 71.1 % (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .711$, $n = 346$, $p < .001$) between the respondents who choose to study at a private educational institution considering its innovative adoptions in the evaluation of all the factors involved in the education as a key criterion, and the respondents who choose to study at a private educational institution based on its innovative adoptions in the teaching methods.

Increasing monotonic trends were observed between the respondents who choose to:

- Attend a private educational institution with career guidance and counseling services as a key criterion

to them and those who choose to attend a private educational institution considering the educational material provided to students, as a basic criterion (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .623$, $n = 352$, $p < .001$).

- Attend a private educational institution considering the educational material provided to students as a basic criterion and those who choose to attend a private educational institution with frequent progress reporting, as a key criterion (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .563$, $n = 352$, $p < .001$).
- Study at a private educational institution based on its innovative adoptions in organizing and communicating and those who choose to study at a private educational institution considering the innovations it adopts in the evaluation of all the factors involved in education, as a key criterion (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .668$, $n = 349$, $p < .001$).
- Study at a private educational institution based on the innovations it adopts in the teaching methods and those who choose to study at a private educational institution based on its innovative adoptions in organizing and communicating (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .582$, $n = 348$, $p < .001$).
- Attend a private educational organization based on its franchise procedures and those who choose to study at a private educational organization with a quality certification (ISO), as a key criterion (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .538$, $n = 349$, $p < .001$).
- Attend a private educational institution based on its career guidance and counseling services, as a key criterion, and those who choose to attend a private educational institution considering the frequent progress reporting, as a key criterion (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .519$, $n = 350$, $p < .001$).
- Attend a private educational institution based on the advertising campaign it follows and those who choose a private educational organization based on its franchise procedures (Spearman Coefficient, $r_s = .519$, $n = 350$, $p < .001$).

The Kruskal-Wallis test (Kruskal and Wallis 1952, 1953) is the nonparametric equivalent of a one-way ANOVA and is used for testing whether samples originate from the same distribution and test the relationship between a nominal independent variable and an ordinal (or numeric) dependent variable with more than three groups. Unlike the parametric ANOVA, the Kruskal-Wallis does not require the fulfilment of assumptions of normality, interval data and homogeneity of group variance. This test is a more flexible and convenient technique like a parametric one-way ANOVA (Ostertagova et. al, 2014). By applying the Kruskal-Wallis H test we derive the following results:

- There was a statistically significant difference in the respondents who, depending on their capacity, choose to study at a private educational organization based on the student's academic performance, $\chi^2(4) = 14.075$, $p = 0.007$, with a mean rank

score of 150.36 for gymnasium students, 178.35 for high school students, 167.52 for graduates, 153.45 for university students and 198.47 for parents. These findings indicate that parents take more into account the academic performance of students in previous years.

- There was a statistically significant difference in the respondents who, depending on their capacity, choose to study at a private educational institution considering their personal acquaintance with the staff or the organization's principal very important, $\chi^2(4) = 16.294$, $p = 0.003$, with a mean rank score of 92.71 for gymnasium students, 204.11 for high school students, 181.66 for graduates, 170.90 for university students and 170.39 for parents. High school students consider their personal acquaintance with the staff or the director of the organization as very important.
- There was a statistically significant difference in those who, depending on their capacity, choose to attend a private educational institution with its advertising campaign as a key criterion, $\chi^2(4) = 10.22$, $p = 0.037 < 0.05$, with a mean rank score of 154.29 for gymnasium students, 189.48 for high school students, 200.56 for graduates, 159.60 for university students and 168.46 for parents. Graduates are more likely to choose an educational organization by its advertising campaign.
- There was a statistically significant difference in those respondents who, depending on their capacity, choose to study at a private educational institution based on its innovative teaching methods, $\chi^2(4) = 13.995$, $p = 0.007$, with a mean rank score of 264.43 for gymnasium students, 165.24 for high school students, 168.54 for graduates, 154.53 for university students and 186.96 for parents. Gymnasium students prefer an educational organization mainly on account of its innovative teaching methods.

The Mann-Whitney U tests the null hypothesis (H_0) that the two groups originate from the same population. In other words, it stipulates that the two independent groups are homogeneous and have the same distribution (Nachar, 2008). It is the non-parametric equivalent of the two-sample t test and tests the relationship between a two-group independent categorical variable and a dependent ordinal (or numeric) variable. An application of the Mann Whitney U test showed that:

- There was a statistically significant difference in those respondents who, depending on gender, choose to attend a private educational institution by its tuition fees, $U = 13302$, $p = .045 < .05$, with a mean rank score of 189.51 for males, and 168.07 for females. These findings indicate that males consider tuition fees more important than females.
- There was a statistically significant difference in the respondents who, depending on gender, choose to attend a private educational institution by its facilities, $U = 13136$, $p = .023 < .05$ with a

mean rank score of 191.64 for males, and 167.46 for females.

- There was a statistically significant difference in those respondents who, depending on gender, choose to study at a private educational institution considering study programs as a basic criterion, $U = 16793$, $p = .046 < .05$ with a mean rank score of 191.64 for males, and 167.46 for females.
- There was a statistically significant difference in those respondents who choose to attend a private educational institution by its tuition fees between male and female parents, $U = 1404$, $p = .002 < .05$, with a mean rank score of 79.42 for male parents, and 58.62 for female parents. We conclude that male parents consider tuition fees more important than female parents.
- There was a statistically significant difference in those respondents who choose to study at a private educational institution by considering the payment schedule of tuition fees as a key criterion between male and female parents, $U = 1493$, $p = .01 < .05$, with a mean rank score of 76.64 for male parents, and 59.43 for female parents. Male parents believe that the payment schedule of tuition fees is of the highest priority to them.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The birth-rate declines in Greece and the reduction of household disposable income due to the economic crisis pose two very serious challenges to the country's educational system. The survival and long-term growth of a training organization that is active in secondary education cannot be taken for granted. This is a finding that concerns both public schools – especially private gymnasiums, high schools, private or group lessons – and online courses.

The differentiation of an educational organization from the competition and the design of innovative services that are geared towards meeting the needs of students and parents require proper design and strategies to satisfy their users and ensure the proper functioning of the organization.

Educational organizations in the realm of secondary education in Greece are public and private schools, secondary tutorial schools, private lessons and online platforms providing online courses.

In the first part of our survey, we examine the degree of trust that Greek people place, without much interest in the reasons, in the proper preparation of the students for their participation in in-school examinations ($M = 3.68$), in the evaluation of academic courses and the scientific adequacy of staff ($M = 3.37$), in the Pan-Hellenic examinations ($M = 3.33$), in covering the learning deficit gaps of previous years ($M = 3.15$) and the career development skills of their students ($M = 3.08$).

In the second part, we examine the criteria by which pupils choose to study and parents choose to cooperate. In particular, the educational material provided to students ($M = 4.09$), the curricula ($M = 3.99$), career guidance and counseling services ($M = 3.84$), innovations in teaching methods ($M = 3.76$), recommendations made by other

students and parents (M = 3.69), innovations it adopts in organization and communication (M = 3.68), innovations it adopts in the evaluation of all the factors involved in education (M = 3.67), academic progress of students in previous years (M = 3.63), frequent progress reporting (M = 3.53), the school syllabus (M = 3.46), building infrastructure and equipment (M = 3.35); quality certification (ISO) (M = 3.29), payment facilities of fees (M = 2.96), distance from the place of residence (M = 2.93), impression created during the first progress report (M = 2.93), tuition fees (M=2.93), accessibility of the organization (M = 2.92), personal acquaintance with the school principal (M = 2.87), franchise procedures (M = 2.73)), wages of educational staff, (as the highest paid employees perform more) (M = 2.48) and advertising campaign (M = 2.08).

For the LSP selection criteria, the following statistically significant correlations were observed: between the evaluations of all the factors involved in education, innovative teaching methods, innovative adoptions in organizing and communicating, teaching material, career guidance and counseling services and frequent reporting on students' progress. Also, between franchise procedures, quality certification (ISO) and advertising campaign.

Statistically significant differences were observed in the LSP's selection criteria between different capacities (Kruskal – Wallis test). Parents take more into account the academic performance of the students in previous years (Mean Rank = 198.47). In addition, parents are more likely to choose a private educational institution considering their personal acquaintance with the staff or the organization's principal (Mean Rank=198). Considering personal acquaintance with the staff or the organization's principal, High school students regard this as very important (Mean Rank=204.11). Also, graduates prefer advertising campaign (Mean Rank=200.56) and Gymnasium ones prefer innovative teaching methods (Mean Rank=264.43).

Statistically significant differences were observed in the LSP's selection criteria between genders (Mann-Whitney U test). Males consider tuition fees (Mean Rank=189.51), facilities (Mean Rank=191.64) and study programs (Mean Rank=191.64) as very important. Furthermore, male parents consider tuition fees more important than female parents (Mean Rank=79.42) and believe that the payment schedule of tuition fees is of the highest priority to them (Mean Rank=76.64).

All the above can be used in the design and implementation of a strategic marketing plan as they contain necessary information for the 7p's marketing mix. Additionally, data must be analyzed in order to gain insights into the opinion and preferences of Greeks in relation to their gender, status and educational level. A more detailed analysis of the learning services satisfaction and their selection criteria in relation to gender, occupation and educational level as well as a comparison with previous and future research is suggested.

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