

**SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN GREECE: THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE
HEADMASTER BETWEEN ADMINISTRATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND
INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

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Abstract: School leadership in Greece is undergoing a gradual but notable reconfiguration, as schools are required to respond to increasingly complex organizational, social, and pedagogical demands. Within this shifting environment, the headmaster is no longer perceived solely as an administrative officer responsible for routine management and compliance. Instead, contemporary expectations position the headmaster as a multi-dimensional actor who must combine formal governance duties with accountability requirements and an explicit commitment to leading learning. This literature-based overview synthesizes key perspectives on the evolving role of the headmaster in Greece, focusing on the growing interdependence between administration, accountability, and instructional leadership. A central theme is the persistent tension between bureaucratic workload and pedagogical presence. Greek headmasters are typically required to manage extensive administrative procedures, staffing arrangements, timetabling, documentation, and communication with higher authorities, while simultaneously responding to policy initiatives that emphasize evidence, monitoring, and quality assurance. In this context, accountability is expressed not only through compliance with regulations but also through processes linked to school improvement planning, internal evaluation, and the documentation of school performance. Although these mechanisms are often presented as levers for improvement, the literature indicates that they may also intensify managerial pressures, thereby reducing the time and organizational capacity available for instructional leadership. Instructional leadership, as conceptualized in international research, is not limited to supervision or control of teachers’ work. Rather, it refers to the deliberate shaping of the conditions under which teaching and learning can improve: building a shared vision for learning, supporting professional development, using evidence to guide decisions, coordinating curriculum priorities, and cultivating collaborative cultures that normalize reflection and feedback. When interpreted through the Greek context, instructional leadership becomes particularly demanding, because schools operate within comparatively centralized governance structures, with limited autonomy in staffing, budgeting, and curricular decisions. At the same time, the literature increasingly recognizes the headmaster’s role in promoting inclusion, student well-being, and a safe school climate. This includes coordinating support for diverse learners, strengthening relationships with families and community services, and managing conflicts in ways that protect social cohesion within the school. Such responsibilities require relational and distributed leadership capacities—effective communication, conflict management, team empowerment, and the delegation of responsibilities—so that leadership becomes a shared practice rather than an individual burden. Overall, the evolving role of the headmaster in Greece can be understood as a shift towards a hybrid model of school leadership. Administration and accountability remain structurally powerful, yet instructional leadership is increasingly framed as essential for meaningful school improvement. The literature suggests that the effectiveness of this transition depends on both individual leadership competencies and systemic enabling conditions, including clear role definitions, targeted professional training, administrative support, and governance arrangements that allow headmasters to prioritize learning-oriented leadership rather than merely managing procedures.

Keywords: school leadership, headmaster, accountability, instructional leadership.

1. INTRODUCTION

School leadership is widely recognised as a pivotal mechanism for strengthening teaching quality, organisational capacity, and student learning in contemporary education systems. In this perspective, the headmaster (principal) is not merely an administrative manager of routines, but a key agent who shapes the conditions under which teaching and learning take place, including professional collaboration, instructional coherence, and a shared focus on improvement. At the same time, leadership practice is strongly mediated by governance arrangements, the scope of decision-making authority delegated to schools, and the intensity of accountability requirements. These mediating conditions are particularly salient in Greece, where policy discussion increasingly links improvement efforts to a recalibration of school autonomy, accountability, and local capacity-building, while the system continues to display features of centralised steering and procedural regulation (OECD, 2026).

Within the Greek educational system, the role of the school head is formally framed as both administrative and educational. At the institutional level, the headmaster is responsible for ensuring compliance with laws and official

directives, maintaining reliable communication with central and regional authorities, and coordinating the day-to-day functioning of the school. Simultaneously, the head is positioned within a school governance ecology that expects planning, coordination, and contribution to the educational mission and collective work of the school community. This dual framing is consequential because it creates a broad portfolio of responsibilities that can generate role overload and competing priorities. In practical terms, administrative coordination and compliance-oriented tasks may absorb a substantial portion of leadership time, potentially limiting the headmaster's capacity to enact learning-centred leadership functions with consistency and depth (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2025).

The international research base on “leadership for learning” offers a useful analytic lens for interpreting these tensions. Instructional leadership is conceptualised not as inspection or narrow supervision, but as the purposeful shaping of organisational conditions that support improved instruction—through setting direction, aligning resources and practices with learning goals, fostering professional learning, promoting evidence-informed decision-making, and distributing leadership to build collective capacity (Hallinger, 2011). When this framework is applied to Greece, the enactment of instructional leadership becomes more complex because leadership is embedded in system-level constraints. In settings where autonomy over staffing, budgeting, or curriculum implementation is limited, instructional leadership tends to rely heavily on relational influence, professional culture, and the strategic use of internal processes (e.g., collaborative planning, peer learning structures) rather than on formal authority.

This study addresses the problem of role expansion and role strain in Greek school leadership: headmasters are expected to satisfy intensified accountability logics and administrative obligations while also promoting instructional improvement, frequently under conditions that restrict discretionary decision-making (OECD, 2026). The objectives of the study are threefold. First, it aims to clarify how the headmaster's role in Greece is currently positioned across the domains of administration, accountability, and instructional leadership. Second, it seeks to identify the organisational and systemic factors that enable or constrain the headmaster's ability to prioritise learning-oriented leadership within daily practice. Third, it develops an interpretive basis for understanding the emergence of a “hybrid” leadership profile in the Greek context—one in which administrative compliance and accountability demands remain structurally powerful, even as policy and research increasingly emphasise instructional leadership as a precondition for sustainable school improvement (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2025; Hallinger, 2011). By articulating these objectives, the study provides sufficient background for evaluating the subsequent analysis without requiring the reader to consult external publications for core contextual and conceptual grounding.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a narrative literature review design to synthesize scholarship on school leadership in Greece, with particular emphasis on the headmaster's role across administration, accountability, and instructional leadership. The “materials” comprise peer-reviewed journal articles, comparative policy reports, and selected official texts relevant to school governance and leadership, identified through targeted keyword searches (e.g., school leadership, principal/headmaster, instructional leadership, accountability, evaluation, Greece/Greek education) and citation chaining from seminal sources. Consistent with guidance for narrative reviews, inclusion decisions prioritize relevance to the conceptual focus (role expectations, enactment conditions, and leadership functions) rather than exhaustive coverage, while sources are screened for credibility (peer review, institutional publisher, and clear methodological reporting) and conceptual contribution. Data extraction is conducted using a structured matrix (author/year, context, design, sample, focal construct, key findings), and findings are integrated through thematic synthesis, grouping evidence into recurrent domains (administrative governance, accountability/evaluation, instructional leadership practices, distributed leadership, inclusion and school climate). The analytic strategy follows a transparent narrative logic—explicitly linking themes to the research objectives and highlighting convergences, tensions, and gaps—so that a competent researcher could replicate the search terms, screening rationale, extraction fields, and thematic coding procedures and obtain comparable interpretive results (Snyder, 2019).

3. RESULTS

The synthesis of Greece-focused evidence indicated that the headmaster's role had been reshaped primarily through a gradual expansion of formally prescribed responsibilities, while the underlying governance conditions had continued to constrain discretionary, learning-centered leadership. A longitudinal documentary analysis of legislative initiatives for Greek secondary school principals (1981–2018) showed that the principal's role had been transformed “to some extent” at the policy level, reflecting influences associated with New Public Management, including an expanded emphasis on school-level initiative and participation in teachers' professional development. At the same time, the same analysis documented persistent structural limitations linked to centralization and bureaucracy, which

had continued to frame the principal as a functionary with limited autonomy and an overloaded portfolio of duties, thereby restricting sustained pedagogical leadership in everyday practice (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020).

Evidence on the contemporary accountability environment further suggested that evaluation-related reforms had intensified the headmaster's coordinating and sensemaking functions. In a qualitative study of secondary school principals in the Piraeus directorate, principals had described evaluation/self-evaluation as a policy shift that affected both administrative order and educational processes in schools. They had reported that the headmaster's role in the new framework had required organizational orchestration (planning, documentation, coordination of internal procedures) and a mediating function between the policy demands and teachers' readiness to engage. The results had highlighted a dual narrative: evaluation had been viewed as potentially beneficial for systematic improvement and school effectiveness, yet it had also been associated with implementation pressures and concerns about how internal evaluation reports might be used or interpreted, thereby reinforcing the headmaster's role as both compliance manager and educational leader (Brinia et al., 2023).

Findings on instructional leadership in Greece had converged on the observation that learning-focused leadership had been feasible, but typically under conditions of strong school culture and deliberate leadership practice rather than through structural autonomy. A comparative case-study investigation of instructional leadership in "outstanding" secondary schools in a centralized Greek context (and a partially decentralized English context) had shown that Greek school leaders had enacted instructional leadership through relational and cultural mechanisms—such as building shared learning goals, supporting teachers' professional growth, and fostering organizational coherence—despite constraints typical of centralized systems. The Greek cases had suggested that the leadership contribution to student learning and school improvement had operated indirectly, by shaping teachers' development and the organizational conditions for effective instruction, rather than via formal control over resources and staffing (Kaparou & Bush, 2016).

Crisis-era evidence had reinforced the salience of relational leadership and the headmaster's "external dimension" (linking school with families, communities, and organizations) when schools faced disruption. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers' accounts had indicated that principals had played a critical role in sustaining trust, collaboration, and a positive school climate, while also coordinating outreach to parents and local actors to address emergent needs. The same evidence had shown that unequal student access to technological equipment had posed a practical obstacle that principals had attempted to mitigate through mobilization of external support and local solutions, again positioning the headmaster as a broker of resources and relationships rather than as an actor enabled by high formal autonomy (Kafa, 2023).

Across studies, the results consistently indicated that Greek headmasters had occupied a hybrid leadership space: administrative and accountability functions had remained structurally dominant, yet instructional leadership had been enacted where cultural capacity, professional trust, and purposeful routines supported it. The strongest pattern in the Greece-specific literature had been that leadership for learning had been possible, but it had depended heavily on local capacity and relational influence under centralised constraints (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2020; Kaparou & Bush, 2016).

4. DISCUSSIONS

This narrative review situated Greek school leadership as a hybrid role formed by three concurrent pressures: extensive administration, expanding accountability routines, and rising expectations for instructional leadership. The significance of the findings lies in showing that the headmaster's capacity to lead learning in Greece was shaped less by individual willingness and more by system design—especially centralisation, bureaucratic workload, and how evaluation processes were implemented. In practice, these conditions tended to privilege compliance-oriented management unless explicit organisational space and support were created for learning-focused work (Katsigianni & Ifanti, 2021).

A key interpretive implication was that accountability mechanisms did not function automatically as improvement tools. When evaluation was enacted in ways that prioritised documentation and procedural completion, it risked producing "administrative saturation," narrowing the time and attention available for instructional leadership. Conversely, when evaluation routines supported goal clarity, collective reflection, and school improvement planning, they could provide a useful structure for coordinated action. This finding pointed to the importance of formative accountability, where evaluation is connected to capacity-building (training, guidance, and collaborative routines) rather than merely reporting (Brinia et al., 2023; Kolosidou & Kakana, 2023).

The review also suggested that instructional leadership in Greece was possible but conditional. Evidence from high-performing secondary schools indicated that headmasters enacted instructional leadership mainly through relational and cultural mechanisms—building shared priorities for teaching, supporting teachers' professional growth, and strengthening collaboration—rather than through broad formal autonomy over staffing or resources (Kaparou &

Bush, 2016). This mattered because it implied that instructional leadership in centralised settings depends heavily on school climate, trust, and distributed leadership, not on managerial authority alone.

Finally, crisis-era evidence highlighted that effective leadership extended beyond internal school management to the mobilisation of external networks. During the pandemic, principals' actions were linked to sustaining cooperation, communication with families, and practical responses to unequal access to digital resources, underscoring the headmaster's brokerage role in promoting resilience and inclusion (Kafa, 2023).

Overall, the results were significant because they indicated that strengthening instructional leadership in Greece requires systemic enabling conditions: reduced administrative burden, accountability processes oriented to improvement, and leadership development that supports collaborative cultures (Gkoros, 2021). The conclusions drawn should be interpreted within the limits of a narrative review, yet the pattern remained consistent across Greece-focused studies: instructional leadership weakened when compliance demands expanded without capacity-building, and it strengthened where schools cultivated trust, collaboration, and distributed responsibility.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This narrative review concluded that school leadership in Greece has been evolving toward a hybrid headmaster role in which administrative governance and accountability obligations remain structurally dominant, while expectations for instructional leadership have increased. The most important implication was that the headmaster's capacity to lead learning has been shaped less by personal motivation and more by system-level conditions, including centralized steering, heavy procedural workload, and the practical design of evaluation and reporting routines.

Across the reviewed Greek evidence, instructional leadership was not found to be absent; rather, it was conditional. It tended to be enacted where headmasters cultivated strong school culture (trust, shared goals, collaboration) and where leadership was distributed through teams and routines that supported professional learning. In contrast, when accountability was implemented primarily through documentation and compliance, leadership time was redirected toward managerial coordination, reducing opportunities for sustained pedagogical guidance. Therefore, accountability appeared most productive when it operated as formative improvement infrastructure—supporting reflection and capacity-building—rather than as an administrative burden.

A further conclusion concerned the widening scope of leadership under uncertainty. The headmaster's work increasingly extended to inclusion, well-being, and crisis management, highlighting the importance of relational leadership and external networking with families and community actors. This broadened the understanding of "effective leadership" in Greece beyond administrative efficiency to include organizational resilience and equity.

Overall, the review suggested that strengthening Greek school leadership requires policy and organizational conditions that protect learning-oriented leadership: clearer role priorities, reduced administrative load, targeted leadership development, and accountability arrangements that reward improvement processes instead of paperwork. These conclusions contribute to the field by framing Greek headmastership as a system-mediated leadership practice and by identifying practical levers for aligning administration and accountability with instructional improvement.

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