

MANIFESTATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN DIFFERENT INTEREST GROUPS WITHIN LITHUANIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The study was based on the systemic concept of leadership, which emphasizes successful learning organizations and communities, distribution and assignment of leadership, vertically and horizontally (relationships with the community). The phenomenon of leadership in education is analyzed in the study by viewing leadership as a process rather than as a position that a person may occupy in an organization. The leadership process is interpreted as the ability to influence people and as a personal capacity that motivates and coordinates organization members to pursue the goals of the organization. The research problem includes two questions: „How is the phenomenon of leadership in education understood by schools stakeholders? What approach differences can be seen from stakeholders' perspectives?” The research objective is educational leadership. The research aim is to reveal the manifestations of leadership in different interest groups within Lithuanian education (pupil leadership, teacher leadership, school principal leadership, and medium-level manager leadership).

Keywords: leadership, education.

JEL Classification: I20, I21, M12, M14.

Introduction

Leadership in education is a multilayered phenomenon that conceptually combines personal, organisational, and managerial characteristics and is distinguished by a variety of types (from directional to empowering leadership) and various levels of manifestation (interaction: transactional, transformational, and transcendental; function: team, operational, and strategic). After the transformation of the concept, leadership becomes separated from its formal status and on the basis of democratic principles is attributed to a broader population: it is not only managers who can be leaders, but each person working in the area of education has the potential to be a leader. The methodology of the study of the manifestations of leadership is grounded on a study of the manifestations of trends in educational leadership, whereby the same samples (representative or target) of the general totality (the same general totalities) are studied at certain time intervals using the same instruments (indicators).

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Theoretical framework

The study was based on the systemic concept of leadership, which emphasizes successful learning organizations and communities, distribution and assignment of leadership, vertically and horizontally (relationships with the community). The phenomenon of leadership in education is analyzed in the study by viewing leadership as a process rather than as a position that a person may occupy in an organization (Hogan, Curphy, 1994). The leadership process is interpreted as the ability to influence people (Vecchio, 1988) and as a personal capacity (Bass, 1985; Bennis, Nanus, 1985; House, 1997; Vecchio, 1988; Conger, Kanungo, 1988; Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, 2002; Fry, 2003, Zohar, Marshall, 2004, Csikszentmihalyi, 2003) that motivates and coordinates organization members to pursue the goals of the organization. The purpose of educational leadership is to improve each school and the entire educational system. The study is based on the assumption that systemic leadership is the improvement of individual schools and of the educational system on the whole (System leadership, OECD „Improving School Leadership“, 2007) by attracting, cherishing, and educating leaders on all levels – in class, at school, on the municipal level, and on the national level.

Cooperative leadership is becoming an underlying form of leadership. Certain conditions are required for cooperative leadership. These conditions are affected by the quality of activities carried out in different

areas, starting with formal instruments (school work programme, work plan, etc.), management and development of human resources (education, self-directed learning, competences, qualification, etc.), system efficiency, and finishing with changes at the level of provisions (approaches).

The concept of leadership in education is related to the concept of a learning organisation (Senge, 1990, 1996; Watkins, Marsick, 1996). Leadership in a learning organisation is becoming a widespread phenomenon; the learning organisation approach transforms and gives prominence to the phenomenon of leadership. Different people can be leaders in a learning organisation – this is determined by the type of problem, circumstances, competencies of the person, etc. In addition, a leader's role in solving problems may, as a result of a change in the situation, be replaced by that of a performer or executor.

In order to implement and maintain school leadership efficiently, nine main conditions must be satisfied (Huber, 2004): horizontal school management structure (single or double layers); replacement of the linear method of decision making by the cyclical method; justification of the managerial decision making process by a study of school activities; actual opportunities for schools to develop their individuality, implement innovations, and rapidly apply social, economic, and cultural innovations; simplification and liberalization of rules and regulations; internal and external exchange and support of training, consulting, and professionals to improve activities of an individual school; agreement between internal school self-assessment and external evaluation in order to implement performance feedback in the school; establishment of professional networks and learning communities in the school: collaboration of teachers, schools, and other educational institutions; and clear and transparent standards, competencies, and principles of responsibility and democracy.

Longitudinal research on changes in the manifestation of leadership in education in Lithuania will rely on the model for the study of the best practice in improving school leadership proposed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), namely by evaluating specific school management areas recommended by OECD that encourage diverse manifestation of educational leadership:

- System improvement, where school leaders take responsibility for contributing to the success not only of their own school, but working together in groups participate in common activities the results of which are oriented to achieving goals for student learning in a network of institutions (on the municipal, regional, and state level) as well as in their own school.
- School-level learning communities in which a combination of managerial, teacher, student, and parent leadership and engagement of all the staff serve for shared decision-making and collective responsibility for student learning, achievement, and continuous improvement.
- Partnerships or collaborations where leadership is distributed across individuals and groups interested in shared activities which affect achievement of goals in education.

Research methodology

Data collection - questioning survey; data analysis - descriptive analysis determined and explained. Statistical response data are stored and analysed in SPSS. The data was collected in early 2011 (January–April) when conducting internet surveys of seven target group respondents: Lithuanian general education school principals, deputy principals for education, teachers, other teaching and non-teaching staff, pupils of grades 7 to 11, parents or custodians of pupils of grades 7 to 11, and municipality specialists of education. A total of 1886 respondents were surveyed.

Lime Survey, open code software for data collection installed in the Education Improvement server, was used to conduct internet surveys. Digitalized study questionnaires were put on, and collected in this server. The collection of data was organized by 3 study coordinators.

The study questionnaire featured the following main topics that united various variables: successful learning; personal leadership orientations, attitude to leadership, initiative, and creativity; self-assessment, reflection; constant learning, ability to learn; work in school teams, relations in a school community, and participation in self-government; assessment of the activities of the school principal; responsible management; management and monitoring of education; and questions about the respondent. The topics in the questionnaires were based on respondent groups.

The trend study is the most common longitudinal study. A trend study samples different groups of respondents at different points in time from the same general population, unlike cohort and panel studies that measure the same sample group of respondents at different periods of time. Trend study provides information about any net changes in the general population (at an aggregate level), but does not reveal individual human development. The article will be focusing on the study of leadership trends in education,

when the same instruments (indicators) are used to study the same sample group(s) of the general population (representative and target) at certain periods of time.

Results

The most positive personal leadership orientations and attitudes were established among pupils and their parents, while in other target groups the most positive leadership orientation attitudes were demonstrated by deputy principals (see Figure 1).

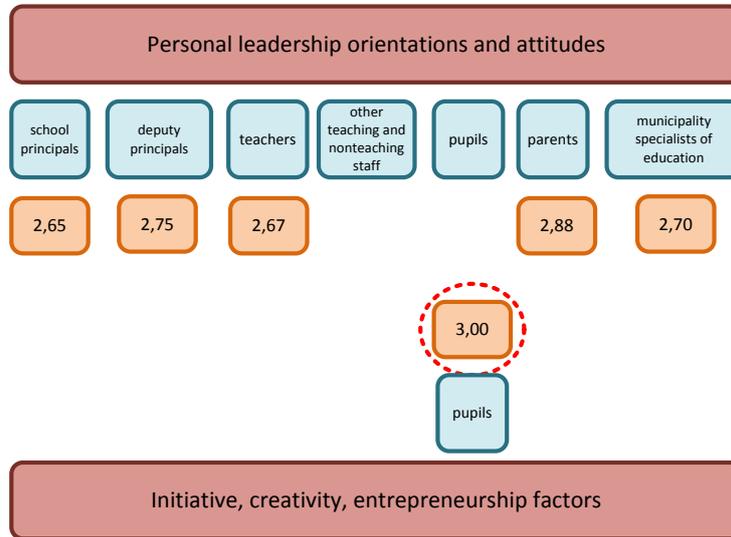


Figure 1. Personal leadership orientations and attitudes (*Mean, when were used five-point Likert from 1 to 5*)

The assessment of individual personal leadership orientation to leadership statements revealed the following trends: only one-fifth of the participating teachers would like to take a leading position in school, little more than a tenth of teachers agree with the statement that leaders disturb working activities in organisation.

Municipality specialists of education not as positive as teachers, deputy principals and school principals, agree that schools must allow teachers to work temporarily in another school while maintaining their place of work (see Figure 2).

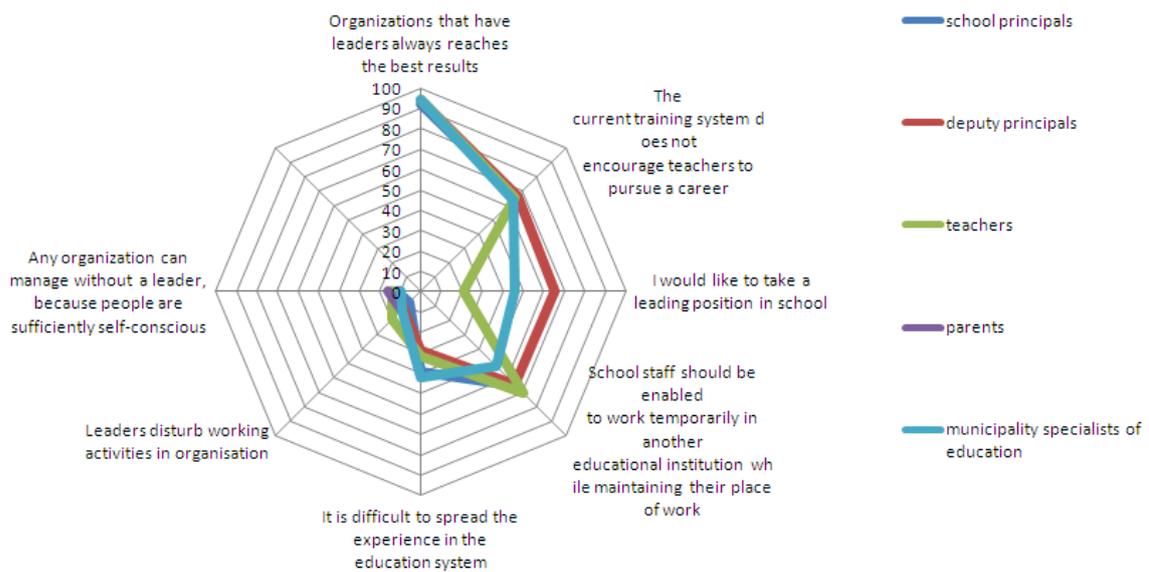


Figure 2. Dimensions of personal leadership orientations and attitudes, (%)

When assessing factors of constant learning, school principals, their deputies, and municipality specialists of education tended to agree with personal learning attitudes, while other teaching and nonteaching staff gave preference to organizational-level factors. The study data revealed that, compared to pupils, teachers view learning success more favourably (see Figure 3).

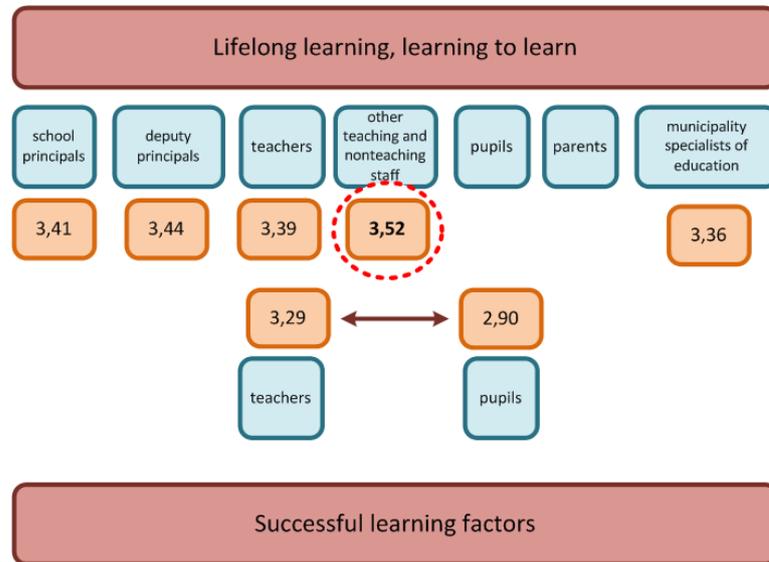


Figure 3. Lifelong learning, learning to learn, successful learning (Mean, when were used five-point Likert from 1 to 5)

Teamwork factors are viewed most favourably by other teaching and non-teaching staff and their attitudes are similar to those of school principals and deputy principals, while attitudes of teachers are more critical. This study data enables us to assume that teachers have less experience in teamwork (considering the dominating individual activities in the classroom) (see Figure 4).

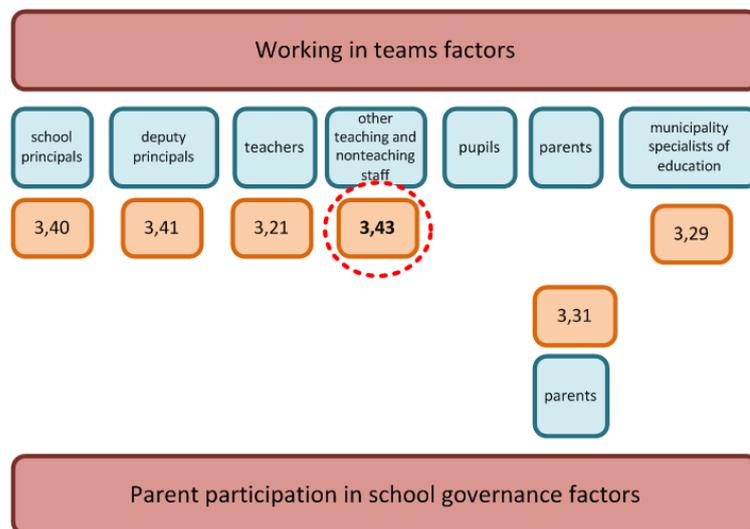


Figure 4. Working in teams (Mean, when were used five-point Likert from 1 to 5)

Assessment of individual factors of teamwork revealed that teachers are the least likely to feel good and not to fear appearing incompetent during discussions (agree 40 %), while deputy principles feel in such situations the most comfortable (agree 78 %). Municipality specialists of education feel least safe when voicing their opinions (agree 60 %) (see Figure 5).

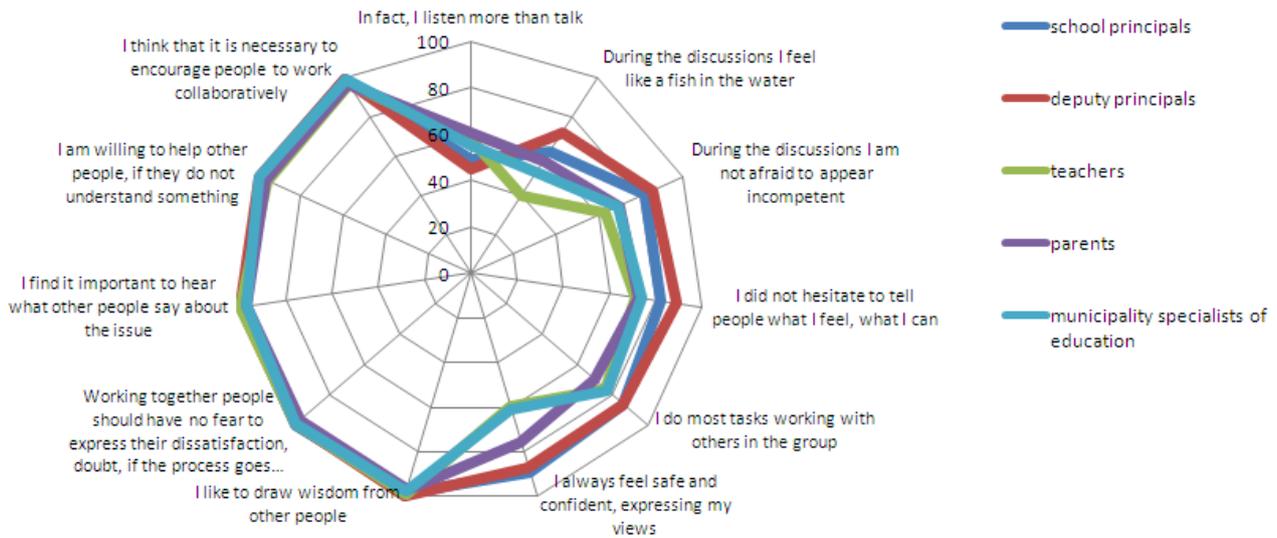


Figure 5. Dimensions of teamworking, (%)

The most distinct differences between attitudes of teachers and school principals were established when assessing the ability of principals to find a common language with individual members of school staff: this opinion was supported by almost all principals who participated in the study and only by one half of teachers. Approximately 40 per cent of school principals agree that they take care of everyday operation of their schools without making any long-term plans (the greatest number of those to agree was among principals of schools located in rural areas), while only a half of that number of teachers and deputy principals agreed with this (see Figure 6).

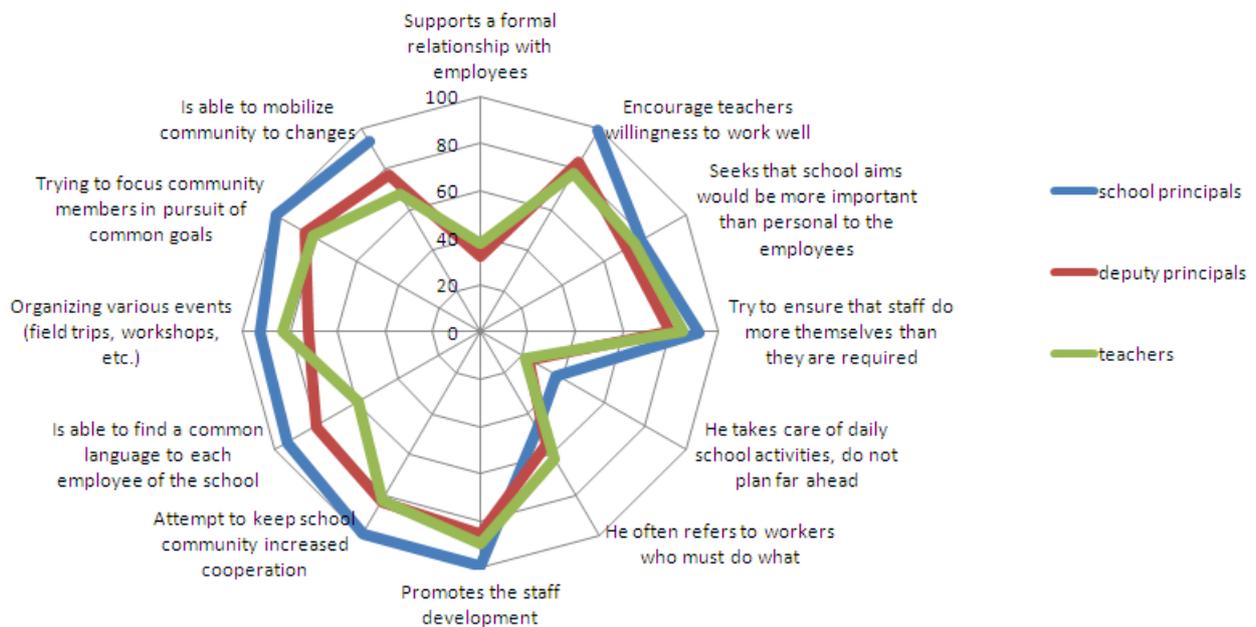


Figure 6. Dimensions of school principals leadership, (%)

The most unified opinion of teachers, principals, and deputy principals was established when assessing statements that the school principal informs teachers about the opportunities to take part in qualification development events and ensures that all teachers constantly improve their knowledge and skills. The most distinct assessment differences between teacher and school principal opinions were established during the assessment of the responsibility of the principal and of the principal's help to teachers in the classroom.

According to principals, they advise teachers on how to improve work in the classroom, inform of improper behaviour in the classroom, and initiate discussions to tackle the problems arising in the classroom; however, the opinion of teachers was the opposite (see Figure 7).

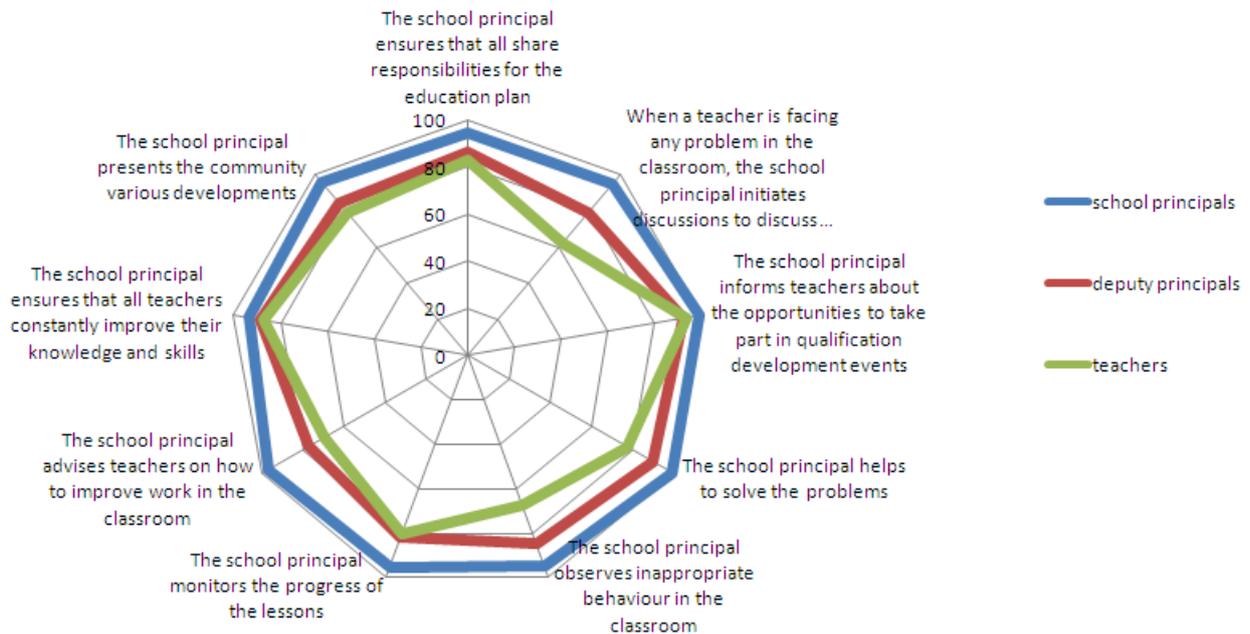


Figure 7. Dimensions of responsible leadership, (%)

When assessing leadership orientations of school principals, which were expressed in personal attitudes and traits (I am attentive and consistent, plan carefully, etc.), significant differences were established between the opinions of principals and deputy principals (who carried out self-assessment) and teachers (who assessed their principals). In almost all aspects considered, parties who occupy leading positions had a higher assessment of themselves than their assessment made by others. For instance, almost all principals agree with the attitude of creating a positive psychological environment, while only half of teachers who participated in the studies confirmed this.

Conclusions

The most positive personal leadership orientations and attitudes were established among pupils and their parents.

When assessing factors of constant learning, school principals, their deputies, and municipality specialists of education tended to agree with personal learning attitudes, while other teaching and nonteaching staff gave preference to organizational-level factors.

Teachers have less experience in teamwork (considering the dominating individual activities in the classroom).

Assessment of individual factors of teamwork revealed that teachers are the least likely to feel good and not to fear appearing incompetent during discussions, while deputy principles feel in such situations the most comfortable. Municipality specialists of education feel least safe when voicing their opinions.

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