

LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION: THE CASE OF SERBIA¹

Jelena Teodorović*

Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac, Jagodina, Serbia

Slavica Ševkušić, Dušica Malinić

Institute for Educational Research, Belgrade, Serbia

Jasmina Đelić

Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract. The paper deals with major aspects of educational leadership in Serbia. First, the legislative framework is presented which, in the last several years, has considerably focused on the roles and obligations of principals, as well as their formal training and licensing. Then, the findings of the research on principals' needs, problems and perspectives on leadership since 2000 are described. This section shows that principals are aware of the multitude of competencies that they need to have in order to professionally fulfill their duties, but that they also believe that many problems hamper them in their jobs: insufficient school funding, teacher employment policies, inconsistent legislation, poor selection procedures of principals, inadequate support from higher administrative levels and so on. Subsequently, the paper gives an overview of seminars, trainings and academic programs that comprise the current offering of professional development opportunities for principals. Among them, the master program developed within the Tempus project and the official state program developed by the Institute for the Improvement of Education are described in more detail. Finally, the authors present a set of recommendations for the improvement of educational leadership in Serbia.

Keywords: leadership in education, school principals, Serbia, professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

The demand for better and more efficient leadership in education has consistently been part of the educational reform programs throughout the world. At the beginning of the 21st century, the interest in this topic rose rapidly due to the widespread belief, based on research findings, that the achievement of pupils is significantly related to the quality of leadership. These findings show that the effects of leadership on learning are indirect and also that, among all the factors related to schooling, by its contribution to pupil achievement leadership is second only to the quality of teaching (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004).

During the last several years, significant strides have been made towards improving educational leadership in Serbia, from providing legal framework for development of educational leadership to providing training through professional development courses and preparatory programs to creating resources to support principals in their everyday endeavors. The aim of this paper is to present the most important initiatives and activities undertaken in this area. Also, based on the results of research, contemporary literature and experiences from other educational systems in which leadership in education is highly developed, we aim to formulate recommendations for further improvement of leadership in education in Serbia.

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

Several important documents regulate principalship in Serbia. Two main legislative pieces are the *Strategy of development of education in Serbia 2020* (2012) and the *Law on the basics of system of education* (2017). Other relevant documents are: *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions* (2013), *Standards of the quality of work of educational institutions* (2018), and the *Rulebook on the training program and the license exam for the principals of educational institutions* (2018).

The *Strategy* declares that principals have a key role in ensuring the proper functioning of educational institutions, quality of work in the institutions, quality of teaching and learning, and quality of pupil achievement. It also states that the following actions need to be undertaken in order to improve principalship (*Strategy of development of education in Serbia 2020*, 2012): 1) depoliticize the selection of principals, as political parties often influence the selection and work of principals, neglecting professional criteria and standards; 2) make the legislative documents more precise in

the area of principalship, especially stressing the role of the principal as a pedagogical leader of the institution; 3) create the preparatory training for principals and, when selecting candidates for principalship, take into consideration their training success and previous professional experiences; also create a system of continuous professional development for principals; 4) devise the evaluation system for principals, where evaluation is to be based on success of a principal's professional development, success and standing of his/her institution, performance of the institution in external evaluation, and pupils' perception of the principal's success. Also, the *Strategy* stresses that the selection of principals is done at school and principals are selected by the teachers in school on the basis of their program proposal. While the *Strategy* clearly states the importance of principals in the education system and the need to improve their quality, it somewhat fails to more clearly and concretely delineate principals' roles. Furthermore, action plans that were derived from the *Strategy* did not include any activities related to principals.

According to the *Law on the basics of system of education* (2017) the principal is responsible for legality of the work and successful functioning of the entire institution. The principal is accountable to the school board and the minister. The *Law* lists 23 principal's duties which can roughly be categorized into four areas: 1) school's pedagogical activities; 2) financial, legal and administrative activities; 3) school quality activities, and 4) cooperation with various stakeholders. There are numerous reasons for which the minister can dismiss the principal from his/her principalship, from failing to maintain necessary documentation of the institution to being unable to ensure that the institution fulfills all the educational programs to disobeying the orders of the higher authorities (Article 126, ZOSOV, *Sl. glasnik RS*, br. 88/2017 and 27/2018).

In Serbia, principals should satisfy the following requirements: 1) pre-2005, a 4-year bachelor degree or post-2005, master degree; in both cases the bachelor degree needs to fit with the type of school in which one wants to be a principal², 2) a license for a teacher or school counselor, 3) principal's training and license, and 4) at least eight years of working experience in school as a teacher or school counselor (*Law on the basics of system of education*, 2017). The principal's license has to be obtained up to two years after being appointed principal. As of this point, the license is designed as permanent,

² This means that a teacher of mechanics (with a bachelor degree in mechanical engineering) in the vocational high school cannot become a principal of elementary school or pre-school, or that a classroom teacher (with a bachelor degree in classroom teaching) cannot become a principal of either academic or vocational high school or pre-school.

except when the principal has been charged for infractions regarding discrimination, violence, political activity in school and similar infractions.

The principal is selected after an open invitation has been issued by the school board. Candidates apply directly to the school. The school board forms an in-school commission which reviews the candidates' documentation and fulfillment of legal requirements, interviews the candidates and obtains opinions of the candidates from the school's teachers' council. If the candidate has previously been the principal, the commission is supposed to take into account their prior work as judged by the regional school authority's education counselor. The commission submits its report on the candidates to the school board, which then deliberates on and makes its selection of a candidate and submits this to the ministry. The minister has the final say in confirmation/refusal of the school's selection and is not obliged to select the school's preferred candidate (*Law on the basics of system of education, 2017*).

The principal is selected for four years. Principals can apply for an unlimited number of mandates, but their prior position in school is held for two mandates. After two mandates, if a principal is not selected for any consequent mandate or no longer wants to be a principal, s/he is offered available teaching position in the system or, if there is no such position, is treated the same way as other employees who are no longer needed³ (*Law on the basics of system of education, 2017*).

In comparison to the previous laws on the basics of education system, the *Law* of 2017 specifies elements of the quality of education in the Republic of Serbia (a total of 13), two of which directly refer to principals' competencies and principals' professional development, thus giving more importance to principalship than before. However, in comparison to previous laws, the education system became more centralized. In the area of principalship, this is apparent in that: 1) the *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions* (see below) are no longer adopted by the National Education Council (NEC), but the minister, and 2) the minister appoints a principal, whereas before the minister only approved the school board's decision on the candidate. In comparison to the pre-2017 situation, the length of work experience prior to becoming a principal increased from five to eight years, and the principal's previous job became secure for two principal's mandates instead of one. Finally, in the earlier versions of the law, the principals' obligations were presented in 11 items, while in the 2017 *Law*, there are even 23 items listing principals' duties.

³ This usually means becoming redundant, a 'technological surplus', who either gets other duties within the system or is dismissed with an appropriate severance package.

In 2013 the NEC adopted *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions*, which were created by the National Institute for Improvement of Education – IIE (*Sl. glasnik RS*, br. 38/2013). The latter is also in charge of preparation and realization of the training for principals and the licensing exam for principals (*Law on the basics of system of education*, 2017). The Standards consist of six areas shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions

1.	Leading the educational processes in school
2.	Planning, organizing and controlling the work of the institution
3.	Monitoring and improving the work of employees
4.	Developing cooperation with parents/guardians, school board, representative union and community
5.	Financial and administrative management of the work of the institution
6.	Ensuring the legality of the work of the institution

Each of these areas contains numerous indicators which detail the key activities for which the principal must be qualified as to successfully lead the institution and ensure the achievement of its goals. The purpose of the *Standards* is to ensure and improve the quality of work of principals, thus contributing to the achievement of general outcomes of education and training defined by law (*Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions*, 2013). *Standards* primarily serve as the basis for the development of principal training, license exam and self-evaluation of principals.

Standards of the quality of work of educational institutions, enacted in 2018, which are used in self-evaluation and external evaluation of educational institutions, contain one Standard area – Organization of schoolwork and human and material resource management – which is usually taken to assess principals' work. The standards in this Standard area are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Standards of Area of quality No. 6

1.	Leadership of the principal is in the function of improving the work of the school.
2.	The school operates a system for monitoring and evaluating the quality of work.
3.	Leadership of the principal enables the development of the school.
4.	Human resources are in the function of the quality of school work.
5.	Material and technical resources are used functionally.
6.	The school supports initiative and develops entrepreneurial spirit.

The *Standards* represent a revision of an earlier version of Standards from 2012 (*Sl. glasnik RS*, br. 7/2011 and 68/2012). No school has yet been evaluated using this new set of standards.

Finally, the newest document regulating the principalship in Serbia is the *Rulebook on the training program and the license exam for the principals of educational institutions* (2018). The *Rulebook* details the training program in accordance with the *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions*, training providers, method of realization, method and procedure of taking the exam, assessment of the exam, and other topics. The program lasts between two and 13 days and is delivered in two ways: interactive face-to-face training in groups of up to 30 participants (up to four days) and individual online training (up to nine days). The *Rulebook* specifies different training for the following categories of candidates:

1. Principals of successful schools (those with the highest mark, i.e., with mark 4 on external evaluation⁴ or those with mark 3, but with areas referring to principal's work marked with a 4) with at least six years of principalship experience: two days of face-to-face training;
2. Principals of less successful schools (those with lower marks on external evaluation), principals with less than six years of principalship experience, and principal "trainees" (teachers and counselors who wish to obtain a principal license): four days of face-to-face and nine days of individual online training;

⁴ This is the mark for the quality of work of the institution obtained against *Standards of the quality of work of educational institutions*.

3. Principals who have a master, specialist, or doctoral degree in the field of education policy, management in education, or leadership in education: two days of face-to-face training and up to nine days of individual online training, depending on the judgement of the commission.

After finishing the training program, candidates prepare a portfolio documenting their competencies and report on the research they have undertaken in their institution. Portfolios and reports are presented before a commission appointed by the minister or provincial secretary and consisting of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MESTD), IIE and Institute for Education Quality and Evaluation (IEQE) representatives.

CURRENT STATE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Overview of research on educational leadership in Serbia

For the purpose of this paper, a review of relevant research conducted since 2000 to date has been provided. We selected those studies which were aimed at examining the problems that principals face in practice, their roles and tasks in the school context, and the competencies they need to successfully accomplish their function.

In the study about attitudes of primary and secondary school principals in Serbia towards important aspects of their work such as development planning, building the image of the school, organization of work, and the role of principals as managers, the authors concluded that principals were aware that they needed a high level of professional and social competence, and that they were ready to professionally improve themselves (Maksić, Đurišić-Bojanović & Avramović, 2002). In the opinion of the respondents, it was important that the school principal be a role model for associates, have a high level of work energy, be well informed, possess good skills for communication and conflict resolution, be persistent in the implementation of decisions, clear in his demands, and have high moral integrity.

In the framework of the international TIMSS study (2003 and 2007), primary school principals in Serbia assessed how much time they devoted to different roles and tasks. In the TIMSS 2003 research, the results showed that they mostly dealt with the instructional leadership, to a lesser degree with public relations and finance, then with administrative tasks, and least with monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and other employees (Maksić & Đurišić-Bojanović, 2005). In comparison to 2003, in the second

cycle of research conducted in 2007, principals estimated that they were significantly more involved in administrative work and employee supervision, while they devoted significantly less time to pedagogical issues (Đurišić-Bojanović & Maksić, 2011). This finding was surprising because, since the educational reform began, schools were expected to have greater autonomy and the principal's focus was supposed to shift from the role of executor of centralized tasks to the role of leader and entrepreneur in the local community (Đurišić-Bojanović & Maksić, 2006).

In order to stimulate the professionalization of leaders in education, a survey of educational needs was conducted on a sample of 200 principals of primary and secondary schools in Serbia (Alibabić, 2007). A modified version of the Management Training Development Needs Analysis instrument, which has 35 items (activities of the school principal), was utilized. Respondents rated the weight, importance and frequency of these activities on 5-point Likert scales. According to the principals' assessments, for the 25 activities it was necessary to organize continuous formal and informal training, as the principals perceived them as difficult, important and frequent. Also, it was found that activities such as talks with students, employees and parents, pedagogical monitoring and counseling were highly ranked, which means that educational programs for principals, in addition to managerial, must include pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Within the international survey study TALIS 2013, issues of the professional preparation and development of primary school principals in Serbia were investigated on a sample of 186 principals (Petrović, 2015). The results indicated that professional preparation for school principals was not adequate. More precisely, most of principals in Serbia completed some form of accredited training for teachers, but a significantly smaller number of them completed training in the field of school administration or training for managers. Related to the principals' participation in different professional development activities (mentoring, research activities within professional networks, courses, conferences, etc.) in a year prior to this study, principals in Serbia were below the TALIS survey average. Also, nearly one quarter of principals did not participate in any professional development. Among the main obstacles, the principals stated the following: high cost of professional training programs, lack of incentives for participation in professional development activities, lack of suitable offers for professional development, and lack of support from employers.

Starting from the premise that in order to build support for the professional development of leaders in education it is necessary to first examine their real problems and needs, a mix-methods research was conducted within

the Tempus project “Master program in educational leadership” (EdLead) in 2014.⁵ The quantitative study focused on competencies of Serbian principals in the area of educational leadership. The sample consisted of 200 elementary and secondary school principals from different regions of Serbia. The questionnaire designed for this purpose contained 82 items using a 4-point Likert scale which was focused on principals’ perceptions in respect of: 1) how important they perceived specific tasks to be part of their overall duties; and 2) the extent to which they perceived the need to improve their competencies in order to perform each task more effectively. The items were based on the indicators found in *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions*. The results indicated that over two-thirds of the principals perceived that all tasks specified in the questionnaire represented important professional duties of principals, and stated that they either *mostly* need or *very much* need to improve their knowledge and skills in these tasks (Teodorović, Ševkušić, Stanković, Radišić, Džinović & Malinić, 2015a; 2015b). It seemed that domains related to financial and operational management of the institution were the most worrisome for the principals (Radišić, Stanković & Malinić, 2015).

The aim of the qualitative research was to gain insight into the barriers faced by school principals in Serbia and the competencies they needed to improve their performance. The focus group method was applied with principals, teachers and school counselors from pre-schools, primary and secondary schools in Serbia (ten focus groups). Also, there were seven in-depth interviews with heads of the regional school authorities of the MESTD, IIE, IEQE and representatives of the local government. Results of the qualitative analysis indicated two broad categories of barriers to effective school leadership in Serbia: 1) barriers related to the system as a whole (insufficient and insecure school funding; employment policy and evaluation of teachers’ work; inadequate selection of school principals and lack of their continuing professional development; legislative issues; a mismatch between the work of higher-level educational institutions; negative image of educational institutions in society); and 2) barriers related to the school as an organization (that come from principals, teachers, parents and other school staff). The analysis of participants’ responses about competencies which school principals need to have for effective school leadership identified a large number of skills and knowledge in various fields: instructional leadership, development and management of human resources, organizational development, communication competencies, knowledge of the education system and education policies, law and administration, financial management, project

⁵ See more details on the TEMPUS EdLead project at: <http://edlead.pefja.kg.ac.rs/>.

management, establishing identity as a leader (Teodorović, Ševkušić, Stanković, Radišić, Džinović & Malinić, 2014).

One more qualitative study with 20 primary school principals in Serbia was undertaken (Raković, 2018; Raković, O'Donoghue & Clarke, 2019). The aim of the study (based on in-depth interviews) was to generate theory about the perspectives of principals on their work. Data was collected in 2015. The qualitative analyses of data generated three levels of their perspectives: macro, mezzo, and micro. At the macro/societal level, the biggest problem they recognized was poor selection procedures of principals. At the mezzo level, principals' perspectives included their views on governance in the education system and related issues of accountability and autonomy. They felt unsupported in the implementation of educational changes and lacked trust in the central authority. And, at the micro level, their perspectives included their own roles and professional learning. The principals thought that the education system in Serbia required them to unreflectively be the implementers of state policies and also entrepreneurs helping to provide funds for their schools. Also, principals stated that the expectation to be entrepreneurs was not sufficiently supported by adequate professional learning.

Based on research review, we can conclude that in the past two decades the principals of educational institutions in Serbia have pointed to some of the main obstacles for effective leading of schools, and that they expressed the need to improve their professional skills in order to successfully perform numerous and complex tasks and roles. However, the first initiatives related to the system support for professionalisation of principalship did not appear in Serbia before 2013.

Overview of preparatory programs and support activities for principals in Serbia

The first seminars for principals, as in-service training, emerged in the early 2000s, but they were not long-term⁶. The topics of the seminar were related to all the important aspects of the principals' work: organization and planning of work in the school, skills of successful communication, how to build a good image of the school, and how to incorporate entrepreneurship into the functioning of the school (Ivanović, 2000; Maksić, Đurišić-Bojanović & Avramović, 2002). In-service training programs for principals in the IIE's Catalog of the accredited programs since 2006 show that until the adoption

⁶ The analysis of pedagogical journals published in the period from 1950 to 2000 showed that topics dealing with leadership in education were of interest to researchers and practitioners in that period as well.

of the *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions* in 2013, there were very few special training programs for principals, but that principals were mentioned as a target group in most in-service teacher programs. In the Catalog for the period 2014-2016, there were 16 programs in the field of “Leading, management and legislature”, three of which were intended exclusively for principals and deputy principals (Pavlović & Žunić-Pavlović, 2015).

In 2018, after the *Rulebook on the training program and the license exam for the principals of educational institutions* was enacted, and at the initiative of the MESTD, the IIE started designing official training for principals. The content of the program consists of several topics (modules) related to *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions*. Additionally, training is envisioned to help principals prepare their portfolio and undertake research in their schools. The mandatory part of the portfolio consists of basic information about the candidate and evidence that his/her leadership is based on regulations, mainly on *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions*. An optional part of portfolio presents specific knowledge, talents, interests, and achievements of the candidate. Topics appropriate for research that the candidates undertake are: analysis of candidate’s own work, analysis of candidate’s school’s work, current or planned projects, and candidate’s professional interests. Chosen topics needs to have practical relevance for candidate’s institution and should be in the function of development of quality of education improvement of work efficiency or increase in accountability of employees and pupils. A two-day pilot training for 362 category 1 principals (those with more than six years of principalship experience and the highest marks on their school’s external evaluation) was held in the period from November 2017 to October 2018. After the *Rulebook* was enacted, this training was recognized as formal training for this group of principals. Scenarios for additional training days (in-person and online) are being developed. Training for other categories of principals was planned to commence in September 2019. The first license exam was organized in November 2018, and all appointed principals are expected to pass a license exam by the end of 2021.

A master program “Leadership in education” was developed in 2016 as the main goal of the TEMPUS project EdLead.⁷ The program was based on the comprehensive needs analysis presented in the previous section, a review of educational leadership literature and extensive overview of preparation

⁷ The program was developed jointly by staff from four largest state universities in Serbia: University of Kragujevac, University of Belgrade, University of Novi Sad, and University of Niš, with valuable input from several other domestic and EU institutions, notably Institute of educational research from Belgrade, Serbia.

programs for principals around the world. The target group for the master program is mostly principals, but also vice-principals, school team leaders, school counselors, and employees in municipalities and regional school authorities. The master program was structured according to the three cycle system (60 ECTS) and consists of four mandatory courses: 1) Introduction to leadership in education; 2) Leading educational institutions; 3) Pedagogical leadership; and 4) Developing people in organization; and five elective courses (from which students select two): 5) Partnerships and communication; 6) Finances, law and administration in education; 7) Education policies and change management; 8) Educational systems in comparative perspective; and 9) Data and project management. There is also mandatory research practice, during which students carry out action research in their institutions. Finally, the master thesis focuses on the application of student knowledge and skills to relevant topics and problems in educational leadership. The courses are theoretically grounded, but are designed to be highly practical, interactive, and relevant to work in schools. Therefore, teaching methods consist of lectures, discussions, workshops, case studies, video clip analyses, text analyses, comparative analyses, practical assignments, etc. An important feature of the program is video-conferencing, which transmits lectures to remote locations.⁸ The program aims to improve principals' knowledge and skills for real life, but also to prepare them for the license exam. For example, half of the master program credits (30 ECTS contained in courses 2–6) equip students with competencies required by the *Standards of the competencies of principals of educational institutions*. Also, one of the course assignments helps students start to prepare their portfolio, while action research and the master's thesis help them with research needed for the license exam.

Along with the development of the master program, five professional development (PD) courses for principals were developed in the TEMPUS EdLead project, some of which were accredited by IIE. These PD courses are categorized as courses for professional development of teachers, educators and school counselors, not specifically for principals, as there is still no rule-book that defines what in-service training for principals should include. The training lasts from two to seven days and is focused on the following areas: Leading educational institutions, Developing of people in organizations, and Action research. PD courses were aimed to be as similar as possible to the select courses in the master program, so that they could be partly interchangeable. A total of 195 participants attended those PD courses throughout 2016 and 2017. A total of 33 days of PD courses was held. There were

⁸ Two identical master programs, one at University of Kragujevac and another at University of Novi Sad, were accredited in January 2016 and 55 students in total were enrolled at those two institutions in October 2016.

also 316 additional principals of schools with marks 1 or 2 on external evaluation who attended the PD course Leading educational institutions.

Finally, there were additional activities that supported and promoted the field of educational leadership in Serbia. We highlight some of those that were produced within the TEMPUS EdLead program: 1) a resource center was established – an online platform presenting international documents, laws and rulebooks, literature reviews and research findings, meant to help principals in their everyday work; 2) a policy brief was formulated for policymakers with clear and concise recommendations on the needed improvements in educational leadership in Serbia; 3) a handbook for principals titled *Steering the quality of work of educational institutions* was created, with articles giving overviews, practical tools and recommendations regarding some of the regular leadership obligations of principals (Ševkušić, Malinić & Teodorović, 2017).

VIEW TOWARD THE FUTURE

Although important strides were made toward improving educational leadership in Serbia during the last several years, there remain quite a few important undertakings to be considered in the future. These recommendations are based on contemporary literature on educational leadership, the practices of countries where leadership in education is highly developed, as well as on the results of research conducted in Serbia.

Initial training. State official initial training should be more extensive, with time in between training days to allow for practical application of what was learnt. The master program should receive state funding in order to continue to attract enthusiastic and motivated principals who desire a deeper study of educational leadership. Generally, master programs in education need to be recognized as a form of professional development of employees in education and thus be eligible for funding by local self-governments; this would significantly improve the current demand of professional development and enable more principals and other employees in education to partake in life-long learning.

Selection of principals. More stringent criteria for selection of principals should be defined in order to improve leadership in Serbian schools. Having such criteria dependent on qualifications and competencies would be one of the ways of reducing politicization of principalship. Talented teachers and school counselors should be actively recruited to become principals; in some countries (for example, in Singapore) this practice is an important

step toward successful principalship (Barber, Whelan & Clark, 2010). The recruitment could be done by the principals, local self-governments and/or regional school authorities. Motivated and effective teachers who are successful school team members should be groomed over the years and given increasingly more extensive duties in school, as well as preparatory training. There could even be a requirement in future of a person having to be a vice-principal prior to becoming a principal.

Induction with mentoring. Induction program needs to be prepared and implemented in schools with a new principal. Regional school authorities could select principal mentors – principals who are experienced, lead schools with the highest marks on external evaluation, and who have gone through mentorship training. These mentors could be recognized and motivated by the system through increased salary, enhanced leadership/career progression opportunities and/or reduction of the more mundane activities in school.

In-service training of principals is not yet established as there is still no rulebook that defines what in-service training for principals should include. Production of such a rulebook and creation of a pool of adequate PD courses aimed at principals should be a relatively easy accomplishment.

Career progression. There should be a serious contemplation in Serbia on how to retain and utilize the best principals in the system because there is no versatility of career path for principals: they can either apply to be re-selected in subsequent mandates or return to teaching. The most effective principals could progress toward becoming mentors to other principals, be assigned more difficult duties (such as leading low-achieving schools) or become resources for other schools, local self-governments and regional school authorities in a variety of important tasks (external evaluation, school development planning, formation of school teams, etc).

Attractiveness of the profession. Currently, the position of principal is not attractive because principals' salaries are low, obligations are many, and the profession does not have an established career ladder. In addition to raising salaries, distributed leadership should be made more formal, with more actors within the school (pedagogical teams, accountant, school secretary, school counselors) taking on more responsibilities. Establishing a variety of career paths for principals, such as described above, would also make principalship a more appealing profession.

Autonomy of schools. Research showed that principals need more autonomy to lead educational institutions. There are limitations in the area of financial, organizational and pedagogical autonomy of educational institutions in Serbia, and principals are not provided with sufficiently strong

leadership mechanisms that they could engage for the purpose of improving school performance. The recommendation for education policy would be to considerably enhance the autonomy of educational institutions in pedagogical, organizational and financial terms.

Accountability mechanisms. In spite of the recent developments in the area of licensing of the principals, there are still no strong professional criteria for the selection of principals and measurement and evaluation of their work, nor a defined and adequate system for rewarding and sanctioning principals for their achieved results. Likewise, principals claim that there is no accountability for teachers' work, which seriously hampers their ability to exercise their pedagogical function and stir improvements of teaching in schools (Teodorović, Stanković, Bodroža, Milin & Đerić, 2016). Even though there are mechanisms that principals can use to influence teachers (e.g., reduction of teacher's salary in certain situations), principals' perceptions indicate that the development of more sophisticated and well thought out accountability systems for principals and teachers should be among the priorities of the education policy in Serbia, while simultaneously developing adequate professional support for principals and teachers.

Democratization of school leadership. Bearing in mind that education itself is expected to shape new generations into responsible citizens who can build a functioning democratic and humane society, the democratic climate and democratic governance of schools are in this sense the utmost condition. The priority for education policy in this field should be to define, promote, and encourage such school structures, procedures and values that pose a democratic culture as the supreme value framework for the functioning of the entire education system, as well as any particular educational institution.

Keeping in mind that all actions and measures that are being implemented with the aim of improving the leadership practices in education should be evidence-based, research in this field should be intensified. Future research should, above all, focus on examining the effects of existing training, as well as on examining the satisfaction of the principals with the quality and usefulness of the training, in order to further improve them.

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