# BALANCING SCHOOL AUTONOMY AND HEAD TEACHERS' ACCOUNTABILITY FOR SCHOOLS IN SLOVAKIA

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*Abstract.* The paper presents an analysis of the changes which have been introduced into the legislation on education in Slovakia. The paper, in its first part, presents an analysis of the transformation process which the system of education in Slovakia has undergone during the period of the last three decades. Within this process a great number of responsibilities have passed from the central authorities to local municipalities and individual schools. The changed conditions and the increased autonomy of schools meant that schools had to face new tasks and challenges. The new demands required new professional competences and calls for the professionalization of school leaders became part of a wider movement for school reforms. How the professional development of the school leaders is currently solved in Slovakia, what kind of education primary and secondary school head teachers are obliged to undergo, who are the main providers of this education, how it is provided, and how it is structured as to its content are described in the second part of the paper. The last part of the paper presents main results of research aimed at an evaluation of the scope of autonomy given to schools and powers given to head teachers from the point of view of an optimal amount of this autonomy in relation to actual needs and requirements of the head teachers.

*Keywords*: school legislation, school autonomy, powers of head teachers, head teachers appointment process, functional education of head teachers

## INTRODUCTION

Teacher shortages are one of the most serious problems of primary and secondary schools in Slovakia. There are two main reasons of this phenomenon. One is the aging of in-service teachers and the second one is the low attractiveness of a teacher profession. The result is that numbers of teacher novices incoming to practice are much lower than numbers of teachers retiring from the job (CVTI, 2016). This discrepancy is increasing from year to year since a significant number of in-service teachers leave their jobs due to the low attractiveness of the profession and low teacher incomes. Therefore, strategies to increase teacher retention are very important. As results

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of some research studies show (LPI, 2017), head teacher leadership plays a significant role in teacher turnover. It is one of the crucial determinants for teachers to stay either in a school or in the profession. While teachers directly influence pupils in their classrooms, head teachers impact both pupils and teachers in their school, promote organizational growth, influence changes, and create a positive school climate and culture. Since, from this point of view, head teachers are a key to teacher and pupil success, it should be important for both national and local authorities to develop policies that support head teachers throughout their careers.

The legislative changes introduced in Slovakia after the political changes in 1989 have changed the status of head teachers significantly as well as the scope of their duties and responsibilities. The key point of these changes is the autonomy given to schools and their leaders. A question is how this changed autonomy of schools is reflected in practice, what is the impact of these changes on school operations and the performance of the head teacher position, how professional development of head teachers in the new conditions is supported, and how head teachers perceive adequacy of the level of autonomy the schools and their leaders were given.

## MAIN LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Political changes in Eastern Europe at the end of the last century initiated transformation processes of the systems of education in these countries, and Slovakia was not an exception. The whole system of education in Slovakia, including school leadership, has undergone significant changes during the period of the last three decades. In the case of school leadership, the introduced changes were influenced by new conditions in which schools were operating. Schools obtained autonomous status, which meant that a great number of responsibilities were passed from the central authorities to local municipalities and individual schools. The objective was to empower school communities by giving schools greater decision-making authority over key aspects of their operation such as staffing and budgets.

The increased autonomy of schools meant that schools and their head teachers started to face new tasks and challenges. Calls for the professionalization of head teachers became part of a wider movement for school reforms. Previously, a head teacher was a practicing teacher with added technical and administrative duties, whilst from that time a head teacher was to be a professional, a full-time manager responsible for developing instructional, human, financial and physical resources to ensure the sustainable quality of the education offered and provided by the school.

The School Management and Governance Reform paid increased attention to ensuring the participation of local authorities, municipalities and regions in the administration of schools. This was specified and legalized by the so-called competency law of 2001, *Act No. 416/2001 on the Transition of Certain Powers from the State Administration to the Municipalities and Higher Territories* – the self-governing regions, and the Act of 2003, *Act No. 596/2003 on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government*.

Based on the given laws, the administration of schools and school facilities of local importance (kindergartens, elementary schools, language schools, school children's clubs, interest centres, leisure centres) was transferred to *municipalities*. The municipality controls their management and allocates funds to them, not only to the schools it establishes, but also to private schools and church schools in the municipality. For the transfer of state administration, funds are allocated to municipalities from the state budget. Municipalities run the administration of schools at secondary level while the head teacher leads this administration at primary level. The municipality appoints and recalls the head teachers of schools and school facilities belonging to its administration. The representatives of the municipality, along with the school council and the head teacher discuss the concept of school development, the budget of the school and the material and technical conditions of the school and school facilities, the municipality's requirements for the care of pupils and a report on the results of school education. In the municipality or in a number of municipalities with a common municipal office, the *educational authority* provides professional activities in the areas of education, youth, and physical culture.

The administration of secondary schools and school facilities surpassing local importance was transferred to *superior administrative units* (*self-governing regions*). Self-governing regions establish and abolish secondary schools and school facilities that are being managed by them, and appoint and recall the head teachers of schools and school facilities that are being managed by them. Besides that they carry on economic supervision of the funds allocated to schools they establish, and provide meals and accommodation for pupils of secondary schools of which they are founders.

The *Act on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government* legalizes the strengthening of democratization in the management of education not only through the competences of local and regional self-government in management but also through the legalization of the broader competences of school councils – self-governing bodies of education. The implementation of self-government through a school council began in the 1990s by the adoption of the *Act on the State Administration in Education*

*and School Self-Government* of 1990 (Act No. 542/1990), in which the school council is defined as an autonomous body for the promotion of local interests of parents and educators in the field of upbringing and education. However, its function was defined only broadly, not specifically. The specification and particularization of its function is defined by the Act of 2003. It characterizes the school council as an advisory self-governmental unit of the school, which takes a stance on current school problems, promotes the interests of parents, pupils and teaching staff of the school and school facility, and performs the function of public control of the school`s activities, but also conducts selection procedures for the head teacher, proposes candidates for appointment to this function, and also takes a stance on the conceptual intentions of the school and its school management budget.

In general, a head teacher is appointed and recalled by the founder of the school upon the proposal of the respective school council, on the basis of competition. The competition is announced by the founder through press or other mass media. Applicants for the head teacher position must fulfil the following requirements:

- qualification requirements of education for the given type of school or kind of school facility,
- at least five years teaching experience,
- first qualification exam including a defence of a written thesis, so-called attestation,
- personal and moral integrity requirements,
- good command of Slovak language in official contacts (members of national minorities),
- after appointment to the function the successful applicant must complete the appropriate form of in-service training (so-called functional education, which has to be completed within three years of appointment).

In addition to these requirements, each applicant is asked to submit to the selection committee his/her own proposal of a school development concept.

The selection committee consists of members of the respective school council and two other members, one delegated by the municipality and the other one by the State School Inspection. The members of the school council are elected representatives from school staff and parents, and delegates from the founder of the school are the municipal self-government and the social partners of the school. The school council usually has 5–11 members. In the case of an 11-member school council, two members represent pedagogical staff of the school, another member comes from the pool of non-pedagogical

school employees, four members are representatives of pupils` parents, and four representatives come from the school founder.

The nominee principal concludes the contract with the founder of the school for the period of five years. The number of periods in the head teacher position is not limited.

Responding to reflection on the application of procedures in practice, the *Act on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government* was twice amended in 2017. Introduced changes relate to a head teacher position and the repeated possibility to stand for a head teacher selection if the applicant is a person who was invited from this position.

Among the reasons which make it impossible for a recalled head teacher to reapply for this post was also recall because of a breach of obligations and legal enactments. This restriction was set without any exception, including violations like delayed property admission submission or violation of the ban on business due to negligence. The law amendment established that, if the legal violations were not serious, it was possible to reapply for the head teacher position.

The second change resolved absence of reasons for a head teacher's dismissal. In practice it was common that one of two different approaches was applied, mainly if a head teacher resigned from his/her function. One way this situation was solved was that the founder acknowledged this decision, without performing any further legal acts. Another approach to solving the same situation was that the founder, due to the absence of any regulations, recalled the head teacher after his/her resignation. To make these situations uniform, in relation to head teacher performance termination the following clauses (possibilities) were specified in the relevant paragraph: expiration of the mandate, resigning from the post of a head teacher based on a written announcement addressed to the school founder, recall from a head teacher's post, validity of the decision of the court on a ban on the capacity to enter into legal acts, elimination of the school from the system of education, and death or death presumption.

If a head teacher resigns from his/her position, his/her performance of the head teacher function will be terminated on the date of delivery of his/her written announcement to the founder, if a later date is not stated. Resignation cannot be withdrawn.

To be nominated for a head teacher position, i.e. to be a successful candidate, the applicant must gain absolute majority of the selection committee votes. If some members of the selection committee are not present at the selection, the number of the necessary votes does not decrease (the absolute majority only of the present members of the selection committee is not

sufficient for election). If no applicant obtains the absolute majority, the competition has to be repeated.

The scope of rights and duties of a school head teacher are set by the *Act on State Administration and School Self-Governance in Education*. A head teacher is responsible for observance of generally binding rules, study plans and syllabi, for professional and educational standard of educational work, for effective use of funds allotted for provision of the school activities, and for property management. The other duties of a head teacher are set by the *Work Order for educational staff and other employees of the schools and school facilities* issued by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic in 2010. These duties are:

- to manage, control and regularly evaluate the work results of school employees,
- to get subordinate employees familiar with organisation rules and labour legal rules,
- to create favourable working conditions and ensure security and health protection at work,
- to use equipment and funds obtained economically and purposefully,
- to provide for remuneration of employees according to legal rules and collective agreements,
- to create favourable conditions for elevating professional level of employees and for fulfilment of their social needs,
- to secure that no violation of working discipline takes place,
- to adopt early and efficient measures for protection of the employer's property.

In addition to these duties a head teacher fulfils the basic teaching load with consideration to the type of school and number of classes, or pupils. The scope of the load is set by the *Government Regulation 422/2009 establishing scope of direct teaching and direct educational activities of teaching staff* as *amended by Government Regulation 433/2012.* The basic load of head teachers ranges from 3 to 23 hours.

In accordance with *Education Act* amendments and supplements (*Act on the Education and Training and on the Change and Supplement to Some Acts as Amended by Subsequent Provisions*) a head teacher is responsible for:

- adherence to the state educational programs designed for the school s/he manages,
- drafting of and adherence to the school educational program and instructional program,

- elaboration and fulfilment of the annual plan of the in-service teacher training,
- annual evaluation of educational and professional staff.

A head teacher's employment is concluded by the founder of the school who appointed him/her to the function. The functional period of a head teacher is five years. By recalling his/her function employment is not terminated. The head teacher as a member of the management staff receives extra pay, which is terminated by the employer as a percentage share from the salary brackets of the highest salary grade s/he was ranked into. A municipality or autonomous region is obliged to provide legal counselling to head teachers.

The *Act on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government* includes the *Municipal School Council* among the self-governing bodies in education. The Municipal School Council focuses its activities on expressing, assessing and controlling public interests in schools within the municipality. It discusses the activity of a school and school facilities, the school development concept, the material and technical conditions of a school and school staff, and reports on education and educational outcomes of schools and school facilities. Its members are elected by employees of local schools and school facilities, pupils' parents, and the municipal council.

In the territory administered by the self-governing region, a *Territorial School Council* acts as a self-governing school authority. The composition of the Territorial School Council and its activity reflects the work of this body at the regional level, similar to the composition of the Municipal School Council, as its activity gets reflected at the municipal level.

According to the *Act on State Administration in Education and School Self-Government*, a body of school self-government, representing the students of a secondary school and representing their interests in relation to school management is the *Student's School Council*. It discusses the issues and measures of the school in the field of rearing and education, school rules, presents its proposals and remarks and elects and recalls its representatives on the school council.

## Functional education of school leaders

As mentioned above, after appointment to the function of a head teacher the successful applicant must complete the appropriate form of in-service training, so-called functional education. This education has to be completed within three years from appointment.

The main national provider of the functional education for school leaders is The Methodology and Pedagogy Centre, an institution for teachers' continuous education and training established by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. Besides this, further providers of the functional education can be educational organizations of another central state administration authorities and higher education institutions or, in the case of pedagogical and professional employees of church schools and church school facilities, a church institution.

The goal of such education is to obtain appropriate professional competences necessary for performance of the school leader's position.

A graduate of the functional education should have broadened and improved his/her professional competence profile in:

- ability of professional development and self-development,
- ability to apply generally binding legislation in school (school facility) management,
- ability to create and implement a school (school facility) development plan,
- ability to apply project management rules in school (school facility) management,
- ability to manage the school (school facility) economically,
- ability to manage creation of the school and school facility educational programs,
- ability to manage realization processes of school and school facility educational programs,
- ability to manage self-evaluation of school and school facility educational programs,
- ability to create competence profiles for the pedagogical and professional employees of the school (school facility),
- ability to create systems of evaluation and remuneration of the work performance of the pedagogical and professional employees of the school (school facility),
- ability to create systems of professional development of the pedagogical and professional employees of the school (school facility).

The scope and content of the functional education is set by the *Decree No 445/2009 on continuous education, credits and attestations of pedagogical and professional employees*. The total scope of the education is 200 lessons, of which 164 are in face-to-face form and 36 in distance form. Duration of the education is a maximum 24 months from its beginning.

The content of the functional education of head teachers (school leaders) provided by the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre is divided into 6 modules, with two alternatives for module 5[1]. See the modules and their topics in Appendix 1.

To complete the functional education a participant has to fulfil (according the *Act No. 317/2009 on Pedagogical and Professional Employees*) the following requirements:

- to participate in at least 80% of the total scope of the face-to-face education,
- to fulfil distance-learning assignments D1–D8 in written form according to given criteria,
- to write a final thesis, the scope of which is from 25 to 35 pages,
- to obtain a positive assessment from the thesis reviewer,
- to defend the final thesis successfully,
- to pass the final exam on a topic drawn from the content of the educational program modules.

The defence of the final thesis is done before a three-member committee. In the case of a failure in completing the functional education, participants can pass a second examination (defence of the final thesis or the second final exam) within 18 months after the date of the failed final exam, but only after six month at the earliest.

In consistency with the law, the functional education is valid for a maximum of seven year from its completion. Its validity can be prolonged by means of the functional innovation education, which has to be completed before the functional education validity expiration. Validity of the functional innovation education is five years from its completion. In contrast to the functional education, the following functional innovation education (functional innovation education I) is carried out only on the basis of face-to-face education. The scope of the functional innovation education I is 60 lessons, over a maximum 12 months from its beginning. The content of the functional innovation education I is divided into 5 modules.[2] See the modules and their topics in Appendix 2.

Functional innovation education I is followed by the functional innovation education II, designed for graduates of the functional innovation education I. The total scope of the functional innovation education II is 60 lessons, of which 48 lessons are carried out face-to-face and 12 lessons are in distance-learning form. Its duration is also a maximum 12 months from the

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[1] https://mpc-edu.sk/sites/default/files/vzdelavacie_programy/funkcne_inov_pre_ved_pz.pdf

[2] (https://mpc-edu.sk/sites/default/files/vzdelavacie_programy/fiv1.pdf).

beginning of the education. Content of the functional innovation education II is divided into 5 modules (https://mpc-edu.sk/sites/default/files/vzdelava-cie_programy/fiv2.pdf). See the modules and their topics in Appendix 3.

## Positive and negative aspects of the legislative changes in school leadership

The transfer of competences in the management of education to municipalities and self-governing regions, and also their involvement in education through school councils and the problems associated with them was critically assessed by Beňo, Šimčáková and Herich in the *School Management and its Implementation* study (2007). When analysing the problematic areas of self-government in education, they pointed out that the state has renounced its responsibility for schools, but that local governments are not professionally prepared to manage it. The head teachers, according to the authors, were given more powers, but on the other hand, municipalities and higher territorial units, more often mayors of municipalities or officials of higher territorial units with meagre competencies in education, are taking their powers back. They therefore recommend precise clarification of the position of the school head teacher in relation to the founder of the school and avoiding less competent interference in the management of the schools by the founders. They recommend strengthening the powers of the head teacher in labour relations and defining the powers of the founder towards schools which act as legal entities. They criticize the fact that schools' status as legal entities led to overload of head teachers in the area of economic management of the school, at the expense of providing management of pedagogical quality. Furthermore, they recommend optimizing the network of schools according to the needs of the labour market and abolishing economically inefficient schools. The authors of the study further propose changing the composition of school councils and increasing the representation of teachers in them. Some of the respondents in research – both head teachers and teachers – proposed the removal of the authority of the school board to elect the head teacher. They recommended that head teachers be selected by a professional selection board. In the area of funding, the authors of the study recommend removing inter-institutional funding of schools through their founders (municipal and regional governments), as they often restrict funding under differing pretexts. Therefore, they recommend that funds be transferred directly from the state to the school account.

Apart from this critical analysis of the involvement of self-government in school governance, positive aspects can also be seen. These mainly concern the development of self-government, introduction of school councils,

and the activation of teachers, parents and older pupils in secondary schools to participate not only in formal school operations but also in "school life". The problematic side is mainly the inappropriate proportion of representatives in school councils. As further positives we see the replacement of centralized management, applied over decades by the state administration, mainly through the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport and in certain periods and areas, through individual regional departments of state administration (regional authorities, district authorities, district offices, regional school authorities) and territorial self-governance (municipalities, cities, and higher territorial units). Territorial self-governance has been, despite shortcomings in comparison with the state administration, closer to the problems of the schools located on the territory of the municipality, the town, or the region. By decentralization, territorial governments have gained more competences at the expense of state administration, which we see as improving the democratic governance of schools. Also positively valued is the increased attention of local self-government to the current education funding issues. Although the problem of school funding has still not been satisfactorily addressed, the municipalities and cities represented by the Association of Towns and Municipalities of Slovakia deliberately apply pressure to the state administration to raise funds for schools, particularly by increasing the percentage of allocated tax revenues.

## RESEARCH AIMED AT SCHOOL AUTONOMY AND HEAD TEACHERS' POWERS

With greater autonomy given to schools, school leaders face much greater responsibility than school leaders did twenty years ago. The autonomy of schools and the responsibility of school leaders, especially head teachers, was broadened not only in relation to the financial and administration matters of the school, but also in education matters (new possibilities given to schools e.g. in relation to the introduction of new study programs, curricula modification, teaching method innovations, etc. (Obdržálek, Polák *et al.*, 2007; Obdržálek, Polák *et al.*, 2008; Pisoňová, 2016; Pisoňová *et al.*, 2014)). School leaders face great accountability for school and pupils' results, responsibility for contributing to and supporting the school's local communities, other schools, and other public services. Quality of leadership has been currently recognized as an important aspect of each school operation, influencing its outcomes and its pupils' achievements (Lhotková, Trojan & Kitzberger, 2012; Pisoňová, 2011). School leadership has also become an education policy priority across OECD and partner countries (Pont, Nusche & Hopkins, 2008;

Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). In this context, the most often discussed and observed topic is the question of the relevant professional competences a school leader should have. Answers to this question should result from empirical findings reflecting the real needs and demands of practice (Bitterová, Hašková & Pisoňová *et al.*, 2011). That is why many researches have been focused in this direction (NCSL, 2006; Revai & Kirkham, 2013; Whitaker, 2002). On the other hand, only a little attention has been paid to the assessment of the state of the school autonomy in the context of the current needs and requirements of the practice.

Changed conditions and the increased autonomy of schools has meant that schools and head teachers are facing new tasks and challenges, mainly in the following four fields:

- financial management under the autonomy given to schools,
- educational changes of the re-assessed and redefined character and mission of schools,
- public management connected with the change from a bureaucratic and institution-led approach to a performance-driven one, with an emphasis on the services delivered to the users,
- knowledge management, focused on the institution's own needs and demands for continuous learning.

As was already mentioned, in common practice a head teacher very often acts not so much as a leader of the school as an institution, but rather as an administrator in a wider bureaucratic school system. One of the reasons behind this can be an inappropriate level of autonomy assigned to schools.

To estimate how much autonomy is currently given to schools in Slovakia and whether this amount of autonomy is sufficient for head teachers, a research study was carried out seeking opinions of head teachers on the issue (Hašková & Bitterová, 2018; Hašková & Pisoňová, 2018).

The main research question was whether the scope of the powers delegated to schools is consistent with the needs and conditions of school leadership practice, i.e. whether the current scope of school autonomy matches the tasks and problems that school leaders, especially head teachers, have to cope with in the common, everyday practice of their school management. From the main research question two partial questions resulted. These were:

- Research question 1: Which powers and responsibilities of schools should be increased?
- Research question 2: Which powers and responsibilities of schools should be decreased?

The attention was focused on primary and secondary schools specifically (ISCED 1–3). The adequacy of autonomy given to schools (the head teachers of these schools) was assessed in five fields of school leadership. A list of the five observed fields F1–F5 is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Fields in which the extent of school autonomy was assessed*

| Item | Field |
| --- | --- |
| F1 | The ability to act within the whole scope of the school's functioning |
| F2 | School curricula matters; influence and impact on the school curricula and educational program of the school |
| F3 | School financing, influence and impact on the school's budget and its management |
| F4 | Selection, termination and employment of employees, both teachers and other personnel |
| F5 | Administrative and operational management |

The fields of powers given to head teachers (school autonomy) F2–F4 are in agreement with the approaches to this phenomena which were used in the frame of PISA and TALIS international monitoring (OECD–PISA, 2012; OECD–TALIS, 2013), where four major fields of school autonomy were specified, in particular instructional policies (e.g. curriculum and assessment), staffing, budgeting, and student policies.

The research sample consisted of 93 participants in the functional education of teaching staff and vocational training instructors (as mentioned in the chapter dealing with legislation, in Slovakia only persons with qualifications for teaching or professional training performance can be appointed to the position of a head teacher and in agreement with the Act 317/2009 these nominees are obliged to complete a so-called functional education course within three years of being placed in this career position at the latest). Forty-two of the respondents were head teachers and 51 were deputy head teachers of either primary/lower secondary schools (58 respondents), upper secondary schools (21 respondents) or secondary art schools (14 respondents). In total, the research sample consisted of 26 males and 67 females, the age range of whom was from 26 to 61 years old (an average of 47.3 years). Thirty-four of the respondents had been in a leading position for less than 5 years, 27 from 5 to 14 years, and 32 respondents for more than 15 years.

The task of the respondents was to assess the adequacy of the power they (the schools) have within each of the given five fields (items F1–F5). The assessments were recorded in a questionnaire in which the particular items referred to the given fields of head teachers´ competences (F1–F5).

Respondents passed through these items twice and each time they gave their responses based on a different point of view:

1. At first the respondents expressed their opinions on the current state of the powers they have. They evaluated the extent of powers given to them to act on behalf of the school they manage in the specified key fields of school leadership. The respondents were asked to express their opinion using a 5-point scale: 1 – minimal powers; 2 – little powers; 3 – average powers; 4 – broad powers; 5 – very broad powers.

2. Secondly, the respondents expressed their opinions on the optimal state of powers they (the schools) should have in the specified key fields of the school leadership. The respondents were asked to express their opinions on whether the current scopes are adequate or whether they should be extended or reduced.

The collected data were processed in relation to different sub-groups of the respondents (created on the basis of various factors, e.g. gender, career position they hold, duration of their previous experience in the leading position, type of the school they lead) but no outstanding differences among the responses of the particular sub-groups of respondents were identified. (More details on differences among the respondents' answers depending on particular factors can be found in Hašková & Bitterová, 2018.) An overview of the main results obtained from the collected data for the total group of the respondents is presented in Table 2.

As Table 2 shows, average score values for all items are within the interval from 2.87 to 3.89, i.e. the school leaders evaluate the scope of the powers they currently have either as with average or broader powers. In their opinion, the broadest scope of powers they possess is in the field of administrative and operational management. Despite the expressed positive assessment of the scope of powers the school leaders have, at least half of the respondents still felt the necessity to broaden these scopes (see the demand to increase the given autonomy at items F2 – 49.5%, F4 – 53.8%; F1 – 67.7%, F3 – 79.6%).

*Table 2. Assessment score of the extent of school autonomy in the specified fields of school leadership and demands to change current extent of school leader powers and school autonomy*

| Item | Assessm. score of the extent of school auton. | Decrease the autonomy | | Adequate autonomy | | Increase the autonomy | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Average score | Frequency absolute | Frequency relative [%] | Frequency absolute | Frequency relative [%] | Frequency absolute | Frequency relative [%] |
| F1 | 3.28 | 0 | 0.0 | 30 | 32.3 | 63 | 67.7 |
| F2 | 3.51 | 6 | 6.5 | 41 | 44.1 | 46 | 49.5 |
| F3 | 2.87 | 2 | 2.2 | 17 | 18.3 | 74 | 79.6 |
| F4 | 3.59 | 3 | 3.2 | 40 | 43.0 | 50 | 53.8 |
| F5 | 3.89 | 4 | 4.3 | 61 | 65.6 | 28 | 30.1 |

The only exception is item F5 – extent of powers and autonomy in the field of administrative and operational management. The respondents assess the extent of powers and autonomy in this field as broad (item F5 – 3.89): 65.6 % of the respondents assess them as adequate, while 30.1% would like to have them increased.

The highest demand for an increased extent of powers and autonomy is in the item related to the field of school financing and budgeting (item F3). The respondents also declare this field as the one in which they are given the lowest level of powers. The opinion that reaching an optimal state of school management in Slovakia would require an increase in the current extent of powers and autonomy in the field of the school financing and budgeting is shared almost by more than three quarters of the respondents (item F3 – 79.6%).

Calls to decrease the scope of powers given to schools were isolated in the case of all five assessed autonomy fields, i.e. a general need to decrease any of the given fields was not shown. Although no differences were proved among different sub-groups in this study, more detailed analysis of the results showed a tendency that those who would appreciate even broader powers in the fields of administrative and operational management (item F5), which are already quite broad, are the head teachers. Deputy head teachers consider the level of school autonomy in this field as appropriate, and are satisfied with it. At the same time, respondents with 5–14 years of

previous practice in a leading position assess the current level of the autonomy and powers in the fields of staff recruitment, selection, employment and termination (item F4) as broad (average score 4.07) while the other two groups of respondents (i.e. respondents with previous practice in a leading position of less than 5 years and respondents with practice of more than 15 years) assess it as average (3.41 and 3.38).

## CONCLUSION

The answer to the main research question, whether the scope of the powers delegated to schools is consistent with the needs and conditions of school leadership practice, follows from the finding that school leaders evaluate the scope of the powers they have as average or broader. On the other hand, although the school leaders assessed the level of the powers they are given in a positive way (as average or broader), they still feel a need to have a broader scope of the powers and responsibilities, mainly in the field of financing and budgeting (the field in which, in their opinion, they have the lowest level of power). The second strongest call for the increase in autonomy was recorded in connection with the field of school activity as a whole. Calls to decrease the scope of powers given to schools were isolated in the case of all five assessed autonomy fields. So the answer to the main research question is: yes, the scope of the powers delegated to schools is sufficient. Answers to the particular research questions 1 and 2 show whether there is a need to optimize in some way the present state of school autonomy. Following the opinions of the school leaders such a need does exist, because the answer to the particular research question 1 is that powers and responsibilities of schools in all of the five given fields should be increased (a need to decrease any of the given fields does not occur).

As reviewed by the Grattan Institute (2013), a wide range of international studies shows that the direct influence of increased autonomy on learning achievements of pupils is relatively small. On the other hand, in PISA and TALIS, monitoring school head teachers' opinions confirmed the existence of this influence (OECD, 2012; OECD, 2013). Moreover as the data gathered in PISA 2009 monitoring showed, when autonomy and accountability are combined well, they tend to be associated with better pupil performance (OECD, 2011). Conceptually, leadership and autonomy can interact in two ways: autonomy allocated to a school may restrict the scope of leadership in daily operations or the ability to launch new initiatives, or leadership activities may be implemented to maximise the use of autonomy allocated to a school, remove existing limitations, broaden the scope of school autonomy

and create better conditions for school development and student learning (Cheng, Ko & Hoi Lee, 2016).

To achieve an optimal model of autonomy offered to schools proves very difficult, as an appropriate level of autonomy is dependent on both time and social conditions. Nevertheless, attempting to form a reality as close to an optimal state as possible is a worthy cause, as being shown in a variety of countries, not only Slovakia (Bush & Glover, 2003; EURYDICE, 2007; Leithwood, 2001; OECD, 2003; Townsend, 2007).

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*Appendix 1. Functional education of head teachers:*
*Modules and their topics*

| Modules and their topics | No. of lessons F to F form* | No. of lessons Distance form |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Introduction to education** | **4** | **0** |
| Educational Program goals, content, structure and value basis | 2 | 0 |
| Rules for working together and communicating with each other | 2 | 0 |
| **2. Normative and economic management** | **24** | **0** |
| Legislation of binding force – Acts No. 596/2003, 245/2008 and 317/2009 and their impact on the participants of functional education career position | 8 | 0 |
| Legislation of binding force and internal regulations and directives of schools and school facilities | 8 | 0 |
| Economic control, generally binding legislation relating to the economic management of schools, school facilities | 8 | 0 |
| **3. School leaders self-development** | **24** | **0** |
| School leader' self-diagnosis | 12 | 0 |
| Selected managerial competences | 6 | 0 |
| Plan of own professional development | 6 | 0 |
| **4. Organization as a system** | **36** | **8** |
| Sub-systems of a school and school facility and their function in the school (school facility) development | 4 | 0 |
| Mission and vision of the school (school facility) | 4 | 0 |
| Analysis of the current state of the school (school facility) development<br>SWOT analysis of the school (school facility) | 6<br>6 | 0 |
| Design of school (school facility) development goals – theoretical and practical activity<br>Distance assignment D1:<br>a) to prepare SWOT analysis of your school (school facility)<br>b) on the basis of the SWOT analysis to formulate intentions of the school (school facility) development<br>c) to concretize the intentions of the development into the school (school facility) development goals | 8 | 4 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Creation of the development goal realization project – theoretical and practical activity | 8 | |
| Distance assignment D2: To propose an implementation project related to D1c | | 4 |
| **5. A) Pedagogical process management** | **40** | **16** |
| Introduction into the pedagogical process management and professional (vocational) activities management | 8 | 4 |
| Distance assignment D3: To propose a goal of the own school (school facility) development which would be pedagogically formulated | | |
| School self-assessment – topics: | | |
| Areas of the school self-assessment | 6 | |
| Tools and methods of the school self-assessment | 6 | |
| Interpretation of the obtained data through the tools of the school (school facility) self-assessment | 6 | |
| Interventions for the school (school facility) improvement | 6 | |
| Distance assignment D4: a) to specify areas of your school (school facility) self-assessment b) to propose tools and methods for your school (school facility) self-assessment relevant to the chosen areas c) to implement (test) the proposed tools and methods of your school (school facility) self-assessment in the chosen areas d) to interpret data collected by means of the tools for your school (school facility) self-assessment e) on the basis of the interpretation of the collected data to propose interventions for your school (school facility) improvement | | 10 |
| Innovations in pedagogical strategies | 8 | |
| Distance assignment D4: To process conclusions of the self-assessment in the selected areas and to formulate proposal to correct pedagogical strategies according to D4d and D4e | | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **5. B) Management of the processes of the pedagogical-psychological guidance** | **40** | **16** |
| Introduction into the school facility and professional (vocational) activity management | 8 | |
| Distance assignment D3:<br>To propose a formulation of the pedagogical-psychological guidance aimed at your school facility development | | 4 |
| School facility self-assessment – topics: | | |
| Areas of the school facility self-assessment (diagnostic, advisory, therapeutic, preventive and rehabilitation) | 6 | |
| Tools and methods if school facility self-assessment | 6 | |
| Interpretation of the data collected by means of the school facility self-assessment | 6 | |
| Interventions for the school facility improvement | 6 | |
| Distance assignment D4:<br>a) to specify areas of your school facility self-assessment<br>b) to propose tools and methods of your school facility relevant to the chosen areas (areas in the phase diagnostic, advisory, therapeutic, preventive and rehabilitation)<br>c) to implement (test) the proposed tools and methods of your school facility self-assessment in the chosen areas<br>d) to process interpretation of the data collected by means of your school facility self-assessment<br>e) on the basis of the data interpretation to propose interventions to improve your school facility | | 10 |
| Innovations in the strategies of the pedagogical-psychological guidance | 8 | |
| Distance assignment D5:<br>To process conclusions of the self-assessment in the selected areas and to formulate proposals to correct strategies of the pedagogical-psychological guidance according to D4d and D4e | | 2 |
| **6. Personnel administration** | **36** | **12** |
| Introduction into the personnel administration | 4 | 0 |
| Competence profile of the pedagogical and professional employee | 8 | |
| Distance assignment D6:<br>To propose pedagogical and professional employees competence profile resulting from the goal of the change D3 | | 4 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Manpower management | 8 | |
| Personnel administration | 8 | |
| | | |
| Distance assignment D7: | | 4 |
| a) to propose system of criteria and indicators to assess the staff sensitive to the change according to D6 | | |
| b) to create an application of the assessment system into the system of staff remunerating | | |
| Evaluating and remunerating system of pedagogical and professional employees | 8 | 4 |
| | | |
| Distance assignment D8: | | |
| To elaborate a proposal of the development system of the pedagogical and professional employees of the school and school facility in dependence on the goal of the change D3 | | |

*face-to-face form

*Appendix 2. Functional innovation education I: Modules and their topics*

| Modules and their topics | No. of lessons F to F form* |
|---|---|
| **1. Normative management** | **6** |
| Up-to date enactments regarding school and school facility management | 2 |
| Application of the enactments into internal school and school facility standards, rules of creating internal standards | 2 |
| Solution of model situations in accordance with the enactments | 2 |
| **2. Innovation trends in school and school facility management** | **6** |
| Innovation trends in school and school facility organization and management (global trends, European trends, education policy) | 2 |
| Inclusive environment design (basic notions, coordination of the inclusion, education of foreigners` children) | 4 |
| **3. Management of changes in schools and school facilities** | **24** |
| Self-evaluation of the school and school facility (self-assessment as a mean of the school quality development, phases of the self-evaluation, areas, goals and criteria of the self-evaluation, methods and tools of the self-evaluation, realization process of the self-evaluation, methods of data processing) | 12 |
| Management of the change of the school and school facility into the learning organization (creation of the goals in context of findings resulting from the self-evaluation, school and school facility as learning organizations and their main features – responses to environment changes | 12 |
| **4. Personal leadership at change realisation** | **16** |
| Leadership of employees at change achieving (orientation of employees towards goals and the change, motivating and gaining trust of the employees, delegating responsibility to the employees, removing employee resistance) | 8 |
| Evaluation and development of the employees aimed at successful change achieving (professional standard and its use at evaluation and development of the employees, considering of the employee`s competence profile in the context of the needs of the school and findings resulting from the self-evaluation, evaluation of the employees in the areas of the formulated competence profile, development of the employees in the areas of the change) | 8 |
| **5. Own personal development** | **8** |
| Self-knowledge and self-management | 2 |
| Working with time | 2 |
| Issue of stress | 2 |
| Prevention of the burn-out syndrome | 2 |

*face-to-face form

*Appendix 3. Functional innovation education II: Modules and their topics*

| Modules and their topics | No. of lessons F to F form* | No. of lessons Distance form |
|---|---|---|
| **1. Normative management** | **6** | **0** |
| Up-to date enactments regarding school and school facility management | 2 | 0 |
| Revision of school documents in the field of subordinate legislation | 2 | 0 |
| Solution of model situations in accordance with the enactments | 2 | 0 |
| **2. Innovation trends in school and school facility management** | **6** | **0** |
| Innovation trends in school and school facility organization and management (global trends, European trends and education policy, synergy in modern management) | 3 | 0 |
| Development of the school and school facility in the area of inclusive environment design (coordination of the inclusion, application of the model of the inclusive environment into the school and school facility environment | 3 | 0 |
| **3. Change of school and school facility** | **36** | **12** |
| School and school facility working with data (data as key sources for decision making, kind of data and their relevance, target groups, internal data and their use, external data and their use, school institutions informing the public, data processing by the means of ICT, presentation of the data and the processed information for different target groups) | 12 | 0 |
| Accountability of the school and school facility (internal development of the school and school facility and accountability, internal and external accountability, approaches to accountability) | 6 | 0 |
| Distance assignment: To formulate a problem of the school or school facility for a selected area of the school or school facility management, to collect data necessary for its closer identification | 0 | 12 |
| Critical reflection of one's own practice and searching for examples of good practice (reflexion of own practice and identification of problematic areas – working with the distance assignment output, use of the participants` experiences for creation of proposals how to solve the problematic areas, identification of good practice and cooperation of the school leaders) | 6 | 0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Methods of leadership supporting development of schools and school facilities (possibilities of the support and its focusing, team collegiate support of the employees, mentoring and couching) | 6 | 0 |
| School climate and culture (development and changes of the school and school facility culture, development and changes of the school climate, diagnostics of the climate and culture, change setting based on the results | 6 | 0 |

*face-to-face form